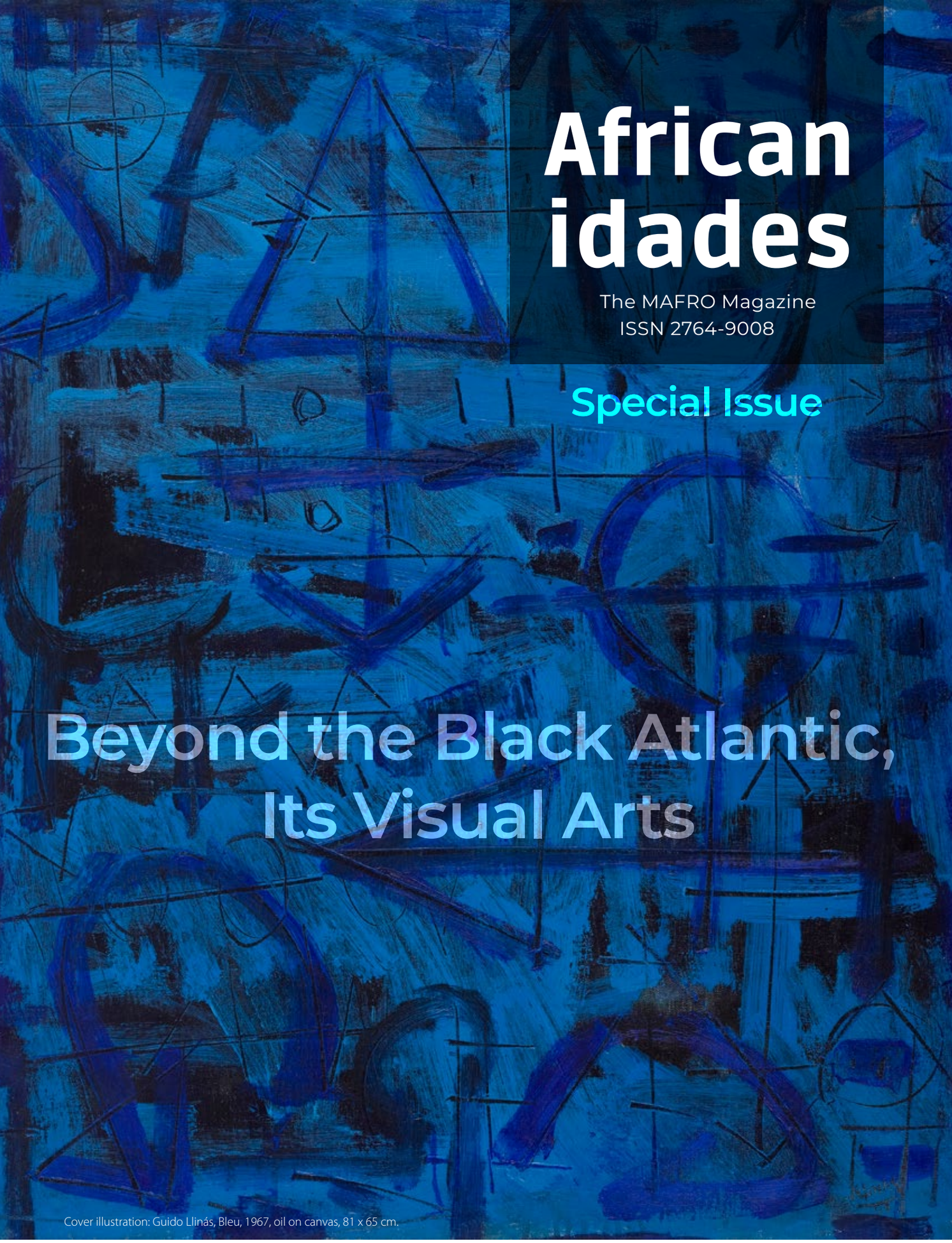

African idades

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Beyond the Black Atlantic, Its Visual Arts

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Introduction

Philippa Sissis and Christoph Singler

This special issue of Africanidades is the product of a summer school focusing on Black Atlantic visual arts. Three sessions were scheduled on different continents: the first in Senegal, the second in Haiti and the third in Germany. In the end, the first gathering at the Théodore Monod Museum in Dakar (part of IFAN, which is directed by Malick Ndiaye) in March 2019 was the only session to take place. The second session, which was scheduled for June in Port-au-Prince, was cancelled due to local political upheaval. The third session in Hanover fell victim to the pandemic in early 2020. Despite these obstacles, we were still able to expand our network. The Kunstverein in Hanover organised a remarkable exhibition titled *Beyond the Black Atlantic*, which was accompanied by a wonderful catalogue.[1] At the start of 2021, a Zoom meeting was held for students to present their thesis projects. We decided to organise another meeting in Salvador da Bahia, although this too was disrupted by the pandemic. It is thanks to the generosity of the Volkswagen Foundation and the hospitality of MAFRO that this publication has been able to bring many of the participants back together.

* * *

In his pioneering book on the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy did not discuss Africa, which remained a ghostly spectre in the background, nor explore the African diaspora in Latin America. Our approach to the Black Atlantic draws on his concept, while expanding the scope and adding nuance. Drafted in 2017, it reads:

> Moving beyond Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic, we understand the Atlantic as a space of interaction shaped by the multiple connections and interrelations forged by African, European, Latin American and Caribbean activity over the last 500 years. Along its North-South and South-South axes, the Atlantic has become an increasingly 'globalised' site of contention, exchange and transformation. Therefore, we define Black Atlantic visual arts as those produced by artists of African origin or artists living in sub-Saharan Africa, employing a wide array of methods and techniques both within and beyond canonised Western formal languages. These artists' work does not necessarily form part of a clearly identifiable African stylistic tradition, although they may draw on African heritage as the subject of their work; equally, regardless of thematic concerns, these works may contain "the subterranean trace or voice of Africa" (Stuart Hall). In Atlantic interrelations past and present, contemporary African and diaspora artworks (these concepts will be discussed at our meetings) share a common cultural agenda, challenging Western modernity and contemporary ideas of globalisation while showcasing the diversity present in aesthetic expressions of the Black Atlantic.[2]

1 The artists whose work was displayed were Sandra Mujinga, Tchabalala Self, Paulo Nazareth and Kemang Wa Lehulere.

2 This was the initial definition. It would also be pertinent to include the influence of Black Atlantic visual arts on artists and art forms more commonly associated with Western culture.

It is clear, therefore, that our aim from the outset was to explore the relationship between anthropology and the history of art. When Brigitte Reinwald, a historian of Africa, agreed to join the management team and host the project at Leibniz University Hannover, the research project was transformed into a summer school. The majority of the thesis projects that we accepted were linked to the history of art. Anthropology was also present, as several of the texts in this dossier reveal. It is important to note that, in recent years, Black Atlantic art (at least contemporary art) has made its way out of ethnographic museums and museums of world cultures and into contemporary Western art centres. In light of this shift, we had to rethink our approach. Although anthropology can play an important role in casting light on the history of art, regardless of the region under study, Black Atlantic visual art must not be explored through a purely cultural lens.

In this volume, readers will find texts written by doctoral students from Benin, India, Haiti, Brazil, Cuba and Germany and by post-doctoral researchers and established scholars from South Africa, the United States, Senegal, Germany and France. We have sought to avoid a hierarchical structure, as the emerging ideas and questions raised by the doctoral students reflect the themes that haunt the present of the Black Atlantic: on the one hand, the issue of museums and their intended, desired interaction with educational institutions, and on the other, the collective memory generated or channelled by the state through museums and cultural mediation. The long-debated identity issue appears to rest on solutions aimed at constructing a collective memory. Contemporary art – postcolonial or otherwise – comes into play here, sometimes running counter to the reason of state. Yet sharing national cultural wealth also raises questions about citizenship. Artists take responsibility here, too. It must be noted that there are fewer doctoral students working on artistic practices. Our publication is not representative but it does suggest that, in Benin and Haiti especially, doctoral research is currently more focused on the relationship between collective memory, museums and pedagogy. This work provides insight into the new generation that we hope will delve deeper into and reinvent the field.

We have organised this dossier into three sections.

The first section features texts that focus on the two sides of the Atlantic: the American side and the African side. An essay on visual anthropology by Eduardo Monteiro opens the section, followed by a reflection on the 'issue of return' in 20th century Haitian art and on Vodou in contemporary art by Sterlin Ulysse and Niklas Wolf. In the next text, Katja Gentric reports on a three-part project spanning Cuba, Angola and South Africa, exploring the debate surrounding the multiple memories that artists attempt to bring into dialogue with one another and discussing what happens to artworks when they are sponsored by states. Tackling a topic that appears to have received little attention from researchers in the context of the Black Atlantic, Philippa Sissis pursues a line of research brilliantly opened up by Simon Njami's 2015 exhibition in Frankfurt on *Dante's Divine Comedy* reworked by African artists. Finally, Christoph Singler makes the argument for a history of Black Atlantic visual arts that revives the relationship with text and sign, both African and Western, among other key strands.

The second section focuses on contemporary artistic practices, touching on several key issues. It opens with an essay by Roberto Conduru on a practice that blurs the

boundaries between art with a capital A and an everyday life that subverts artistic codes in an understated manner. The topics explored in this section have given rise to numerous, sometimes heated debates and have triggered stubborn resistance: the stereotyped image of Black women that Betye Saar unpacks with a ferociously jubilant irony (Shaweta Nanda); Black abstraction driven by the refusal to depict Black bodies, explored from a feminist perspective (Huey Copeland); the artist's skin colour and the definition of Afro-descendant art (Cary Yero García); the origins of performance art and artistic challenges to the ruling powers in 1970s Senegal (Malick Ndiaye), and finally, leading into the final section, the friction between modernism and memory in Guyana (Leon Wainwright).

The third section combines museography and collective memory, touching upon a variety of other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, political science and historiography. On both sides of the Atlantic, memory arouses or reawakens latent conflicts that influence nation building. The reception of heritage by local audiences has received little attention from researchers on either side of the Atlantic. Gbénidaho Achille Zohoun discusses the topic in the context of Benin. Meanwhile, at the heart of the diaspora in Brazil, a museum focusing on Black culture is only tentatively accepted by the population: preceded by an overview of the history of racism in Brazil by Christine Douxami, Marcelo da Cunha's essay highlights the obstacles that hindered the creation of MAFRO, situating them largely among the local elites. His detailed account traces the museum's origins and casts light on the memory that other local majorities wish to build (or block, or build by blocking) of their Black diasporas. Kesler Bien-Aimé explores the collective memory conveyed by Duvalierist photography in Haiti. Barbara Prézeau describes the situation of Noailles art village in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince. Recently this jewel of the Haitian artistic scene was the scene of clashes between two criminal gangs, resulting in 15 deaths and more than 100 displaced families. To contribute to its reconstruction, we join a call for solidarity.

This section also contains texts by Jean-Mozart Féron and Fritz-Gérald Louis that address strategies for mediation or education on both sides of the Atlantic, illustrating the difficulties facing museums and raising questions as to the competing political and social interests surrounding museums and public art. Preceded by an exploration of the practices employed at a Beninese museum by David Gnonhouevi and Romuald Tchibozo that shows how important it is for Africa to recover its heritage, the section and the dossier close with an important contribution to the debate on the restitution of African art objects from Romuald Tchibozo.

* * *

From our European perspective, the editors of this volume feel and hope that they have learned a lot from the texts. Between plenary sessions in Dakar, we discussed our working conditions, our prospects and our plans. The memory of these warm conversations remained with us throughout the editorial process. Despite this, this publication must not be the end of the summer school. Although academia aspires to be international, doctoral education is far from it. Our work with doctoral students from all walks of life has shown us that in order to create a common space for reflection (Aby Warburg's *Denkraum*), we must share our words and ideas, which remain the source of multiple disagreements. In particular, our understanding of the

term 'postcolonial' can take very different forms in different contexts. Perhaps this could be discussed at a future gathering. The same is true of our reading: in Europe, everyone is familiar with Warburg, Benjamin and Glissant. However, few in the Global North draw on the work of Paulin Hountondji, Ekpo Eyo or Valentin Mudimbe. Now that the topics of our research are global, let us endeavour to bring *all* educational institutions up to the same level. We must share our bibliographies, our sources and our resources more widely. Initiatives and reflections taking place in the Global South must be more broadly disseminated and taken into consideration in the North. It is said that in order to move forward together, the slowest partner's pace must be respected. Those who speak the loudest are not necessarily the quickest.

Acknowledgements

Without the generosity of the Volkswagen Foundation, this project would never have come to fruition, yet without Dr. Adelheid Wessler's particular interest and attention, the Foundation would never have hosted it. We are especially grateful to her.

Thanks are also due to our summerschool partners: first of all, Brigitte Reinwald, Leibniz University Hannover; Malick Ndiaye, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (especially for his hospitality at the IFAN Museum); Romuald Tchibozo, University of Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou; Kerstin Pinther, University of Regensburg (at the time of the project), and Sterlin Ulysse, State University of Haiti.

Last but not least, we are grateful to the members of the review committee: Anja Bandau (Leibniz University Hannover), Kerstin Pinther and Brigitte Reinwald. Huey Copeland, Shaweta Nanda, Anja Bandau, Andrea Frisch (University of Maryland), Cary García Yero, and Leon Wainwright read the translations into English; Marcelo da Cunha, the Portuguese versions.

A word on the illustrations. In a few cases, the image rights exceeded the budget of an online and free access journal. We have been forced to place a link that will take you to the image. We apologize for the inconvenience. On the other hand, Edu Monteiro, photographer carioca, was kind enough to share with us his PhD research in visual anthropology on Laamb and Ladja; Maksaens Denis and Josué Azor, artists based in Port-au-Prince, entrusted us with images of the Village of Noailles. We feel honored to be able to show their photographs.

Laamb and Ladja

Edu Monteiro

Senegal and Martinique lie at the same latitude, at the 14th parallel north that connects Africa with the Caribbean across the Atlantic Ocean. They are also two points along a sea route that favoured the arrival of large numbers of slaves coming from the west coast of Africa to this small Caribbean island. This essay follows this parallel and visually presents two forms of wrestling; the Laamb from Senegal and the *Ladja* from Martinique. Two war dances that through music, trance, and ancestry conduct the gestures of corporal resistance, until they emerge, in the crossing of physical and cultural borders between their expressions, in contemporary times.

On the small island of Martinique, still a French territory, life carries the burden and traces of time. *Ladja* imprints the marks of the diaspora in the flesh of its fighters, in the beating of the drums, and in the sorrow of its songs. In this Afro-Caribbean battle dance, syncopated vibrations of drums and singing lure the bodies into a trance. Metaphorically, *Ladja* presents itself as a possible plot of resistance that enables plunging into African roots.

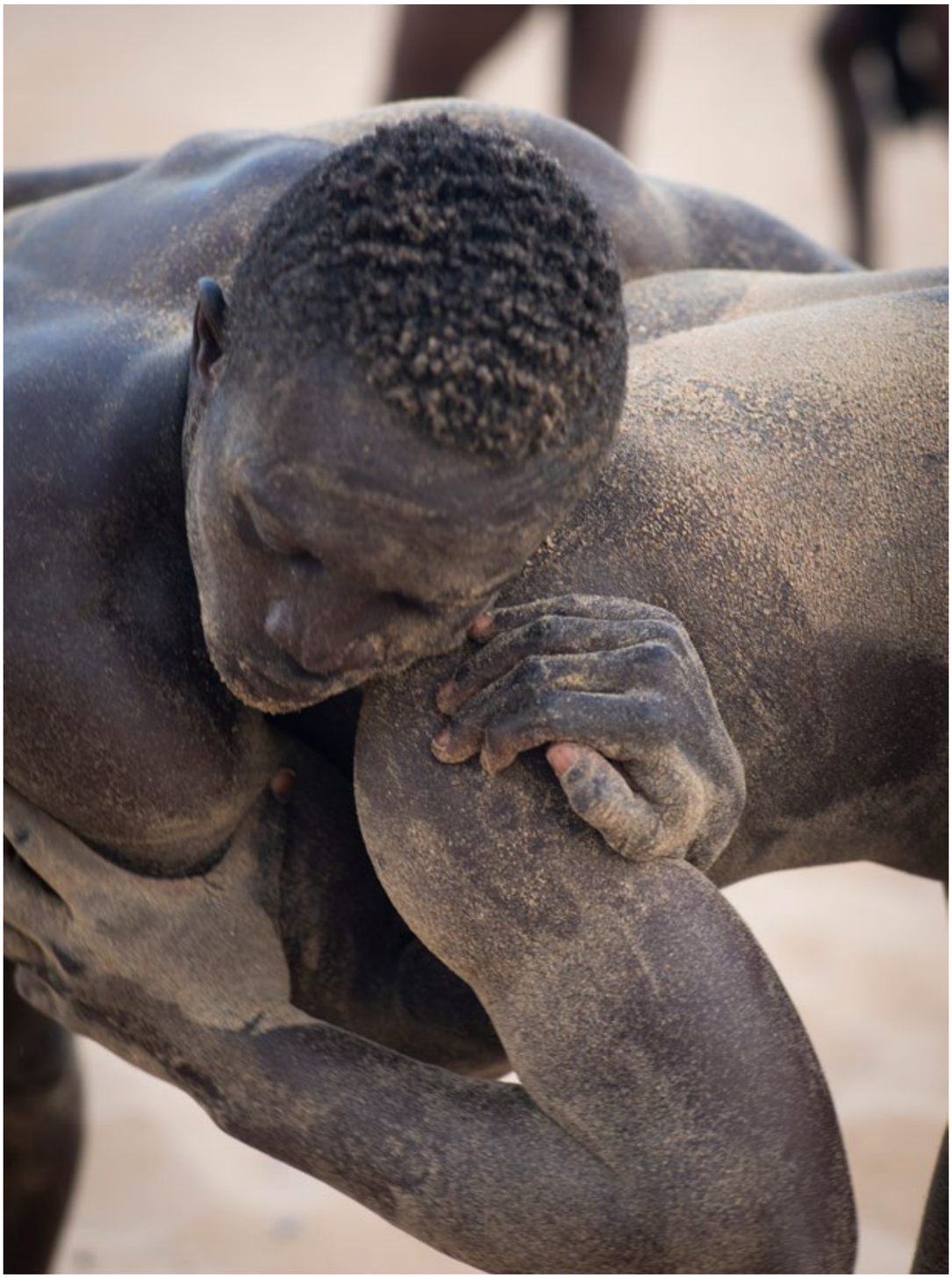
Through an aesthetic force this rhythmic fight found only in the Caribbean, brings new mythical rearrangements, with no beginning or end, but circular like the stage of the fight, like the trajectory of the Earth that slowly glides in space, to let this movement, which we call time, heal the wounds of slavery. It is a war dance that is still marginal, little known internationally, a performative action practised by only a hundred people, a modest number to shake the social structures, but a strong presence to maintain the rhythm of the anti-colonial combat. It is the search for an independent path, a precious word whose weight oppresses those who have not yet conquered it, an adjective that marks the discrepancy of any power relation.

Ladja is the syncopated combat that tries to reverse the post-colonial dysrhythmia that insists on whispering melodies of domination.

Senegalese wrestling, or Laamb (in Wolof), is an ancestral practice adapted to the present day. It is internationally known and highly respected by the local community. The main matches happen in crowded stadiums and are broadcast live by the country's television channels. Some events attract an audience of up to thirty thousand people. It is also seen in the streets of the capital Dakar, through advertisements from the major telephone and credit card companies that use the image of the greatest wrestling champions. These gigantic fighters, some weighing more than 150 kilos, are seen as national heroes, they are the image of success.

It is an activity that has accompanied the urbanization process. On one hand, Laamb has adapted to contemporary Senegalese development; on the other, it continues to live on in the most remote villages deep within the country. In both cases, the fight has not given up its tradition. Both in the village and in the capital's large stadiums, the ritual maintains its foundations, passed on from generation to generation. Entering the arena to the sound of drums and the chorus of predominantly female voices, it is hard not to feel a strong energy. The fighters walk from one side to the other, and it is then that we notice the dance, the rhythm of their bodies. Each fighter enters accompanied by his *marabout*, the spiritual leader responsible for protection. With powerful gri-gris, magic potions distributed in different bottles, dried or even live animals, goat milk, and a dozen other objects, the *marabout* and his helpers fight together. It is a team effort; while the fighter faces his opponent using his body, the *marabouts* face each other magically, mixing liquids, burying objects, scratching the earth, and evoking powers from the rhythm of the blows. The audience participates actively in the combat, cheering, shouting, and adding their gri-gris and energy to the fighters.

Across the Black Atlantic, several African fights, such as Laamb have adapted and branched out into new expressions such as Martinique's *Ladja*, Capoeira in Brazil, and so many others already rooted out in this wider global region. In common, they keep the poly-rhythms and the memories re-signified on the skin. Laamb and *Ladja* carry rhythms in bodies that dialogue between tradition and the contemporary world. In this field of ritual and resistance, a differentiated vision of time prevails – that of the body which fights through dance.



Returning to Africa in Search of an Authentic Art: The Haitian Indigenist Movement

Sterlin Ulysse

In July 1915, the American army landed in Haiti with the purported aim of bringing peace to the country after a national uprising in which President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam had been lynched by an angry mob. US marines remained in Haiti for 19 years. This occupation was interpreted by intellectuals as an insult to both the country and Latin culture in general. Haitian intellectuals considered Haiti to be the cradle of Latin culture in the Americas and here it was being trampled under the jackboots of white Western society. From the 1920s, Haitian culture began to be questioned. The shock of the occupation brought debates on Haitian identity to the forefront among writers and artists. One of them was Jean Price Mars. In his best-known book, *Ainsi parla l'oncle,* he advocates a return to Africa. In his eyes, literature and the arts should draw inspiration from the lives and beliefs of the ordinary population, immune to the 'collective Bovarysme' of the elites, who had always seen themselves as Westerners. Only the peasant masses had been able to preserve their African heritage intact. In order to reflect a Haitian aesthetic, literature and the arts should therefore seek to "gather up these sheaves of popular beliefs and draw from them the effects of realism and quaintness with which he [Frédéric Marcelin] has imbued several of his books" (Price Mars 1928: 57). According to Price Mars, the sole criterion for a Haitian aesthetic was "Haitianness" as inspired by the Haitian people's culture and customs, especially those of the rural world. The indigenist movement, as perceived by Price Mars, brought about a new understanding of the Haitian people. They no longer had a duty "to prove the moral and political aptitude of the Nigritic race" (ibid.), but to proudly accept their African roots. They were no longer seen as representatives of Black Africans in "the civilised world". As the birthplace to a number of major civilisations, Africa was no longer to be perceived as a place in need of *Civilisation*.

For the indigenist movement, all cultures were equal and the Haitian people represented a synthesis of both Western and African cultures. In Price Mars's view, this synthesis was best expressed by the country's population, especially those who worked the land and were best equipped to strike a balance between the two cultures. In order for Haitians to gain greater self-knowledge, they needed to immerse themselves in peasant culture. Peasants were "the Other within" to whom urban Haitians needed look to find their identity. The country's troubles were the product of peasants being overlooked in its cultural and social life.

Whilst Price-Mars was publishing his ideas, a group of young people were returning from Europe having witnessed the rise of Black culture (jazz, blues, the arts of the Harlem Renaissance, etc.) in the Western world; they set themselves to redefining literature and enhancing the status of writers. Through Jacques Roumain, Émile Roumer, Normil Sylvain, Carl Brouard and Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, writing became a

true vocation. For the first time, a generation of young poets and novelists raised their voices to shout out to the world that their sole ambition was to produce literature. In 1927, this group of young people founded *La Revue Indigène,* in which they set out their agenda.

The revue marked a turning point in the understanding of literature and of civilisation more broadly. In his *Chronique-programme*, Normil Sylvain argued in favour of a regional literature. For him, Latin America was a new civilisation and Haiti's potential role in its emergence should be considered.

Although the movement is attributed to Jean Price-Mars by literary historians, the young people responsible for *La Revue Indigène* made a major contribution by changing the way in which writers and poets were perceived. Literature was no longer a substitute or a secondary affair. They argued for a regional literature while drawing on international literary heritage. Generally speaking, the writers who joined the movement considered it their obligation to defend the values of ancestral Africa and there was a fundamentally nationalist [or Pan-Africanist?] tone to their words. From 1930 to the mid-1960s, most Haitian art made reference to popular tradition, which governed what indigenist theoreticians termed "Haitian-ness" or the authentic identity of the Haitian people. In this way, Jean Price-Mars's wish was fulfilled and the population became the subject of art. Novels became more rural in focus, where they had been primarily engaged with the urban bourgeois in the early 20th century. Poetry, meanwhile, often spoke of Africa and its gods, celebrating Vodou and reclaiming the humanity of the Black race after it had been humiliated around the world. In theatre, which had always been a realist discipline, Vodou ceremonies began to be depicted on stage. Folk songs, music and dances unashamedly took over the National Palace.

The inspiration of the indigenist movement led to another, still more radical, revue: *Les Griots*, founded by François Duvalier, future President of the Republic, Lorimer Denis, Carl Brouard and Magloire Saint-Aude. In this revue, the focus shifted from purely cultural and artistic concerns to encompass political and social demands. This led to the emergence of a social and political Noirism, whose mission was to counter the mulatto class. The political triumph of Noirism and the dictatorship that followed prompted many writers in the 1950s and 60s to oppose indigenist theories, which were accused of endorsing what some referred to as "the downward spiral of Noirism". To transcend racism and nationalism, novelists and poets sought to create a more intimate or even Intimist art in response to this harmful direction that the nation was taking, opting for a new, universal humanism in Haitian literature. New methods were sought to express this humanism: language took precedence over subject. This goes a long way towards explaining the failure of Négritude in Haitian literature, as many of its tenets had been taken up by proponents of Noirism. As a result, many intellectuals were forced into exile, giving rise to a Haitian diaspora literature written outside the country.

Meanwhile, indigenist artists worked to establish a Haitian pictorial art. A lack of information about 19th century and early 20th century painters and their works prompted some artists to celebrate the dawn of indigenist painting as the birth of Haitian painting itself, notably through the exhibitions of *Pétion Savain* in 1931-32.

Savain himself boasted of being the father of Haitian painting. However, he replicated much of what had been produced by painters in the previous century. Although indigenism did not bring about the creation of Haitian painting, it did encourage the emergence of an aesthetic that was more aware of itself, its vocation and its duty. This paved the way for popular painting in the 1940s, which took everyday life and the country's people as its main themes.

Unlike the writers, the painters' concerns were related to technical rather than thematic aspects. As Michel Philippe Lerebours has noted, indigenist painters sought subjects in the everyday lives of the Haitian people and in rural environments, but these themes were often a pretext for aesthetic experimentation. They also aimed to respond to the challenges posed by perspective in Western painting. However, the acclaim surrounding this style of painting was short-lived. A lack of public understanding, discouragement among artists and the deaths of several painters brought an end to one of the biggest pictorial adventures in Haiti's history. However, some less well-meaning critics insist that a pictorial revolution did not occur with the indigenist movement.

With the creation of the Centre d'Art in 1944 and the triumph of naïve art in international artistic and cultural circles in 1946, pictorial "Haitian-ness" was redefined. The people were now more than just the subject of art; they now played an active role in its creation. Emanating from the people themselves, this art was perceived by international critics and some marginal Haitian critics as the authentic Haitian pictorial expression, or the only genuine Haitian aesthetic. Theoreticians who favoured naïve art saw it as a manifestation of the African soul that had guided the Haitian people throughout history. André Breton was among the first to express this sentiment:

> What gave the Haitian people the strength to first endure and then cast off their yokes, what represented the soul of their resistance, was the African heritage that they managed to transplant and harness here despite their chains. In my opinion, it is admirable and exemplary that the myths of African animism, whose oral traditions were transmitted to Haitian peasants, came to take precedence over the myths of the Christian religion belonging to the oppressor by simply embracing them (Breton 1965: 184).

Jean-Marie Drot expanded further: "without this Africa forever lost, always dreamed of and constantly visited, painting in Haiti would not exist". Other critics, who sought explanations for the emergence of naïve art in Haiti that went beyond the hypothesis of ancestral Africa, interpreted this art rather romantically with reference to "the innocence of the people" (Drot 1974). Michel Philippe Lerebours, meanwhile, attempted to explain naïve art in a way that took people's experiences into account but without focusing on racial memory, the magical dimension of Vodou or the people's innocence to the detriment of other aspects. The naïve painters were well aware that they owed their success to their purported innocence. They took full advantage of it, inadvertently sawing off the branch on which they were sitting. Lerebours notes:

> Most of the primitive artists who became famous prior to 1960, arousing enthusiasm due to the spontaneity, poetry and shamelessness of their language, were slowly perverted as they played up their naïveté more than was necessary and

> slid into vulgarity and lies. Some dealers went as far as to consider a lack of expertise as a criterion in art. Studios for mass production were set up under the supervision of renowned artists, who did nothing more than sign artworks on which the signature was the only authentic element. The same paintings were repeated identically *ad nauseam*. More striking artworks would pop up from time to time, but generally speaking, one had the sense that the artists were held prisoner by pre-set models and that nothing new could emerge from the primitive movement in either technical, thematic or iconographic terms. Despite the immense scale of production and the "discovery" of talents supposed to be exceptional, there appeared to be an almost complete block. Saint-Soleil, so full of promise, so enthusiastically acclaimed by André Malraux, was already showing unequivocal signs of fatigue and disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared in 1980, giving rise to a multitude of questions (Lerebours 1993: 280).

In the meantime, "sophisticated" or "erudite" painting emerged and became popular first with the Haitian public and then in international art circles. Nevertheless, naïve art remains the best-known form of painting in Haiti, albeit with some variations, as it was supported by authoritative figures in the Western art world. An entire mythology was created around naïve art and those who produced it, against the backdrop of Africa and Vodou. When reflecting on Haitian painting, some critics ignored all other forms of pictorial expression and took only naïve art into consideration, even if they did acknowledge several different trends within the style. One example is Jean Métellus in *Haïti, Une Nation Pathétique,* who describes Haitian painting and painters in the following terms:

> It is important here to note that naïve painting and Vodou are inseparable from one another. Acknowledgement of this is vital, as Vodou is an integral part of the Haitian soul and the history of the Haitian people; it permeates our artists' every step and is omnipresent among painters (Métellus 2003: 157).

Haitian painting is surrounded by multiple narratives. However, many questions remain and others must be restated. Why, in most cases, have people sought to impose an essence on Haitian painting or on Haitian art in general? Is it purely to satisfy a certain art market or are more subtle motives at play? It is important that these questions are explored using new conceptual and methodological tools in order to grasp differing opinions on Haitian painting.

According to Jean Price-Mars, indigenist novelists and painters sought to depict rural life because peasants represented the authentic Haitian people and maintained the greatest proportion of African heritage. Observers have noted a reticence among Haitian writers and painters to create autobiographical works. In our view, this reticence is not innocent and is linked instead to an ideology or demand from the art market. In Lerebours's view, Haitian painting was enriched by autobiographical themes once attempts to make naïve painting its essence ceased and a different clientele emerged:

> As the clientele changed, the repertoire used in Haitian painting had to be modified and the iconography reworked. Haitian painting had long remained loyal to an indigenism that became superficial, stereotypical and backward-looking

> over time, for many years it had avoided addressing certain subjects or expressing sentiments deemed too personal, before finally overcoming these taboos during this period (Lerebours, op. cit.).

Marie-José Nadal corroborated this opinion:

> Firstly, I would like to mention Dewitt Peters, my watercolour teacher, who taught me to love this art form so much. He opened the doors of the Centre to me and helped me become part of the great family we forged between 1944 and 1950. Although he once discouraged me by saying that my painting no longer had any "local colour", revealing his fascination for the naïve painters he preferred over modern artists, he redeemed himself in my eyes on the day when I was awarded second prize in the Esso Salon Competition at the American Institute in Port-au-Prince for my painting *L'Oiseau Noir*. He came over and embraced me, saying how proud he was of his pupil (Nadal et Bloncourt 1986: 34).

Although "naïve" or "primitive" painters prioritised certain themes prized by the art market, some of them, including Hector Hyppolite, Philomé Obin and Castera Bazile, made their own tragedy the true subject of their works. Before them, there were not many self-portraits in Haitian painting.

From the 1950s onwards, emerging literary and artistic movements countered indigenist conceptions of the Haitian people and did not hesitate to rethink cultural and artistic matters or re-consider Haitian artists' relationship with Africa. The emergence of surrealism in Haitian literature was crucial, representing something akin to a revolution. The writers in the Literary Haiti group reoriented poetry and novel-writing in the 1960s. Lerebours's words about painters in the 1950s-1970s are equally relevant to writers: "It is true that they [painters] did not refuse to bear witness or challenge, but they also spoke of their innermost heartaches, aspirations and tragedies" (Lerebours 1989: 270).

Changing understandings of literature and art obliged writers and artists to reconsider their understanding of themselves and others. Literature and art were no longer conceived as expressions of a whole society's soul. Although some continued to sing the praises of their island or town, they were aware that they spoke only for themselves. Numerous contemporary poets and novelists have refused to serve as spokespeople for the population. In their eyes, the act of writing is entirely individual and personal. They wish to be solely responsible for their creations. The "world-literature" movement led by Michel Le Bris was a great success in Haiti. Dany Laferrière's provocatively entitled work *Je Suis Un Écrivain Japonais* is also relevant as a reaction to being labelled as a writer from the Global South, with all the prejudices that accompany the label. Of course, the spectre of indigenism continues to haunt Haitian literature and painting, often among the very writers and artists who challenge it. This leads to the production of works that, unconsciously or involuntarily, fulfil indigenist recommendations to a greater extent than works created in the 1940s that deliberately sought to meet indigenist requirements. In truth, in a country such as Haiti, it is very difficult to separate literature and the arts from society, (popular) culture and politics. Under certain circumstances, a theory such as indigenism is bound to have a far-reaching impact.

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Past, Present and Future: Mapping Vodun and the Art of Edouard Duval-Carrié

Niklas Wolf

Introduction

> *Beneath their bright surfaces, Duval's paintings are X-rays of a pornographic society. They are positioned like mirrors on the ceiling of a bordello whose whores mimic the manners of genteel society.*
>
> Cosentino 2004: 14

A mirror image not only reflects historic, present and future events, it offers, depending on the mirror's surface, a glance at the various possibilities of reality. It can add layers of distortion to the world as it is perceived and is therefore able to trigger memory like images of history; as a Déjà-vu, it can provide a gaze into possible futures, based on interpretations of the past and present.

When it comes to the religion of Vodun — a term originated in West Africa, describing Spirits, a belief and knowledge system and its material culture at the same time — its mirroring imagery offers visual and often quite personal interpretations of a complex religion, its human and non-human actors as well as glimpses into material and immaterial archives. Vodun, "a knowledge system that transgresses the boundaries of a dualistic worldview" (Sharpe 2020: 61), connects practitioners with their ancestors, their past and future as well as their homeland through practices of remembrance. Specific memories can be activated through sacred and secular archival sites like museums or shrines, where memory is triggered by performative ways of interacting with things, pictures or architectures. While travelling through Black Atlantic spaces — a hidden archive of the Middle Passage and route for the "flow of knowledge" (Sharpe 2020: 61) between West Africa and its diasporas — Vodun changed constantly. Showcasing the characteristics of a fluid archive, Vodun transforms when it encounters new environments by incorporating and adapting to local religious and pictorial practices".

This text will follow some of those global connections, looking at the work of Edouard Duval-Carrié and the exhibition *Voodoo* held at the Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim (19.10.2019 - 27.09.2020), Germany.[1] The exhibition's aim was to tell a global story of Vodun, mostly based on the objects of one single German private collection, using the umbrella term "*Voodoo*"[2] to frame the religion, its actors and imagery. The Haiti-born artist Duval-Carrié is one of the most prominent visual narrators of Hai-

1 This essay is derived from an ongoing PhD project on "*Voodoo* and the State of Inter. Picture Production and Media of West African Vodun between Identity and Alterity" which focusses on a critical analysis of the display of Vodun in European collections and publications, artistic representations and (re)appropriations as well as decidedly contemporary approaches of West African shrines to publicly displaying Vodun.

2 The term Vodun also highlights the connection of the religion to West Africa; its adaptations in Haiti are known as *Vodou*, whereas the commonly used term *Voodoo*, often an umbrella term for content wise and geographically quite different belief systems and practices, is located in the south of the US and determined by the many influences the religion encountered there.

tian history and the strong connections between the country, its *Vodou* Spirits and its diasporas. One of Duval-Carrié's bigger installations, *the Apotheosis Altar,* was shown most prominently on the exhibition poster. *Voodoo* presented more than 1200 objects from West and Central Africa as well as from diasporas like Haiti, Brazil, Cuba or the US, most of them from the Henning Christoph collection, which usually is partly on display at the private Soul of Africa Museum in Essen, Germany. The exhibition display combined the material culture of Vodun with contemporary artistic interpretations.

According to Jacques Derrida a material archive would be organized, institutionalized, and contained within walls of all kinds of shape or form. In the context of the African diasporas those material connections have been immaterialized and dispersed by the experience of the Black Atlantic. Water is the path through which human and spiritual actors traveled to new destinations during the Middle Passage.[3] Yet, especially in recent times, the sea signifies also one of many conceptual connections between West Africa and its diasporas.[4] Following Kobena Mercer it could be argued that "accepting that the diasporas are the product of forced migrations which separate populations from their natal origins, we find that, instead of time's arrow moving in a straight line, the traumatic ruptures and breaks that characterize the Black Atlantic as a chronotopia of multiple stops and starts are offset by unexpected patterns of repetition, detour and return" (Mercer 2010: 41). Therefore, the ocean is not only the material and immaterial connection between continents and route to the realm of Spirits, but also an important metaphor to understand contemporary Vodun and its artistic representations. Water was and still is a (if not the main) medium of Vodun, "replete with diasporic memory" (Sharpe 2020: 15) and part of the geography of Vodun.

In 1992 the then president of Benin Nicéphore Dieudonné Soglo started to plan the *Ouidah '92* festival which took place one year later. As part of the bigger UNESCO funded project *La Route de l'esclave* it was intended to memorialize the transatlantic slave trade (while in parts neglecting the lucrative involvement of Africans in the deportation)[5] and to address worldwide diasporas in a way that could be termed as roots tourism. Vodun and its imagery was staged as cultural heritage of West Africa and a crucial connecting factor between the diasporas and their home countries. Many architectural and other visual and commemorative markers were erected along the coastline of Benin before the festival, to make the starting point of the Middle Passage more tangible and to create sites of remembrance between West Africa and its diasporas.

Eduard Duval-Carrié was one of the diasporic artists who traveled to Benin in 1993. He contributed a work focusing on the connecting character of the event, an installation resembling an antenna so "that spirits of Haiti, when they would go back

3 In many Haitian *Vodou* shrines one would encounter tubs of water, a material connection to the many marine spirits in Vodou. One of the most prominent water deities in Vodou is Lasirèn, based on West Africas Vodun Mami Wata, an intercultural and international goddess of Vodun (in Vodou often associated with Damballah, the rainbow snake), "part-European, part-African; part-*Rada*, part-*Petwo*; and, of course, part-human, part-fish" (Houlberg 2008: 144) and therefore especially important for watery journeys such as the Middle Passage.

4 Kamau Braithwaite coined the term *tidalectics* to describe the back and forth, the cyclical flow of water and its meaning for transatlantic movements (which are thought as not being linear as would the tide be). (Pressley-Sanon 2013: 40).

5 Tony Presley-Salon also highlights the differences in remembrance between different diasporas and African countries. She argues that some actors in Benin would suppress certain memories — such as their contribution to the inner African and transatlantic slave trade — through "historical amnesia", to address contemporary diasporas through the connecting aspects of Vodun and forget the "sad past". (Pressley-Sanon 2013: 43). Edouard Duval-Carrié made the same point as Pressley-Sanon. (Duval-Carrié, Interview Niklas Wolf). Thanks to Edouard Duval-Carrié for the kind help and inspiration and all those exciting stories along the way.

to Africa would know where to go".[6] Duval-Carrié decidedly thought this installation as an art piece to be displayed at an international art festival and later on in a local (art) museum after the ending of the festival. Nevertheless, Daagbo Hounon, the spiritual leader of Vodun in Benin, who traces his ancestry back to the powers of Mami Wata and the ocean itself, received the artist as a well-known *feticheur* from Haiti.[7] Daagbo Hounon had no intention to display international art, yet later he re-integrated those powerful antennas into local practices of Vodun, blurring the terminological and material borders between sacred and sacral matter, between works of art and works of religion and their corresponding modes of display. As evidence of his artistry, Duval-Carrié showed a catalogue from an earlier exhibition to Daagbo Hounon, "and the next day he had selected walls in his compound where I was to paint. He was like 'that painting goes there, this one there' and so on and so forth; he thought it was a sales catalogue".[8] Duval-Carrié then created several murals in Benin, one depicting the Daagbo lineage, another one showing the Vodun Avlekete, among others. Those murals — done by an internationally well-known artist or a likewise successful *feticheur*, depending on how one would understand the role of Duval-Carrié — were all repainted and partly transformed by a local artist several years later, as it is common for the treatment of Vodun imagery.

Even though Duval-Carrié's antennas were more informed by international art discourses and the artist's ideas of materiality, form and display than by religious ideas, their seamless re-integration into religious spaces and the repainting of his murals show that both curatorial and religious approaches are indissociable to displaying Vodun, since its imagery is often an expression of the dialectics between ephemerality, unfinishedness, openness and continuous actualization (Rush 2010).

The Hildesheim exhibition used various modes of display to frame the origin of Vodun material culture and to map and tell the story of Vodun. The first floor presented West African Vodun. The second-floor showcased African diasporas and their forms and adjustments of Vodun. Visitors were supposed to symbolically experience the Middle Passage. In the last room of the first floor the curators used a huge backlit photograph of Benin's *Door of no Return*, one of the newly built commemorative monuments for the 1993 festival, inspired by the one on the island of Gorée, Senegal (Law 2008). In that part of the exhibition the vitrina backgrounds were painted in a darker shade of blue, and slave irons ornamentally structured the walls. Several artefacts like whips, shackles and photographs related to the transatlantic slave trade were presented. Some of them were arranged on pedestals like works of art, seemingly a spooky or haunting atmosphere was suggested, reminiscent of the exhibition poster's design.[9] The highly stylized photograph presented the *Door of no Return* at the center of the image: Two straight lines of small pylons lead to stairs, forming the first of the three superposed platforms. The door itself is formed by four pillars supporting the decorated architrave, showing two rows of people being deported to a ship at the center of the relief. The surrounding of the door in this picture is deserted, blending out its history and present: traces in the sand are the only visible signifiers of human activity. The ocean is barely visible as a faint blue line in the middle ground behind the pillars. In

6 Duval-Carrié, Interview Niklas Wolf.
7 "(…) I was there to present my pieces, which were supposed to be shown in a museum, but there was no museum and I had to install them at his (the Daagbo Hounons) compound, you know. And then they kept them there because they were from this great *feticheur* from Haiti" (Duval-Carrié, Interview Wolf).
8 Duval-Carrié, Interview Niklas Wolf.
9 For a more elaborate discussion of the exhibition poster see below.

combination with the walls painted in blue and the objects shown, the photographic representation of the monument could be read as an otherworldly end time portal.

Across the *Door of no Return* visitors left the first part of the exhibition through a staircase leading to the Vodun in the African diasporas, one of them being Haiti.

Vodou in Haiti: Making History

> *The new is about multiplicity. It is the way in which the past is not self-referral but becomes disrupted (…) history is replaced with the contemporary and with it a new aesthetic emerges.*
>
> Bogues 2018: 29

The Caribbean has been thought of as being a "liquid continent" (Gutiérrez 2017: 20), referring to its global connections and the many transfers of knowledge and imagery occurring in this region. Edouard Duval-Carrié's art is strongly connected to his experience of being Haitian. In his work, he is dealing with the politics, history and collective memory of the country,[10] rooted in the experience of migration and the pictorial and ritual practice of Haitian Vodou, which was introduced to Haiti via the Black Atlantic routes.

The religion of Vodou — the Haitian term for Vodun based religious practices — is part of a "profoundly creolized culture" (Cosentino 2009: 250). Tony Pressley-Sanon introduces the Haitian Kreyòl term *istwa* to highlight the strong connections between history, its framing and formation through storytelling and memory (Pressley-Sanon 2022: 19).[11] Over centuries Vodou in Haiti has been maligned, even "fetishized" (Cosentino 2009: 250) and associated with sorcery and magic. As a form of *sortilège* (spell) Vodou has been forbidden by the Haitian penal codes in 1835 and 1864 (Ramsey 2011: 14). During the American occupation of Haiti (1915 - 1934) these laws were used to suppress *Vodou* and to establish a paternalistic understanding of "moral decency" (Ramsey 2011: 15). Only in 1934 the right to practice *Vodou* "in accordance with popular custom" (Ramsey 2011: 15) was established before finally being recognized as an official religion in 2003 (Sharpe 2020: 60).

One could argue that making history in this case is based on the experience of displacement (Bogues 2018: 27). Most of the contemporary Haitian population has ancestry in sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of the 15th century the indigenous population of the island was eradicated, and the island was repopulated in the following two centuries mainly by deported Africans working in the sugar industries of Saint-Dominique.[12] At the end of the 18th century Toussaint Louverture (whose father was deported from Benin), and others led the Haitian Revolution, declaring Haitian independence from France in 1804. Haiti became the first independent nation in Latin America, fighting for the abolition of slavery ever since. The following decades were characterized by the political dominance of several autocratic regimes and violent conflicts, some of them leading to the formation of the Dominican Republic. In the beginning of the 20th century, the United States of America occupied Haiti, leaving it in 1934 to Haitian presidential de-

10 Which can't be disentangled from Vodou. (Pressley-Sanon 2022: 5)
11 The author also draws a connection between the dis-membering experience of the Middle Passage and the potential of re-membering (in the sense of bell hooks' definition) of Vodou (Pressley-Sanon 2022: 8/20).
12 On the strong connections between *Vodou* and Haiti's social and political history see Mintz/Trouillot 1995.

mocracies after another revolution. In 1957 the former medical doctor François Duvalier (Papa Doc) became president. He introduced a decidedly anti-American policy and established a gruesome regime between 1957 and 1971. Under his dictatorship, Duval-Carrié, born in 1954, fled with his family to Puerto Rico.

Since the 1930s Duvalier was interested in Haitian ethnography and became one of the main figures of the Noirist movement.[13] Not only did he reclaim his Haitian African heritage, he also reintroduced *Vodou* iconography and practices to the Haitian society thereby instrumentalizing *Vodou* for political purposes Duvalier later proceded to model his public appearances after a powerful Spirit (*lwa*) of Haitian *Vodou*: Baron Samedi, also known as Baron-Cimetière, member of the *Guédé* family generally associated with death (Métraux 2017: 123-129).[14] Like Legba (the Spirit of the crossroads) who establishes the connections between the world of humans and the one of the Spirits, Baron Samedi connects the living with the dead. He is dressed in black, mostly wearing dark sunglasses and a black hat - as did François Duvalier, appropriating iconography of (spiritual) power: "Power sui generis is transgressive and transformative, exceeding boundaries, subverting structures, even turning hierarchies upside down; it must be harnessed and domesticated, contained by authority structures and channeled for the collective good" (Apter 2002: 236). By modeling his appearance after one of the most feared *Vodou* Spirits, Duvalier made use of the religious beliefs and knowledge system by melting political and religious power into one, "cooling it down" to speak with Andrew Apter: "If in formal terms such a concept of power is transgressive, transformative, and pitted against the rule-governed hierarchies of administrative authority, then in Yoruba terms it is hot, polluted, and dangerous, a pure potency that must be purified, cooled, and contained" (Apter 2002: 236).

Taking the form of a seemingly classical but decadent family portrait, the painting *Mardigras au Fort Dimanche* (1992/93) by Duval-Carrié is an artistic expression of Duvalier's iconographic strategy. The painting shows eight people in a small, dark room; the only window is close to the ceiling, the view outside is partly blocked by bars, connecting the picture to the Fort Dimanche prison, mentioned in the title. It was the most feared prison during Duvalier's regime. At the center of this otherworldly prison cell stands Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc), François Duvalier's son. He is dressed in a bridal wedding gown, pointing a pistol at his lap. He appears to be "an absurd parody of a strongman dictator" (Munro 2015: 14). On his right shoulder rests the hand of his father, who is standing behind him. The father, dressed in a black suit, tie and hat, appeared like Baron Samedi. The left half of his face is exposing his skull thereby creating a per-

13 Especially parts of Duvalier's early writings could be compared to other political movements of that time with similar agendas, like the Négritude in Senegal or the Harlem Renaissance in the USA. Andrew Apter juxtaposes the concept of Négritude (which he translates to black cultural nationalism) with ideologies like mestizaje (mestizo identity), creolite (Creole identity) and noirisme (blackness) (Apter 2002: 233). Those movements (all manifesting in writings, art and exhibitions like the FESMAN in Dakar 1966 or the FESTAC in Lagos 1977) had a recollection of African heritage, the formation of a diasporic consciousness and the idea of being African while not being there in common. Actors like Langston Hughes, L. S. Senghor, Aimé Césaire, L. G. Damas, WEB du Bois (who produced the first programmatic studies of African cultural contributions to the Americas, enlisting the recovery of this history against Jim Crow and the color bar (Apter 2002: 233), and many more focused on the visual and material cultures of African countries, their philosophies and religious systems, to proclaim self-conscious identities. Duvalier co-founded Les Griots as a printed manifesto, reminding of similar publications like Présence Africain, and was involved in the foundation of the Bureau National d'Ethnologie, a National Institute for Culture and Arts.

14 In addition, Duvalier made use of traditional *Vodou* imagery. For example his violent secret police the tonton-makout was literally named after "a bogeyman in a folktale." Their uniforms were partly made in the image of the *Vodou* spirit Zaka (Apter 2002: 245). Though Duvalier heavily relied on the common understanding and social connections to *Vodou* in Haiti, he officially tried to "solidify the ties between the Roman Catholic church and the Haitian state". After the Duvaliers regime the process of dechoukaj (uprooting) started, which led to a "vendetta against *Vodou* leaders" (Mintz/Trouillot 1995: 144; 146/147).

ception that he has returned from his grave to visit his grown-up son.[15] The former president is depicted as being in a state between the living and the dead, between politics and Spirits, between the real and the imaginary, between memory and present.

Duvalier's wife Simona (dressed like Gran Brijit, Baron Samedi's wife (Cosentino 2004: 15), his daughters, the archbishop Ligondé and a general, Max Dominique are the other persons who are present in the painting. Duvalier seems to be supported (and literally framed) by the military and the church. Showing Duvalier and his family between the realms of politics and religion, Duval-Carrié has created a history painting, "a *memento mori* of Haitian history" (Middelanis 2005: 116). The painting not only showcases formal aspects of the genre but also reveals the uncertainties and transformative powers of history and its archival construction by man, which is like West African Vodun unfinished: "[…] it seems to matter little if one is dead or alive. […] the severed hands on the walls and in Simone's basket are still fresh with blood" (Munro 2015: 14).

Here and there. *Vodou* and West Africa

Transformative powers were already inscribed into most of the Haitian *Vodou* Spirits even before they left the African continent.[16] The *Iwa* are generally divided into two categories, the *Rada* and the *Petwo*. The latter can be traced back to the Kongo kingdom (de Heusch 1989: 290)[17] and are associated with "hot" emotions and transgression, carrying "revolutionary power" (Apter 2002: 240); *Rada*, of Dahomean ancestry, are cool, righteous, but "lacking in power.[18] *Petwo* and *Rada* represent thus the hot and cool valences of Yorùbá pantheons and the difference between power and authority. While "*Rada* carry the authority of Africa […] enshrining the reproduction of the status quo, […] the *Petwo* manifest pure power and efficacy, uncontrolled, dangerous, devious, and above all, transformative" (Apter 2002: 240/241).

The Spirits of Haitian *Vodou* themselves are actors of international networks between West African countries and Haiti. Enslaved people mainly from Benin, Ghana, Togo and Nigeria, brought the Vodun Spirits to the Caribbean and other Black Atlantic spaces. Especially Yorùbá belief systems (as well as the ones from the Kongo or other religious ideas from West African origin) have been transferred, translated and adapted to new geographies like Cuba (Santería), Brazil (Candomblé), USA (*Voodoo*) or Haiti (*Vodou*). In Haiti several Òrìsà (Yorùbá gods) were fused with or were "camouflaged as" (Fandrich 2007: 776) representations of Catholic saints, to enter religious systems of the colonial rulers, forming new Spirits specifically addressing diasporic contexts and issues. The *Iwa* Papa Legba, *Maître Carrefour* (Métraux 2017: 111), derived from the Òrìsà Èsú, is a "divine trickster" (Chemeche 2013) who often takes the shape of the Catholic saint St. Anthony of Padua. The Yorùbá Spirit Sàngó is the origin for Ogou Chango, the *Iwa* that took the form of St. Michael. The Òrìsà for War and Iron, Ògún, was transformed into the Haitian Papa Ogou (Fandrich 2007: 783).

15 Soon after Duvalier's death his son became the president of Haiti.
16 Robert Farris Thompson highlights the transformative aspects of Vodun showing how the Dahomean kingdom integrated ("assimilated") foreign spirits of other inner African cultures long before their encounters with Europe (Farris Thompson 1983: 166).
17 *Petwo* or Petro refers to a messianic figure named Don Pedro (Farris Thompson 1983: 164).
18 The term *Rada* refers to "the slaving destination for persons abducted from Arada, on the coast of Dahomey, itself derived from the name of the holy city of the Dahomeans, Allada" (Farris Thompson 1983: 164).

Besides the above mentioned terminological and content related connections to the belief systems of Yorùbá religion, Haitian *Vodou* seems to be strongly based on juridical systems and therefore is very much connected to everyday reality The term *lwa* is probably based on the French (loi) and Kreyòl word for law (*lwa*). However, new etymological connections have been made to Yorùbá too wherein the term *lwa* and its spiritual meaning have been traced back to oluwa (god) and babalawo (diviner or priest) in Yorùbá language (Ramsey 2011: 18/19). Andrew Apter uses the Yorùbá terminology *imo jinlé* to frame the transfer of knowledge in confrontation with established discourses and especially its strong connection to memory that could be stored in material culture. This kind of "*deep knowledge* [...] has no content at all but derives its power from context-specific opposition to the authoritative discourses that it implicitly challenges."[19] In Vodun this is achieved by "reblending" (Farris-Thompson 1983: 164) iconographies, imagery and knowledge in different settings. I contend that deep knowledge also made the integration of Christian iconography into Haitian *Vodou* possible. Woodcuts and lithographs of Christian saints were integrated in *Vodou* because their potency was linked to their imagery.[20] By incorporating such pictures, diviners used "context specific opposition" to successfully challenge the "authoritative discourses".

Visual Jazz? *Voodoo* in Hildesheim

I'm an artist, don't ever forget it.[21]

In the introduction to "The Rara of the Universe: Vodun Religion and Art in Haiti", a chapter of his groundbreaking study *Flash of the Spirit. African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (1983), Robert Farris Thompson quotes the Oxford Dictionary's definition of *Voodoo* at the time. No wonder the definition, based on racist and primitivist Western categories, refers to "superstitious beliefs", which Farris Thompson very eloquently deconstructs and disproves of in the following pages.

In Western contexts the reception of Vodun-based religion is often determined by a one-sided gaze at *the other*, imagined as being exotic and in clear opposition to the construction of the Western self. Ever since Vodun became a part of traveling imagery, it was adopted in popular culture of the Global North, often taking an alienating perspective, summarized under the term *Voodoo*. Its sometimes eclectic, mostly open and unfinished or ephemeral material manifestations have been described as "dances for the eyes [...], visual jazz, constantly reworked and reactivated".[22] *Vodou* was displayed in several big exhibitions all over Europe, followed by extensive publications. Most of those exhibitions relied on one European collector and their networks and provided exciting insights into Western modes of appreciation and appropriation of Vodou. The resulting strategies of

19 "[...] it was precisely the hermeneutical mapping of deep-knowledge claims within these oppressive contexts that provided possibilities of collective empowerment" (Apter 2002: 237/238).

20 "[...] potent images indeed for minds informed by the visual cultures of Dahomean vodun, West Yoruba orisha, and Kongo minkisi." (Farris Thompson 1983: 169).

21 Duval-Carrié, Interview Wolf, 13.04.2022.

22 David Byrne, cited by Donald J. Cosentino 2004: 20. Donald Cosentino also writes on the ongoing processes of actualization of Vodun (looking at the reception of chromolithographs and their imagery into Haitian *Vodou*): "Each new interpretation is contingent only upon the attributes of the last, no authoritative voice is powerful enough to check theological innovation. The process is centripetal, pushing out into new forms like a jazz riff." (Cosentino 2005: 242).

display in those exhibitions and their accompanying publications presented *Vodou* in terms of both art and ethnography.[23]

It should be obvious by now that there is no one *Vodun* religion. The term *Voodoo* might be the one best known and the basis of many stereotypes, a term that is often "fraught with racist categories about black religious practice" (Desmangles 2012: 26). And still, this is the title chosen for the exhibition at the Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim. For almost one year a plethora of pictures and objects of Vodun was shown,[24] most of which came from the Henning Christoph collection. The poster featuring Duval-Carrié's *Apotheosis Altar* was held in black and grey: The altar was floating in a space of otherworldly drifting smoke. Above Duval-Carrié's altar, the title of the exhibition was written in bluish cold flames. Though the altar was recognizable as being religiously powerful, the poster design was more reminiscent of horrific movies and othering phantasies of the West. Using the imagery of Holly- and Nollywood movie productions featuring Zombies and wax dolls pierced by needles, the poster "rescripted" (Cosentino 2015: 40) Vodun to '*Voodoo*', despite its declared aim to trace Vodun back to the routes of the Black Atlantic and thus to present it beyond all stereotypes as a global religious phenomenon.

Since the geography of Vodun was immensely important to the curators and designers of the exhibition, the visitors were greeted by an enormous world map showing the spreading and globalization of Vodun. The map was illuminated from behind and colored in brown, its design referred to depictions (imaginations) of the world in early atlases from the 16th or 17th century. West African Vodun was shown in display cases with muddy brown walls, covered with straw roofs. Maybe for conservational reasons there was almost no light, the rooms were filled by the sound of a Vodun ceremony, emerging from a film by Henning Christoph, shown in a *séparé*. Among the many Vodun objects only a few works of art were shown in that part of the exhibition. When leaving the African continent via the room described above, visitors were led to *The World of the Underwater Beings* (2007-08, fig. 1) by Edouard Duval-Carrié. The huge installation was the visual introduction to the second part of the show, which could be headlined Vodun and its Diasporas; a wall text introduced Haiti as "the undisputed center of modern art in the Caribbean." Unlike the first part of the exhibition, the second presented several contemporary artworks. The display echoing Caribbean architecture was bright and colorful, for instance in *The World of the Underwater Beings.* Made from polyester and textile the installation features three big boats, floating above the visitor's head. In these boats three *lwa* - Mambo Inan (the wife of the *lwa* Bazou, also known as Kongo Chief or King Wangol, coming from Angola (de Heusch 1989: 299)), Agwé (the ruler over the sea, dressed in blue) and Erzulie (an incorporation of love and female beauty, marked by jewelry, beautiful dresses and perfume (Métraux 2017: 121) - are crossing an imaginary ocean. Agwé's long arms are recalling seaweed. Like tentacles they reach for the ground and connect the Spirit to the realm of the ancestors that died during the Middle Passage. Cowry shells cover their bodies, sea plants are emerging from the Spirit's arms. Erzulie is adorned

23 There will be an extensive catalogue of the Hildesheim exhibition, which was not available while writing this text. Other comprehensive exhibitions in Europe dealing with the topic of Vodun which are well documented and published in accompanying catalogues are for example: *VODOU. A Way of Life*, Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève, Geneva 2008, *Vodou. Kunst und Kult aus Haiti,* Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin 2010 (both exhibitions displayed objects from the Marianne Lehmann collection) and *VAUDOU/VODUN*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris 2011 (Jacques Kerchache collection).

24 According to the curator, more than 1200 artefacts related to the topic of Vodun were on display (Oliver Gauert, Interview Wolf, 24.09.2020).

with several picture frames tangling from her neck. They are not only jewelry but material manifestations of their origin in West Africa. They represent the archive of Vodun, its deep knowledge, which such imagery globalizes.

Fig. 1 Edouard Duval-Carrié, *The World of Underwater Beings*, 2007 - 2008, mixed media (polyester, textile et al.)

In his *Série migration* (Migration Trilogy) from 1997 Duval-Carrié visualizes the idea of Haitian Spirits traveling to new shores. The first painting, *Embarquement pour la Floride*

(Embarcation for Florida, fig. 2), shows seven *lwa*, cramped into a small wooden boat, leaving Haiti in the night.[25] The water seems to be calm, the black sky is structured by yellow dotted lines, as is the watery ground. Those dotted lines are *pwen*,[26] like vèvè ephemeral drawings leading the way to Ginen.[27] In West African imagery it is often the "use of dots to specify a surface that is permeable and transparent, thus signifying the immaterial presence of the spirit. More than signifying, it is visible information that serves as a geometric metaphor specifying a presence without surface" (Benson 2008: 156). Sela Kodjo Adeji highlights the importance of dots, spheres and circles as a crucial part of West African Vodun aesthetics; dots are "among the most popular shapes, forms and symbols that permeate Vodun iconography" and are reflected in the architecture of shrines and spiritual regalia (Adeji 2019: 275). In Duval-Carrié's paintings *pwen*, the "distilled points of power",[28] seem to be part of a permeable and transparent spiritual cartography, structuring the surface of the painting and mapping the way of Vodun more precisely than the geographical map shown in Hildesheim ever could.

Fig. 2 Edouard Duval-Carrié, Embarquement pour la Floride (Embarcation for Florida), 1997, from Série Migration (1), oil on canvas in artist's frame, 150 x 150 cm. Courtesy Edouard Duval-Carrié

25 According to Duval-Carrié, in his artworks the migrating *lwa* are doppelgangers for the Haitian people (Cosentino 2013: 385).

26 Mystic power points of "energy or spiritual heat, (…) as dots painted or sewn onto sacred objects, usually in conjunction with the *Petwo* (or Kongo) spirits" (Cosentino 2004: 50).

27 The term Ginen is used in Haitian *Vodou* to refer to a land under the water (that) shares the same name with Ginen signifying "Africa" as a land across the water (Sharpe 2020: 4).

28 "usually [they] evoke or assuage Kongo spirits" (Cosentino 2013: 87).

The second painting of the series, *La calebasse magique* (The Magic Calabash, fig. 3), shows the boat in heavy waters, threatened by an armed coast guard ship; the seven Spirits seem to use all their power to fight the hostile Atlantic and no less dangerous humans at the same time. In the last painting, *Le débarquement à Miami Beach* (The Landing, fig. 4), all of them arrive safely at the coast of the American continent, as suggested by lines of *pwen* spanning Miami's skyline. Duval-Carrié's series connects Haiti and its diaspora relying on the metaphor of spiritual travel over the sea and the boat, creating a representation of the global dimensions of conscious and decidedly contemporary Vodun. Contrary to the curators of *Voodoo*, Duval-Carrié does not rely on Western cartographic modes but shows an artistic representation of spiritual travels, giving the journey of ideas the shape and form of travelling *lwa*. He presents an alternative knowledge system actualizing *Vodou deep knowledge* in the form of painting and thereby challenging the iconographies of knowledge production prevailing in the Global North.

Fig. 3 Edouard Duval-Carrié, *La calebasse magique* (The Magic Calabash), 1997, from Série migration (2), oil on canvas in artist's frame, 150 x 150 cm. Courtesy Edouard Duval-Carrié

Fig. 4 Edouard Duval-Carrié, *Le débarquement à Miami Beach* (The Landing), 1997, from Série migration (3), oil on canvas in artist's frame, 150 x 150 cm. Courtesy Edouard Duval-Carrié

Leaving The World of Underwater Beings behind, visitors of the Hildesheim exhibition finally encountered Duval-Carrié's *Apotheosis Altar* (2004, fig. 5) which they already knew from the poster.

The *Vodou* altar is a very special form of displaying aspects of history, present and future in religious contexts, encompassing all the objects that constitute the spatial experience. The materiality and modes of display of its knowledge producing imagery - and therefore its site-specific strategies - may vary. Such an altar is also an architectural anchor of the ritual. *Vodou* altars can be found everywhere, taking any imaginable shape, form, size and material. They are "located in temples, bedrooms, and on the dashboard of taxis, such altars consist of found objects, images, and offerings known to please divine tastes" (Cosentino 2004: 20). They are the "face of the gods […] a school of being, designed to attract and deepen the powers of inspiration" (Farris-Thompson 1993: 147).

Duval-Carrié's room-filling installation consisted of an altar in the shape of a huge white, luminous cross.[29] The installation was dominated by a big, bust-like sculpture

29 The Portuguese brought the iconography of the Christian cross to the Kongo, where it was adapted into tradition-based art. In Dahomean cosmology it represents the four cardinal points and is a visual metaphor for crossroads "joining the worlds of the living and the dead" (Sharpe 2020: 72). Mostly it is part of Papa Legba's *vèvè*, "the Kongo and Angola cruciforms invoked God and the collective dead" (Farris Thompson 1983: 191).

in the middle, which was accompanied by five smaller busts. Symmetrically arranged, several snakes,[30] made of the same colorful material as the busts, were crawling towards the center from all sides. The wall behind the installation was painted black. Most of the light came from the cross, illuminating the figures from below and giving them an eerie glow. The installation was most obviously informed by the modes of display to be encountered in international art shows. It was an aestheticized and decidedly contemporary and globalized interpretation of a *Vodou* altar making use of the structuring habit of *Vodou* shrines,[31] but never meant to be anything else than an art piece (Duval-Carrié interview Wolf). Similar to the Underwater Beings, the *lwa* on the *Apotheosis Altar* are made of colorful plastic, creating a contemporary and globally accessible materiality. Following Edouard Duval-Carrié, the altar was erected to celebrate the marriage of the *lwa* Erzulie Dantor (the more aggressive *Petwo* form of the peaceful *Rada* spirit Erzulie Fréda)[32] and Damballah,[33] a "mariage mystique" (Welling 2012: 36). Both forms of Erzulie are depicted, the central one being Erzulie Dantor. Damballah-wèdo is one of the main Spirits of Haitian *Vodou*. Being the *lwa* of creation and fertility, he takes the shape of a crawling snake (Métraux 2017: 115). Also shown are the *lwa* Agwé, Aizan and General Sobo.

Fig. 5 Edouard Duval-Carrié, *Apotheosis-Altar*, 2004, mixed media (polyester, plexiglass, et al.), variable dimensions. Courtesy Edouard Duval-Carrié

30 The iconography of the snake is very important for Vodun in general. Snakes are globally and in different religious and profane contexts often associated with special knowledge, the duality of things and the natural cycle as well as with access to otherworldly realms; it can often be read as "the embodiment of a reverse side" (Welling 2012: 15). On the strong connections between Vodun visual and material culture based on the snake imagery in Ewe pottery (Ghana) see Aronson 2007.

31 There is "a strong organizing principle in the world of Vodun altars, while *Petwo* altars for example would look very much different to the ones of *Rada* spirits" (Farris Thompson 1983: 182).

32 The *lwa* Erzulie can take two different forms: Erzulie Fréda being the *Rada* form of the spirit and Erzulie Dantor being the more aggressive *Petwo* form. Erzulie Fréda is the goddess of love and beauty, while Erzulie Danto as a mother figure would fiercely protect her children (Pressley-Sanon 2013: 51).

33 The creole name for the Fon spirit Dã, "a metaphor for […] primary, combinatory sign of order", combining male and female aspects. The many colours of Damballah-wèdo's (the rainbow snake) body, represent aggression (red) and compassion (blue) (Farris Thompson 1983: 176).

The surface of the altar is decorated with blue shapes and forms that could be interpreted as contemporary forms of *vèvè*, which are "considered some of the earliest nonindigenous art forms and, as such, contain sacred memories passed from one generation of oungans and manbos (*Vodou* priests and priestesses) to the next" (Sharpe 2020: 60). *Vèvè* are part of the knowledge system of *Vodou*, taking the shape of geometrical line drawings; they are the symbols of the *lwa* and the writing of the Spirits, functioning as doorways to Ginen (Sharpe 2020: 74). They "are traced by priests or priestesses in powdered substances [...]. Symmetrically disposed and symmetrically rendered, they praise, summon, and incarnate all at once the *vodou* deities of Haiti."[34] As for the *lwa*, there is no existing canon (Cosentino 2004: 17) though some are based on the recollection by Milo Rigaud.[35] Cosentino says: "The *lwa* are like the Greek god Proteus. Grab them and they metamorphose, [...] iconic consistency is irrelevant. Divine inspiration is the artist's privilege" (Cosentino 2004: 17/18). *Vèvè* are also taking part in the continuous adaptation of Vodun to the present; according to Farris Thompson *vèvè* have influenced Haitian "museum art since its first renaissance", around 1947 to '49" (Farris-Thompson 1993: 294).[36] Duval-Carrié often uses *vèvè*-like shapes to literally frame his paintings, probably to further blur the borderlines between the many heres and theres of Vodun.

Conclusion

John Dewey coined the idea of *Art as Experience*. He broke down the differences made by Western theory between (fine) art and *popular art* (his reference being Jazz) in order to reestablish the continuity between life and art. Dewey argues that works of art are able to trigger sensations comparable to aesthetic experiences made in everyday life. Edouard Duval-Carrié would have liked to see his art as part of Haitian or West African shrines[37] where they could be "an actual object of veneration" (Sullivan 2007: 170). They would then create a sensory experience even closer to Vodun terms, re-connecting their different localities like he intended with the antennas for the Benin festival. Popular and fine art, profane and religious art and practice would finally be reunited. LeGrace Benson suggests that large installations like Duval-Carrié's *Apotheosis Altar* or *Underwater Beings* dominate a room, even forcing the viewer to become part of the artwork: "This is the kind of sacred space in which the theatre of re-enactment takes place, and anyone who enters must become an actor in the drama [...] Duval-Carrié urges us to be more than voyeurs" for a drama only visible on some shiny surface; "to use

34 Farris Thompson traces the term *vèvè* back to archaic Fon terminology and the idea of cosmograms to Kongo and neighbouring territories (Farris Thompson 1983: 188 and 1993:49, 293). Some of them provide geometric design for a constellation of Dahomean, Kongo, and Roman Catholic forces constituting the very fabric of Haitian cultural history (Farris Thompson 1983: 191).

35 Milo Rigaud (1974: 67), describes *vèvè* as having magical power, them being ritual attractors and condensors of astral forces to which they are mysteriously bound by a geometric occult chain, from which Writing and Language, Architecture and Cybernetics were born. Besides making esoteric references and connecting *vèvè* to mythical teachings like the kabbalah (tradition of Jewish mysticism) or the New Age mystics, virulent at the time of its publication, the book is a compendium of *vèvè* and a work of visual reference, being closest to a canonical work on the stylistic aspects of *vèvè*, still used by religious specialists today (Duval-Carrié, interview Wolf).

36 It also might be noted that in *Face of the Gods* Farris Thompson seems to terminologically differentiate between museum art and non-museum art.

37 "Yes, my initial aim with all the big installations, was to build a cathedral of *Vodou* in Haiti. But that's like really going to lalaland, that kind of concept. I've mentioned it. I talked about it and everybody looked like what does he think he is? A crazy *Vodou* priest or what? But you know — where do I exist otherwise?" (Duval-Carrié, interview Wolf).

the language of *Vodou*, the works to some degree possess the visitor" (Benson 2008: 155). While the Hildesheim exhibition showed the curators' idea of Vodun display, Duval-Carrié's installations and paintings challenge the concept of a museum space by integrating Vodun *deep knowledge* into decidedly contemporary works of art. Thus, the space of a museum or a shrine is to be understood as a powerful archive. Their pictorial programs are part of the (re)writing of histories which inform contemporary identities in the Black Atlantic and beyond by visually analyzing Vodun knowledge production and its power strategies.

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"Digging as if to find the source of all doubt": *Memórias Íntimas Marcas*

Katja Gentric

> *He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the "matter itself" is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights—like torsos in a collector's gallery.*[1]

Walter Benjamin here suggests memory and the genesis of collectively significant representations as a performative process.[2] According to Benjamin, he or she endeavouring to apprehend their own past should time and again return to the same constellation of events and circumstances. Benjamin refers to this constellation by the expression "Sachverhalt" translatable as "how circumstances relate to one another" or – in conflated form – a "situation".[3] By his or her gesture the digger re-actualizes the past situation for the present, introducing a mental representation of something that formerly lay beyond imagination. Absence of intelligibility of past events occurs amongst others in situations where particularly traumatising episodes have prevented a community from coming to grips with its past. The persons who have lived these experiences are at pains to coherently reconstitute what happened. However, in order for the community to heal it is unavoidable that these events become thinkable (Ott 2018) – our consciousness needs to be able to make a mental representation of what happened. "Bilder" (images), which in Benjamin's writings refer to all representations (by words, written or spoken, by pictures, by visible or audible media), can function as carriers of memory in collective imagination.

One particularly complex and violent episode, the hostilities in Angola and environing the northern Namibian border between 1975 and 2002, involves several countries from the southern hemisphere. Work by artists from radically different backgrounds coincides around this conflict and its legacies. Amongst them I have singled out the threesome of artists who were part of the initial *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* project,[4] and the duo Kutala Chopeto (Teresa Kutala Firmino and Helena Uambem-

1 Translation by Rodney Livingstone. Original German ("Ausgraben und Erinnern", in *Denkbilder*, 1931-1933) reads: "Wer sich der eigenen verschütteten Vergangenheit zu nähern trachtet, muß sich verhalten, wie ein Mann, der gräbt. Vor allem darf er sich nicht scheuen, immer wieder auf einen und denselben Sachverhalt zurückzukommen – ihn auszustreuen wie man Erde ausstreut, ihn umzuwühlen, wie man Erdreich umwühlt. Denn »Sachverhalte« sind nicht mehr als Schichten, die erst der sorgsamsten Durchforschung das ausliefern, um dessentwillen sich die Grabung lohnt. Die Bilder nämlich, welche, losgebrochen aus allen früheren Zusammenhängen, als Kostbarkeiten in den nüchternen Gemächern unserer späteren Einsicht – wie Torsi in der Galerie des Sammlers – stehen."

2 I was made aware of Bejamin's text by a South African collective of artists, the Center for Historical Reenactments, Johannesburg.

3 In the English translations I am aware of the word "Sachverhalte" is translated as "matter" or "matter itself", which does not transcribe this notion of "how things are related to each other". Catherine Perret in her translation into French opts for "teneur chosale".

4 *Intimate memories, intimate traces.* The artists are Fernando Alvim, Gavin Younge and Carlos Garaicoa.

be). I will relate each artist's work to that of the other, presenting it as the process of returning over and over again to the same sites, digging in so many different ways.

Given the extreme complexity of the historical and political background underpinning the Angolan independence war followed by a civil war, partially overlapping with what was referred to as the "border war" in South Africa, it seems near impossible to present a linear summary of the conflict. Following upon a long period of Angolan struggle for independence, Portugal ended colonial rule in Angola as a result of the overthrow of the Estado Novo dictatorship on the 25th of April 1975. At independence three Angolan liberation movements claimed right to govern the country.[5] The conflict ensued in a civil war that lasted 1975 – 2002 and ended only with the assassination of Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, on 22 February 2002. MPLA, the soviet-backed liberation movement had assumed government in Angola at independence from Portugal. It was aided by Cuba who stayed in Angola with the aim of stabilizing the country. South Africa acted on the grounds of the 'total onslaught' rhetoric (Baines 2014), claiming that it needed to secure the northern border of Namibia against Soviet intrusions, against SWAPO[6] refugees, and against ANC[7] military camps in Angola. South Africa formed an alliance with UNITA lending military assistance. This alliance is backed by financial support from the United States also supplying weapons as part of the Cold War (Heißenbüttel 2014: 23) thus transforming what would have been a conflict between local Angolan groups into an East–West conflict fought on African soil. Due to this, the merciless circumstances of civil war deteriorated exponentially. Civilians, caught between the fighting fractions, had no choice but to attempt to be accepted by one adversary or the other in the hope of providing some security for their families Kutala Firmino 2017: 11-12). Not knowing who supported whom further led to social introversion Hayes 2001: 134). 9 September 1987 was the beginning of an offensive at Cuito Cuanavale that ended on 27 June 1988 with the withdrawal of South Africa from Angola (Kasrils 2008). This battle has become the symbolic turning point of the history of these countries. Nelson Mandela has significantly claimed Cuito Cuanavale as the decisive battle in the history of the liberation of Africa.[8] Reading different accounts of the offensive told from different military persuasions reveals that interpretations diverge drastically, even today (Saunders 2014: 1363-68; Forrest 2022). One crucial detail is that the SADF[9] could not afford human losses, because they would not have been able to explain them to South African citizens – officially South Africa was not in war.[10] The South-African community still has much difficulty to come to terms with this breach of truth (Hayes, Liebenberg 2010: 9-10). On the other hand, while SADF intervention was limited to southern Angola, Umkhonto we Sizwe were

5 MPLA (Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola), FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence).

6 When Germany lost its African colonies as part of the peace accords at the end of WW1, the colony *Südwest Afrika* became mandate of what was then the South-African Union. From 1948 onwards the South African Republic imposed Apartheid Legislation in this territory treating it as a fifth province. South Africa did not cooperate with the demands of the United Nations for a plan of Namibian Independence, and on the contrary pursued members of SWAPO (South West African Peoples Organization). Namibia gained its independence on 21 March 1990.

7 African National Congress.

8 During an address held in Havana in 1991, Nelson Mandela highlighted the importance of Cuban commitment in the struggle for the liberation of Africa and the battle of Cuito Cuanavala as a "milestone in the history of the struggle for southern African liberation". The South African Parliamentary Millennium Project (PMP, launched in 2002) had planned commemorations for the 20th anniversary of the battle at Cuito Cuanavale to be held June 2007 - June 2008. These commemorations were destined to highlight the commitment to the values of internationalism and global solidarity with the fight for liberation of Africa, more specifically the commitment of Cuban soldiers. It also meant to raise awareness of the role played by Umkhonto we Sizwe (see below). Heindri A. Bailey, 2007.

9 South African Defence Force.

10 Clive Kellner (1998: 3) phrases it thus: "Cuito Cuanavale is the site of a battle that took place between South African, Cuban and Angolan forces, and more importantly, where South Africa lost. Which South Africans? And who were they fighting for?"

actively present in northern Angola.[11] Angolan refugees, thought to be either fleeing FNLA combatants or displaced civilians with no military background, had been integrated into the SADF as part of the 32 Battalion. This means that they fought for South Africa in their own country against their fellow nationals. Their reason for integrating the SADF was the relative security the army could provide for themselves and for their families, combined with the hope that they would be entitled to land ownership once the conflict would end. After the war their situation remained desperate and their struggle to establish a sense of belonging remained traumatic. As to Cuba due to changed relations with the Angolan government after the collapse of the Soviet Union and also due to its wish to show its autonomy from the Soviet Union[12] the Cuban cultural administration has since adopted an official explanation on the role Cuban military efforts played in Angola which does not leave much room to speak of individual trauma suffered in Angola (Hatzky 2012). For this reason, Cuban ex-soldiers carry the burden of silenced remembrance of unbearable violence.

Inspite of official discourse, over time, little by little, attempts to tell the many-layered experiences of this conflict have started to accumulate. Amongst others, artists have taken up the painful challenge, approaching these conflicts and their legacy, relating their own lived experience of them to their art-making. Patricia Hayes explores how, on a technological level, image-making becomes part of the offensive via aerial photography or the gun-camera, how photography sometimes inadvertently generates violence, how it can aid the spy or the liberator. She studies how photographic equipment amounts to "technologies which act as a prosthetic relation with the human body" and can be used as a military tool or as a weapon of resistance (Hayes 2001: 134, 150). However, throughout, the war-situation is someone's personal story: images are gleaned from this chaos. The question how to respect the individual lives remains. Patricia Hayes has convincingly shown how the documentary image is paradoxical in this context: by showing victims it repeats the violence.[13] The "truth" it supposedly represents is ambivalent. Consequently, the Angolan cascading conflicts add up to one collective "war of madness" for the photographer Joachim Schönfeld (Hayes 2001: 156).

As imagined by Walter Benjamin, artists have continued to return time and again to the places where this story unfolded and still grapple with their inability to represent this fraught history, be it only in the imagination of the ones concerned. Today, the question is as pertinent as ever before: how will it be treated in collective memory?

Digging I: *Memórias Íntimas Marcas*

A triad of notions (Memories, Intimacies, Traces)[14] and a geographical triangle (Angola, Cuba, South Africa) structure one artistic project conceived in the early 1990's. Titled *Me-*

11 Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) (Spear of the Nation) was the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC). The South African Parliamentary Millennium Project wished amongst others to draw attention to the active presence of Umkhonto we sizwe in Angola, and therefore their contribution in the struggle for the liberation of Africa and the downfall of Apartheid despite the fact that they had not participated in military operations at Cuito Cuanavale.

12 For the complex political reasoning behind the asymmetry of this narrative, see Sujatha Fernandes 2006: 173-74.

13 This said, sometimes the work of the photographer allowed to establish the identity of victims or to re-claim nationality (Hayes, 2001: 23, 27, 153, 154).

14 Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine. The project and the exhibitions and publications that result from it are referred to by this title, translated as "Memories, Intimacies, Traces" (intimate traces of memory or traces of intimate memories). "*Intimas*"can also connote interiority. See Nadine Siegert, s.d., 176.

mórias Íntimas Marcas, it consists in collaborative work conducted at Cuito Cuanavale by three artists. Following an initial artistic action *in situ*, it gave rise to a series of exhibitions shown between 1997 and 2000. The added ambition of creating South-South ramifications through the arts Mosquera 2002: 166) resulted in the fact that in certain aspects this project was conducted in an institutional, ambassador-like mind-set.[15] The organizational phases of the project are intertwined with that of international cultural agendas.

In 1994, to celebrate its newly won democracy, South Africa commences preparation of a Biennale to be held in Johannesburg in 1995. South Africa looks to its northern neighbours Angola, Mozambique, the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The South-African artist Gavin Younge secures funding to conduct research in these countries.[16] The Angolan Government contributes an exhibition for the Biennale, including amongst other artists Fernando Alvim.[17] At this occasion Alvim and Younge meet and begin to consider the idea of a collaborative project. Alvim proposes going back to the site of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale as a joint venture between artists from the three countries involved (Alvim 2004: 50-53), an idea he has considered since 1992. He suggests Carlos Garaicoa as the Cuban representative. He also secures financial means from the Angolan private sector[18] and obtains the patronage of Angolan military to assist in the logistics of the journey.

After the expedition to Cuito Cuanavale the exhibition is shown first in Luanda then at the Cape Town Castle of Good Hope.[19] At this second opening the director of the collection, Paul Grobbelaar,[20] a retired Lieutenant-Colonel of the SADF, discloses that he was one of the commanders of the invasion of Angola. He talks of the frightening moment when he realized the senselessness of this action. After the Cape Town show, many artists come forward[21] wishing to contribute to the project. The artists' lively reaction shows that this question is at the heart of their concerns. This is interpreted as a sign of the fact that there were very few platforms where concerns of the military after combat could find a voice.[22]

Frictions between the official discourses accumulating around this large-scale project and the artistic implications centred on individuated memory-work become evident in the finer implications of the project. One sensitive detail is the fact that the civil war has not ended at the time of the project. The stay in Cuito Cuanavale takes place during a short-lived regional cessation of hostilities. In late January to early February 1997

15 The initial *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* project grew into much larger network. Fernando Alvim together with Clive Kellner and Hans Bogatzke constituted the C.CACSA in Johannesburg with a cultural peripheral "embassy" in Europe: Camouflage in Brussels. Several publications, international collections and large-scale exhibitions are linked to this network, amongst others *Marcas News and co@rtnews.*

16 Gavin Younge, email to the author, 11 April, 2016.

17 Johannesburg Biennale Catalogue 1995: 106.

18 Alvim, 2004: 50. At later stages the project received funding from UNESCO and the European Union. See Kellner, 1998: 7. On the importance of the official personalities that act as patrons for the project see Nadine Siegert, 174-175.

19 November 1997.

20 *Marcas News* 3rd edition, 25.

21 On the process of opening the exhibition to all who wish to contribute see Alvim, 2004: 52. New artists added at Electric Workshop in Johannesburg (*Marcas News* July 1998) included: Capela (Angola), Sandra Ceballos (Cuba), Moshekwa Langa (South Africa), Wayne Barker (SA), Colin Richards (SA), Lien Botha (SA); joining for the exhibition at the African Window Museum in Pretoria (June-July 1998): Thomas Barry (SA), Jan van der Merwe (SA); Lisbon (September 1998?): Raymond Smith, Willem Boshoff (SA), Kendell Geers (SA), Abrie Fourie (SA), Minette Vári (SA); Antwerpen (MUHKA February to May 2000): Jan van der Merwe (SA), Kendell Geers (SA), Kay Hassan (SA), Abrie Fourie (SA), Minnette Vári (SA), Willem Boshoff (SA), Colin Richards (SA), Clive Kellner (SA), Carlos Garaicoa (Cuba), N'Dilo Mutima (Angola), Bili Bidjocka (Cameroun), Gast Bouchet (Luxemburg), Toma Muteba Luntumbue (Congo), Aimé Ntakiyica (Burundi), Fernando Alvim (Angola).

22 Kellner, personal communication to the author, 11 April, 2016.

– nine years after the battle, five years before the end of the civil war – the three artists (Alvim, Younge and Garaicoa) and a team of 15 spend 12 days in Cuito Cuanavale living in a ruined house.[23] The organization of this project necessitated considerable diplomatic ramifications on the part of the organizers. Notwithstanding the institutionalised character of this phase the prime interest of the project seems to lie in the precise actions each artist undertook during these twelve days and in the intimate character of their sojourn.[24] Out of these actions flow artworks that are central to later work of each artist. Each of them lived through the twelve days in a different way, retained memories, interiorized different minute details he encountered: moments of contact and the traces left behind. This memory-work conducted collectively *in situ* can be seen as a threefold process of individuation of a communally lived experience. Each "reads"[25] the traces the war left on the region in a personal way.

Emerging out of a Tunnel

During the preoperational phases of the project and also in later communication, Fernando Alvim[26] speaks much of healing. His artistic contribution consists in images filmed amongst others from a toy car steered for kilometres randomly through the bush. He further stages actions, ritual-like performances including assembled objects, for example the hybrid doll-figures he has a habit of using.[27] These figures travel through tunnels constructed by the artist. The re-appearance of the hybrid creatures after their underground passage is celebrated as a re-birth. Close-ups of the action are filmed underground (Alvim 2004: 51). As a material trace of the action, the artist gathers up the roots that would have witnessed this subterranean rite of passage at first hand.

Alvim's contribution to the *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* travelling exhibitions is an archive of found objects, a material archive of the intimate traces of the war: parts of soldier's uniforms, water girdles, used ammunition. According to Alvim autonomous meaning is created by the act of displacement these objects undergo. They are transported from the site of the battle to spaces where they once more confront society: as an artistic gesture this work hinges on the notion of removal, the etymological origin for all metaphors.[28] Alvim writes about amnesia, exorcism (Njami 2008: 42-49), a culture of war, symptoms of times of war and symptoms of culture, psychoanalysis of our existence, deformity,[29] ethno-psychiatry (Alvim 1998: 6; 2004: 53).

23 "Cuito was pretty amazing – completely shot up with bits of helicopter blades re-fashioned as garden walk ways. Ruined buildings everywhere. A detachment of the Angolan army was stationed there, but they kept to themselves. We all slept in a large house with a roof, but not much by way of ablution facilities, in fact we shared a toilet which did not have running water" (personal communication from Gavin Younge to the author, 11 April, 2016). See also Alvim, 2004: 51. On the traces of soviet presence in the region, see Sujatha Fernandes, 2006: 17.

24 Patricia Hayes (2001: 133) speaks of a "sense of intimacy about the causes and effects of violence".

25 In a telephone conversation with the author (13 June, 2015), Fernando Alvim suggests that their method consisted in "lire ce qu'il était possible d'appréhender" "reading that which it was possible to apprehend".

26 Part of the Angolan exhibition in Johannesburg 1995 curated by Andriano Mixinge (Johannesburg Biennale Catalogue, 1995: 106.

27 Alvim uses the doll-assemblages in the installations at the 1995 Biennale. See Siegert, 171-172.

28 Fernando Alvim refers to a journey to Havana just after the fortnight at Cuito Cuanavale in May 1997 - He speaks of soldiers who recognized the wooden poles as they had been soldiers in Cuito Cuanavale in 1987

29 "Deformity: All deformity is a sign of mystery, either malevolent or benevolent. As in the case of any anomaly, there is first something repulsive about it; but it is also a popular sign or place in which to conceal something very precious, something which requires effort in order to be accepted. This explains the respect, tempered by fear, felt by African societies towards the madman, the cripple and above all, the blind, who are deemed to see the other side of things. To be understood, the anomalous has to transcend the normal standards of judgement and, as a result, is able to lead us to deeper understanding of the mysteries of being, the mysteries of life. Deformity makes the victim a mediator - fearful or benign - between the known and the unknown, between the diurnal and the nocturnal, between this world and the other", Fernando Alvim, 1998: 5.

Indeed, within post-colonial theory *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* is most frequently mentioned within discussions on "Art and Trauma".[30] In art, these fields of interest are accompanied by research on the visual language of trauma and of the experience of loss. The question of the visual language of trauma is one of the main issues repeatedly raised within the problematics of representation. This question is carried by a line of thought that hinges on three consecutive arguments. In the context of art in the early 20th century, one possible point of departure for this field of enquiry is Aby Warburg's interest in the way that emotional content can be visualised within a work of art through a visual language that is shared over time and beyond geographical divides. He suggests the *Pathosformel* as a safe keeper of an archaic energy; these expressive gestures carry cultural memory over time. They can be considered to be those forms and those instances escaping precise memory – and it is precisely for this reason that they cannot be forgotten.[31]

The counter-argument, developed in the wake of the Second World War, is the ethical question of representation of violence or the suffering of others.[32] Faced with the dilemma of a need for representation and concurrently its ethical impossibility several commentators suggest that through an active and personal confrontation with pain, an empathetic relationship with the onlooker might be achieved.[33] According to this theory the onlooker enters into a dialogue with the traumatic situation treated in the work of art. The possibility of active personal involvement however remains questionable – a representation cannot be considered to be a particularly apt vehicle, infallibly resulting in sincere empathy on behalf of the onlooker.[34]

The visual material produced during *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* does not represent suffering, it does not communicate in pictures, even though there is a strong sense of visuality and of image genesis. The artists remember that evenings were spent looking through the filmed material of the day, the inhabitants of the village joined in.[35] However, the crucial work done during the project as a whole is the process-based approach, returning to the same set of circumstances again and again with ever new tools and means of apprehension: visual, but also audial or performative.

Passing by

Gavin Younge has brought a bicycle with him to Cuito Cunevale, which he rides[36] through the landscape that shows the many abandoned signs of the war: burnt-out

30 Brandstetter 2006: 122-155. Jill Bennett, 2005.
31 Nadine Siegert constitutes a bibliography reflecting the richness of the analytic texts written in this field (Unpublished manuscript, note 498, p.163).
32 Adorno, "Commitment ", in Adorno 1962. More recently this argument has been extended upon by Susan Sontag, 2003, but also by Georges Didi-Huberman (1999), on the inherent cruelty in representation.
33 Jill Bennett, 2005.
34 Catherine Nichols, 2007: 217-226. See also Thierry de Duve (2008: 3-23) for one of the most polemical essays denouncing certain humanitarianism that this field of questions may be put to abuse within the art institution.
35 Alvim 2004 http://www.bpb.de/internationales/afrika/afrika/59164/ausstellung-gleichzeitig-in-afrika?p=all. The villagers becoming part of the project seems essential, Alvim remembers that the head of the village asked whether he could keep a doll that had been used in a performance, for it to bring good fortune to a house they were building in the village (Alvim, Hanussek Interview Springerin, 51). Gavin Younge remembers that the children of the village borrowed the bicycle he had brought (Personal communication 11 April 2016) See below for his use of the bird names contributed by the villagers. The film contains interviews with villagers, telling their personal experiences linked to the war (Nadine Siegert, 178-181).
36 He also uses other modes of transport, a truck for example.

tanks, shells of houses, helicopter blades (fig. 1),[37] scars and amputations visible on the bodies of the persons he encounters. He has secured a video camera to the carrier on the back of the bicycle. Later he uses this film footage, in combination with other images, to assemble a video to be shown in television monitors, as part of the installation titled *Forces Favorites.* Younge covers ten bicycle frames in vellum[38] and then assembles the ten post-office bicycles to be arranged in circular form. The title, *Forces Favorites*, is borrowed from a listener's choice programme, which, broadcast in South Africa during the "border war", gave family and friends living in South Africa the illusion that they could, by means of the songs they requested, share time with the conscripts. Letters by the soldiers, addressed to loved ones at home, were read by the presenter during the programme.

Fig. 1 Arrivals Hall, Cuito Cuanavale, and artist's bicycle brought from Cape Town. Photography by Gavin Younge, 1994. All rights reserved to the Publisher and Gavin Younge.

Apart from his bicycle Gavin Younge also brought his edition of *The Birds of Angola*, published in Lisbon shortly before Angolan independence.[39] Younge paints copies of the illustrations found in *The Birds of Angola* on floorboards and window frames in the abandoned house. As a result of the war all bird variety in the region is gone but the inhabitants of the village see the painted birds and pronounce their names. Younge inscribes phonological transcriptions of these almost lost bird names onto the panels, these are the titles for the paintings: "Sumbo", "Kawa-Na-Mbulu", "Onduva". Like the bicycle-frames, the fragments of wooden furniture are then covered in vellum; the translucent quality permits to make out the images of birds underneath the semi-opaque skin.[40] Gavin Younge's intervention is one of covering up, a sort of inverse archaeology. His gestures are those of someone dressing a wound in order for healing to be able to set in. Beyond this, his works hinge on the grounds of an ambivalent relationship with time and voice.

37 Gavin Younge, Personal communication to the author 11 April, 2016. See also Gavin Younge, 2007.
38 Gavin Younge (2010: 17) explains his use of vellum in artworks all though his career.
39 David Bunn in Gavin Younge, 2007: 32; Gavin Younge, email to the author, 11 April 2016.
40 Maud de la Forterie (2007: 17) has written about the use of vellum all along his career. Its metaphoric associations flow from the tanning process (depliant phase using lime) to the recuperative associations of (medical) stitching.

This relationship results out of the circumstance that, while international military interference had disinterested itself from the conflict, the civil war had not yet come to an end at the time of the project. This means that for the South African soldiers, those concerned by the listeners programme *Forces Favorites*, the war is in the past, but not for the inhabitants of the region. Yet, in both cases fluctuating memory is carried by voice. The time lag Younge has sensed here is one that is inherent in the nature of traces.

By a strange coincidence, simultaneously with the work *in situ* in Cuito Cuanavale another event takes place in the northern hemisphere: an exhibition organized at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, open from 19 February to 19 Mai 1997. The exhibition, based on research by Georges Didi-Huberman, is named "L'Empreinte"[41] (translatable as "The Imprint" or "The Trace"). Didi-Huberman's research limits itself to images and objects, but his reasoning might have been applied to sound, the audial trace. From the outset he remarks on the banality of imprints or traces: "Partout des empreintes nous précèdent ou bien nous suivent" (Everywhere traces precede us or follow in our step). He thinks of the infinite forms under which traces may appear, and of the circumstances under which they are produced. Traces need to be accounted for as a tangible process, all the while they are a theoretical paradigm used in philosophy. They are relevant to prehistoric condition of image making and are equally specific of production methods in contemporary art, much used by Marcel Duchamp[42] and a generation of conceptual artists inspired by his work. By this condition they are simultaneously relevant to two different time frames, a condition that encourages Didi-Huberman to refer to his "pensée de l'empreinte" as an "anachronistic point of view" which is needed when works of art have not yet come to be "legible" within history (Didi Hubermann 2008: 12). Didi-Huberman attributes the same qualities to the "dialectical image" as defined by Benjamin. According to Didi-Huberman, Benjamin's is "an image where past and present face each other, transform each other mutually and criticize each other, a constellation which is a dialectical configuration of heterogeneous time" (Didi-Huberman 2008: 13). Playing simultaneously on two time-frames means paying attention to the long run at the same time as being watchful for the present moment; to demand of recent events that they open up onto things long gone by, to require of the past, commencing with prehistory, that it disclose something about what "now" means. This is the anachronistic nature of objects that have as yet gone unnoticed by art criticism; they are objects that have accumulated sediments of time (Didi-Huberman 2008: 23). History needs to be constructed within this incessant counter-motif of the anachronistic point of view. Fernando Alvim seems to express the same thought permitting a hint of "difumbe" (testimony): "Culture should be the alchemy of societies, the more contemporary we are, the more we have the means to go into the past".[43] Likewise and inversely Didi-Huberman points out that a trace is a present condition, visual and tactile, of a past that hasn't yet ceased to transform the substrate wherein it has left its mark. It is

41 The text published in the exhibition catalogue L'Empreinte, Paris : Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997, has been republished recently in Didi-Huberman, 2008.

42 Duchamp favoured techniques of making imprints our moulds because while this is a process, it is also a non--œuvre par excellence. See Didi-Huberman, 2018: 20.

43 Alvim telephone conversation with the author, 13 June 2015 (La culture devrait être l'alchimie des sociétés, plus on est contemporain, plus on obtient les moyens d'aller dans le passé).

> Something speaking simultaneously of contact (a foot pressing into soil) and loss (the absence of this foot inside its trace). Something that is as eloquent about the contact of loss as it is about the loss of contact.[44]

Gavin Younge's artistic interventions are carried by this ambivalent relationship to time. Even though he had set out to find physical traces of the war, both his projects in the final run concentrate on an auditory feature, on sound, or more precisely voices, carrying memory over time and space.[45] By the inhabitants' oral intervention (pronouncing the names), the birds' names are re-activated over time while the real birds have disappeared. The listener of the *Forces Favorites* programme established (imaginary) contact over a considerable geographical distance. In both cases Younge's work tells the making of traces and their loss in one single gesture, which might result in healing, translated by the gesture of covering, suturing.

The fact that memory is carried by sound in Younge's work allows for a cleavage between lived actions here and now and experience of actions nine years earlier or elsewhere, later. The vehicle for communicating this "decalage", (tanslatable as interval or discrepancy, as time lag or gap) can be sound or image, storytelling in writing or orally, object gathering and action, a detachment, which is equally brought about in Carlos Gariacoa's work.

Digging into

Carlos Garaicoa is known for his poetical social critique in the form of performance work.[46] He has developed a method which Gerardo Mosquera qualifies as a form of "artistic archaeology",[47] inspecting the overlapping historical époques as seen in buildings or in social phenomena. Cuban involvement in the war in Angola (or in Ethiopia for that matter) remained a difficult subject in Cuba[48] seeing that much hype was made around Cuban soldiers' heroism during the war effort, which did not leave much space to come to terms with the atrocities they had witnessed.[49] Artists have thus made it their duty to uncover what Piero Gleijeses refers to as a "culture of silence".[50] In Cuito Cuanavale Carlos Garaicoa spends seven days digging holes in the Cuito riverbank. He films his action and the results are shown in an installation with seven video screens,[51] adopting a twice translated line by the Japanese poet Bashō Matsuo as a title: *In the summer grasses there is boredom now, glorious dreams of ancient warriors / En las hierbas del verano, Ahora se está aburrido. Gloriosos sueños de antiguos guerreros.* By choice of this title Garaicoa seems to express a

44 Didi-Huberman (2008: 18): "Quelque chose qui nous dit aussi bien le contact (le pied qui s'enfonce dans le sable) que la perte (l'absence du pied dans son empreinte). Quelque chose qui nous dit aussi bien le contact de la perte que la perte du contact".

45 The ways in which sonic reverberations are indeed physical traces are discussed in Neumark, 2017, and Gentric, 2019.

46 Johannesburg Biennale catalogue 1995: 130.

47 Mosquera, 2000: 1286-1291.

48 "Nobody in Cuba talks of war in Angola or Ethiopia. Censorship as much as auto-censure" writes Gerardo Mosquera (2000: 286). Or rather, the involvement in the war is taken care of by official propaganda rhetoric, "a language of victory and martyrdom", which does not allow for the narrative of personal experience of the conflict. "Aucun récit ne vient contrebalancer le discours officiel." (there is no narrative to counterbalance the official discourse). See also Fernandes, 2006: 173, 174.

49 The Parliamentary Millennium Project Proposal of 2007 uses the same type of discourse.

50 "Because the leaders said nothing, the Cuban volunteers who carried out the missions said nothing. The culture of silence enveloped the island" (Piero Gleijeses, 2013:395). Quoted in Fernandes 2006: 171.

51 Shown at Galeria Continua at Le Moulin Boissy le Chatel, Ile de France Festival "Sphères" 2009.

feeling of "having arrived too late" on the battlefield accompanied by a sense of helplessness and paralysis. The significations attributed to the artist's action waver between that of a gravedigger, a farmer, a labourer or an archaeologist.[52] In a text written at Cuito Cuanavale Garaicoa, unaware of Benjamin's text on memory, speaks of his attempt to "interrogate the earth through performance".[53]

> To dig. Seven days to dig up answers. To dig up an answer. To dig in search of a convincing reason. My own archaeology. Imagination Grave. To dig, to dig, to dig... In me, in my friends, to excavate everything and everyone. Digging as if to find the source of all doubt. To face the incomprehensible. Dig, dig...

Not only a sense of paralysis and fatal belatedness accompanies this action: the forcefully repeated open but deadly silent secret is the fact that the region has not been cleared of landmines. The action of "interrogating the earth" thus carries an aspect of razor-sharp and vital danger. An explosive sense of "here-and-now-ness" is felt every time the spade is thrust into the earth.

Garaicoa produces a second artwork following the expedition to Cuito Cuanavale. Almost like a pendant to the artist's own action, it consists in four video-portraits of his friends, young Cubans having served in Angola: *Four interviews without*.[54] The ex-soldiers face the camera without speaking (Fernandes 2006: 173). The sound-track consists in a recorded conversation. Thus, their voices in dialogue with the artist can be heard: they speak disjointed sentences of war memories "... that it would be better not even...but most of us were too young... after all, what..."[55]

The voices in Garaicoa's video do not coincide with the speechless portraits shown by the image; the radio-programme in Younge's work speaks of sound transmitted over a large distance in terms of time and space, the voices of the inhabitants pronounce names of birds that are no longer to be found in the region A sort of "Nachklang" (echoing, reverberation, resonance) emerges from these multiple dialogues, but remains suspended, for now.

Un-hearing

Alvim's claim of a preoccupation with "healing" and catharsis come under pressure as soon as the first critiques of the exhibitions appear. While he claims that "the exhibition is more a dialogue between victims than between winners and losers" it needs to be pointed out that certain victims in this war are not heard.[56] The artists are representative of the geo-political situation on the one single criterion of nationality: one Cuban, one South-African and one Angolan. At this early stage it has

52 A text by Orlando Hernandez (written in La Havana, January 1998) accompanies Garaicoa's work: "There, outside a man is digging, silently turning the soil as a grave digger would (But have not all the dead people been buried? Or, what else could be buried in those graves? Waste, rubbish?) It could also be a farmer who is preparing the soil, to sow his seeds, to insert saplings (but what can be cultivated in this land buried by fire, drowned in blood, that would not later beget more blood, more violence? and who wants to dine on such a harvest? Surely it must be an explorer, an archaeologist (but what is he looking for? What is he looking for?). 7 days from sunrise every morning - so each hole is made inside himself for his spade to penetrate..." *Marcas News* 3rd edition: 5.

53 Carlos Garaicoa (1998), *Marcas News* 3rd edition, 5.

54 "Quatre Cubains (1997), Cuatro entrevistas sin.." (*Four interviews without*). See also Fernandes, 2006: 174, 175.

55 See also text by Orlando Hernández 2000: 10.

56 Rory Bester, 1998: 64-66. Bester later became part of the project, writing text for later issues of *co.@rtnews*.

as yet proven impossible to take the very complex situation of the local population affected by the Angolan conflicts into account. *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* does not undertake an equitable assessment of all the participants in the war. The analytical texts accompanying the exhibition do not heed the fact the civil war had not ended, probably because the situation is not clear to anyone, even more so as in 1997 it it not possible to know that the civil war will draw on until 2002. It still remains that this detail considerably weakens the project's claim to being concerned with collective memory. To refer to the artistic interventions as though they were a work of collective remembrance would be over-precocious and would actually be an effacement of personal suffering because its inadvertent selective pertinence remained unavowed. Thus, *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* from the outset, in order to have any sense at all, needed to be followed up by more "diggers" returning here, trying to glean remembrance and representation from layers of trauma or forgetfulness.

In 2017 another project was conceived with this exact aim. The exhibition *[South-South] Let me begin again* involved 30 artists from southern America, the Caribbean and southern Africa exploring parallels between artists from the Global South. *[South-South]* confronted the complex notion of a connected "geopolitical South" through contemporary art and related to conflicts in general. The Angolan conflict featured amongst them.[57]

In the works shown at *[South-South]* it is brought home forcefully that for some the war is far from over even long after the 2002 ceasefire. The families of the veterans of the 32 Battalion for example still grapple with an unresolved traumatic past. Amongst these veterans, the conscripted Angolan refugees were first settled in a military base in northern Namibia. At Namibian independence they were moved to Pomfret in northern South Africa, an arid region. Since then, the South African state has discontinued the municipal services for this town to persuade the inhabitants to leave. The community as a whole is haunted by the legacy of war, repeated displacement and their struggle to summon a sense of belonging. As a result of the un-resolved war trauma suffered by most of the men having fought in the Angolan conflicts, normalization of violence is paramount and abuse of women is prevalent in this community. Two artists born in Pomfret from families relocated here as a result of the Angolan conflicts have taken up the challenge to make the stories of this community heard.

Teresa Kutala Firmino and Helena Uambembe work as the collective Kutala Chopeto.[58] Their work materializes in the form of story-telling. Gleaning personal stories from interviews with fellow members of the community Kutala Chopeto re-write these personal stories into a performed narrative. The tales are often read as part of performed actions. Elements from the narrative feature as a material language accompanying the verbal account.[59]

One such re-written and re-imagined narrative is titled *The Lizard*. A filmed version of a rehearsal of the performance shows Teresa Firmino and Helena Uambembe knee-

57 *SOUTH-SOUTH:* Let me begin again, 2 February 2017. https://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/cape-town-gallery-south-south-let-me-begin-again-2017. The exhibition was shown 28 January - 04 March 2017 at the Goodman Gallery, Cape Town.
58 Translatable as "To see beyond something soft".
59 Firmino and Uambembe also work in video, painting, and found object installation.

ling on a surface covered in large sheets of white paper, at opposite ends, both facing the camera (fig. 2). Teresa Firmino moves backward while writing phrases from the narrative onto the paper she crouches on: "I am a lizard", "I am a mother", "I am a grand-mother", "She is my child", etc. Helena Uambembe moves forward in a similar crouched attitude placing alternately one ear or the forehead to the ground while her other ear points to the ceiling. The two artists then inverse roles, becoming alternately the listener or the writer, adding layer upon layer of writing or hearing: writing and over-writing or un-writing, hearing, over-hearing and un-hearing. The accompanying recital is written from the point of view of unexpected witnesses to scenes of personal distress: a lizard, a pot-plant and a shrub of a peanut plantation. The recital repeatedly refers to a character – human, animal or vegetal – holding an ear to the ground, crouching or slanting in order to hide. At one point a character is hidden in a ceiling thus holding the ear to the wooden casing she hides over, in order to overhear the conversation unfolding in the room underneath her. From the "more than human" point of view of a lizard, a pot-plant and a peanut plant Kutala Chopeto tell a story of repeated displacement and abuse.

Fig. 2 Teresa Fimino and Helena Uambembe, video of performance rehearsal: 2 minutes 50. Cinematographer Duško Marović; Effects & Editing: Kutala Chopeto, Sound: SoulFire Studio.

Teresa Firmino and Helena Uambembe chose the format of storytelling[60] as a means to avoid figurative representation.[61] Firmino's Master dissertation unpacks this artistic practice for contemporary art. The thesis titled *Rewriting History*, Pomfret community stories evidences that narratives never exist in isolation. Each chapter begins with a story from the Pomfret community. By means of these narrative passages, Firmino's texts "navigate the different tools used to rewrite history" (Firmino 2017: 1).

"Storytelling grabs the imagination", she writes, "it gives the audience the freedom to interpret and re-imagine what so many have imagined", and later: "Rewriting history is an act of reimagining one's past in a world replete with pre-inscribed histories that have set themselves as truth" (Firmino 2017: 35-36). In Kutala Chopeto's work

60 Firmino, Telephone interview, 11 September 2019.
61 Firmino, ibid., 11 September 2019.

the telling of the story is completed by re-enacting certain essential gestures, thus allowing bodily memory to take up the trace of an earlier lived experience (ibid.: 87).

Firmino and Uambembe are at considerable pains to create a respectful reception of the narratives they share and to cater for the sensitivities of the prospective viewer/listener.[62] Within the performance it is made clear that the stories function as such, that they are an independent element, heard in a specific context, re-told here and now, potentially to be re-told in other contexts. For Firmino, reading is like research: each reading of the story is a new investigation into what happened, which part of lived experience can be remembered or shared and how to come to terms with this difficult past.[63] It is important that the viewer/listener is conscious that he/she is hearing a subjective account of the facts, re-told by the artists who themselves heard it from someone else. Their personal way of telling the story is important but on the other hand the artists are just the voices retelling the story (Firmino 2017: 35). Another detail the artists consider crucial, is the fact that both have a personal relationship with the person whose story is told. Having a shared spatial reference: Pomfret is the home-town of both the initial story-teller and of those who mediate it. Voice as safe-keeper of memory thus follows up on sonic traces passed on between individuals – returning time and again to the same set of circumstances, in order for collective imaginaries to become capable of apprehending the individually lived episodes.

Un-earthing

In her text on the photographic images of war in Angola and Northern Namibia, Patricia Hayes has questioned this set of circumstances thus: "What visibilities does violence create? What visibilities does violence destroy? What explanations for violence feature in the popular imaginary and on the ground?" (Hayes 2001: 157). This is complicated by the fact that "commemoration becomes increasingly centralised through a national elite in the state" with the result that, instead of furthering collective memory-work "a kind of collective post-colonial forgetfulness takes hold" (Hayes 2010: 11).

Indeed, seeing the almost ambassador-like rhetoric in the later phases of the *Memórias Íntimas Marcas* project (the travelling exhibition shown in Luanda, in Cape Town and in Antwerp) it becomes difficult not to lose sight of the first action that consisted in travelling through a war zone and makeshift living in ruins. It is however the furtiveness of the stay in Cuito Cuanavale that seems to contribute as an aesthetic category to the memory work debate. The unsolved intimate experiences are like the awareness of the presence of unexploded landmines in the soil of the riverbank. As long as the experience has not been allowed to enter dialogue with the present changed reality, the violence can't be laid to rest. This gesture is to be seen in the larger context of cultural memory[64] and thus needs to take the political into account (Bennett 2005). Negative memories or the absen-

62 When Teresa Frimino and Helena Uambembe told the story "*The Lizard*" at the University of the Witwatersrand, at the occasion of a presentation of Teresa Firmino's practical work, (March 2017), Firmino prepared a form to be filled in by the viewer, stipulating the conditions under which the narratives would be shared. The viewer had to act according to a precise protocol.

63 Firmino, Telephone interview, 11 September 2019.

64 Here meant as "Kulturelles Gedächtnis" in the sense used by Aleida and Jan Assmann.

ce of recollection result in an inability to describe experience. In order to create an opportunity to approach this missing link from within a cultural process, society needs to find ways of narrating memory and generating images and gestures as part of collective imaginary.

Once again: The voices in Garaicoa's video do not coincide with the speechless portraits shown by the image; the radio-programme in Younge's work speaks of sound transmitted over large distances in terms of time and space, the voices of the inhabitants pronounce names of birds that are no longer to be found in the region. Finally, one generation later, the call is taken up as Kutala Chopeto become the voice that retells personal stories. The artists have each returned time and again to the same set of circumstances, unavoidable if one is to unearth elements of initial comprehension from layers of forgetfulness. They each are, in his/her own way, "digging, digging as if to find the source of all doubt".

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The Black Atlantic Enters the Thinking Space between the Pages: Three Books by Bundit Phunsombatlert, Atta Kwami, and Gilles Elie dit Cosaque

Philippa Sissis

Introduction

The medium is the message.
Marshall McLuhan

An artist's choice to present their work in the form of a book immediately puts it into a form that implicitly and explicitly admits a whole series of levels of meaning and forms of encounter. The *book* not only refers to the functions and design characteristics of European book culture.[1] The book form also implies that the viewer is actively involved in the reception of the work in certain ways – for example, through the invitation to leaf through it and read. The impact of reception in the following up of pages due to the book form happens in parallel and before and after the viewing of individual pages and their graphic message. The composition in book form thus is an amalgamation, an additive procedure that plays with impressions of script, text, images, ordering of information and the implication of the viewer/reader who chooses how to travel through the book. The selection of the book form as artistic surface implies more: As a cultural object with multitudinous facets of use, function, haptic and visual effects and elements, the choice of a bookish form creates a multifaceted art work.

By analyzing three artists' books, we will show how artistic engagement with the book thematizes the culture of memory and the construction of history. The examples in question will explore the very different ways artists choose to use the dimensions of the book for the effects of their works. First, the *Sunny Gardens in Blue* by the media artist Bundith Phunsombatlert creates a cyanotype book around a project of documenting and archiving emigration experiences of Caribbean-born seniors in Brooklyn. Phunsombatlert plays with artistic references to the first historical photobook that Anna Atkins created in 1834. Second, the *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, a book whose title places it somewhere between a book and a sculpture, is an exploration by the Ghanaian artist Atta Kwami of the work of his mother, Grace Kwami. He memorializes her with his art book, but his choice of format also inscribes her in a canon shaped by the authority of the book. Like the moment of archiving that Phunsombatlert takes up with his collection of biographical narratives, the artwork here also becomes a part of book-shaped historiography, thus revealing different dimensions

1 This reference to European book culture is due to the choice of these three examples. Artist books are a global artistic medium reflecting the diverse book cultures and traditions centred or not around the written word. See for only some examples: Wasserman 2007; Hubert/Hubert 1999; Pinther/Wolf 2020; https://library.si.edu/exhibition/artists-books-and-africa/unique-visions (last accessed: September 29, 2022). For some aspects of the dimensions of meaning inscribed in the book in European book culture see for example: Kiening 2008.

of remembering and the preservation of memory. Third, Gilles Elie dit Cosaque works in *Lambeaux* on an infinite journal intime, where each newly created page is an extension and continuity of those already created and those yet to be produced. The pages that the artist prepares for each new collage – in the same dimension and the juxtaposition of writing, collage of photographs, magazine clippings and other graphic and visual elements – make *Lambeaux* an imaginary book or notebook that never existed as such but presents itself as a (infinitely unfinished) unitary object in the effect of the individual pages. In this case, the format of the pages and the title as a diary makes clear the relationship of the pages to each other, and again uses the idea of turning the page to facilitate contemplation beyond the current exhibition and towards future pages.

The reading of these art works cannot be simplistic, as these three examples will show: the artists reflect on different elements of the *thinking space* (Aby Warburg's "Denkraum") produced by the book, elements which are as numerous as book cultures in time and geography, as multifarious as interactions with books and writing. This paper will only take up some of these elements to elaborate the contours of the interplay between book culture, memory, art, and the memory of, and history writing in, the Black Atlantic.

In Dialogue with Historical Models: Bundith Phunsombatlert

Creating a book does not just mean binding pages together. The individual book forms a container of ideas, scientific argumentations, notes, personal memories, and imaginations. Books in general contain a multitude of histories forming a connected textual space through allusions and intertextual references, or simply by the local connection of numerous books in a collection or library.[2] Every new book is connected to this existing and ever-growing book space – it is enriched by stylistic or textual relations to other books and can use the references for its own effect on the reader or viewer who reacts to the different references according to his own knowledge.

In his book project *Sunny Gardens in Blue* (fig. 1), the Thai-born artist Bundith Phunsombatlert explicitly invokes a dialogue with a historical publication. He takes up the visual characteristics of Anna Atkins's *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (fig. 2)[3] to create a dialogue across time. As he writes, "by pairing the immigrants' stories with images of plants that are significant to their personal histories, I have added a human immigration element that was absent in Atkins's original work."[4] In opening up this relation between his work and *British Algae*, he refers to the achievements of this historical model, the first

2 The library and book collection as an artistic, but also space of, memory constitutes the subject of the work *Library of Exile* by Edmund de Waal. In his collection of books by authors who were forced into exile in their lives – from antiquity to the present time – he creates a literary space ("a working library") connected by the shared and yet diverse experiences of the authors. The visitors are invited to sit down and read and leave their own traces in the *exlibris* of the books so that a space of multiple times – or outside time is developing. The collection is completed with the inscription of destroyed libraries on the porcelain surface of the outer walls of the library space. See De Waal 2020).

3 One of thirteen exemplars that Schaaf named is in the Museum of Natural History in London. See: https://nhm.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/view/BookReaderViewer/44NHM_INST/12190875980002081# (last accessed: March 5, 2022)

4 https://bundithphunsombatlert.com/work/sunny-garden-in-blue (last accessed: March 1, 2022)

book that worked with photographic illustrations. The book stood out at the time not only by virtue of the extraordinary photographic nature of the pictures in this botanical publication, but also because it was the result of a woman's work in a mainly masculine discourse. Even if Phunsombatlert claims that his unique contribution to the historical model was the content of his interviews with senior residents of Brooklyn, a closer examination of the context of both works, the ongoing project *Sunny Gardens* and the first book including photographs, created in 1843, reveals further discursive levels of this dialogue.

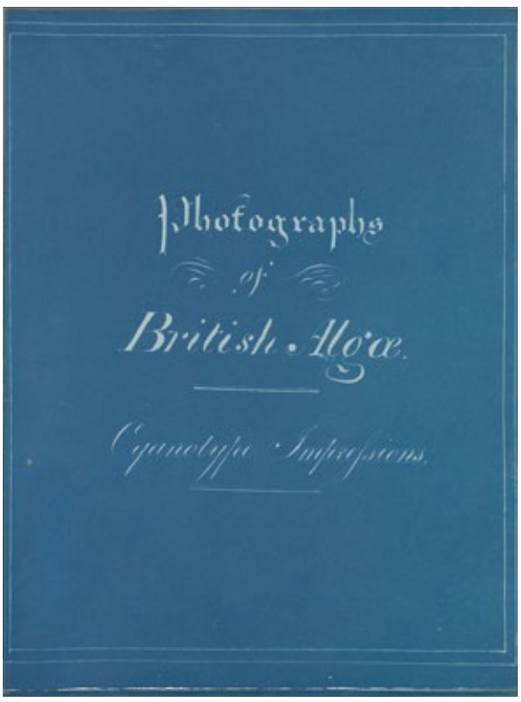

Fig. 1 Bundith Phunsombatlert, *Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn*, Ongoing project, Archival digital and cyanotype versions, Book version: 14 1/4 x 20 inches (each page). Copyright: Bundith Phunsombatlert, image courtesy of Wave Hill, photo by Stefan Hagen

Fig. 2 Cover Anna Atkins, *British Algae*. From The New York Public Library[5]

One parallel between the work of Atkins and the artist's book is their positioning "at the borderline": while Atkins, as a woman in a patriarchal world, interrogates the problem of "positivist classification" (Armstrong 1998: 187) from the margins with her illustrations and adaptation of the cyanotype, Phunsombatlert uses this technique to inscribe a subject that is equally at the margins of official historiography into cultural memory through documentation. In doing so, Atkins moves with botany into a field that, in her time, did not count as high science, but was instead considered "a pastime 'of the gentler sex and high estate,' little more than a 'pretty lady-like amusement'" (Armstrong 1998: 187).

5 (https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-4b43-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99, (last accessed: 19.09.2022)

Anna Atkins's *British Algae*

The work of Anna Atkins emerged in the context of the broad enthusiasm for natural history in Great Britain in the 19th century (Schaaf 2018). John George Children, Anna Atkins's father, was a recognized scientist and active member of the Royal Society (Schaaf 2018: 41). His daughter knew her father's scientific colleagues well and took part – as much as was possible in this time – in some of the scientific culture, for example in chemical experimentation (Schaaf 2018: 44). She also assisted her father in illustrating his translation of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's *Genera of Shells* in 1833 (Schaaf 2018: 49). In the field of scientific illustration, the preoccupation with photography was both a technical and conceptual turning point. Working from an understanding of nature as a field of knowledge to be collected and organized in an intelligible structure, illustrations in the methodological publications were understood as references to the natural order. The artist's interpretation inherent in the act of drawing was a moment of subjective transformation. The idea of creating illustrations that would exclude this human factor were crucial to this notion of science. Atkins used the technique of cyanotypes at a very early stage of its development: only a few days after John Herschel, a family friend, communicated the functioning process to her father, she started the production of her systematic reproduction of *British algae* (fig 3).

Fig. 3 Anna Atkins, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, Part I, Polysiphonia violacea, 1843, Cyanotype on paper, ca. 27 x 21 cm. From The New York Public Library[6]

She sought to produce "impressions of the plants themselves" (Armstrong 1998: 187), thereby creating authenticity. In the resulting book, the succession of illustrations, monochromatic negatives on which the plants appear in white as they were less exposed to the sun (Sachsse 2021: 23), generates a systematic and ordered archive.

The representations of the plants reveal individual and collective features at the same time. While each imprint is individual, each plate becomes representative for its specimen as part of a methodical collection. It is precisely this play with individuality and collective representation that Phunsombatlert deploys in *Sunny Gardens*, although in a quite different historical context.

6 (https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-4b43-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99, last accessed: 19.09.2022)

Absences in the archive, presences in the artistic process

The ongoing book project *Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories From The Caribbean To Brooklyn* was and is part of a three-part exploration of moments of immigration and migration, to which the artist also refers to as "History in Blue".[7] In the porcelain assemblages entitled *Returning Dialogue: Fragments of Blue and White Porcelain*, he explores colonial pasts and intercultural connections between art production, especially porcelain, and colonial trade routes in the form of plates composed of shards of different origins and with localizable and datable decoration. In the spacious installation *Crossing the Border: Beneath the Blue Sky*, he negotiates the nation as an abstract quantity by translating the suspended flags of the world into shades of blue, questioning recognizability and proxy roles through minimal intervention. While recognizability remains in some cases, the identifying color characteristics of numerous flags disappear.

Only Sunny Garden in Blue will be discussed here, as it is the only work for which the artist chose the book form. The project is conducted as a participative archival work recollecting and illustrating immigration stories of retired residents of Brownsville in the south of Brooklyn, New York.8 The artist collected personal stories and documented and re-narrated these memories in his own voice in the text of the art book. Phunsombatlert presents drawn portraits of the various participants, and tells their stories as they were told to him, beginning with their Caribbean experiences and their paths to the USA (fig. 4).

Fig. 4 *Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn*, *Jose A Felix Story (page 1)*, Ongoing project, Archival digital and cyanotype versions, Book version: 14 1/4 x 20 inches (each page). Copyright: Bundith Phunsombatlert

All portraits start on the verso with the name on a plain page. On the recto follows the main text, often accompanied by a portrait drawn by the artist in blue lines on white. The Caribbean origin of the interviewee is illustrated by a drawn outline of the island, with the places named in the text labelled in handwritten indications. Plants and fruits are shown as photographic reproductions in white on blue, thus reproducing the color effect of cyanotypes. hese organic objects are linked to the lives of the interviewees by means of personal memories:

7 See https://bundithphunsombatlert.com/ (last accessed: October 2, 2022).

8 The project was completed by means of different activities: The artist created the portraits of the interviewees, they created cyanotype images of flowers and plants, and they printed cyanotype style motifs on fabric. The results of their works were presented in at least two exhibitions in 2018 (*Sunny Garden in Blue. Artworks from Rosetta Gaston Neighborhood Senior Center*, May 14, 2018, artist reception on June 15, 2018. Participating artists: Rebecca Abrams, Kenneth Beckles, José A. Felix, Julia Fraser, Vere Gibbs, Ketty Greene, Magdalen Jobity, Carmen Mendez, Aida Ramos, Lorna Thomas, Norma Tudor, Francis Bates).

> His [Jose A. Felix] memories about Puerto Rico are all about nature - the coconut trees and rocky mountains; the wide open ocean that meets the sky; and nights made bright by the moon and the endless numbers of stars.[9]

The visual effect of this *mise en page* only uses the main color blue and the representation of plats as references to Atkins's book.[10] Contrary to Atkins, Phunsombatlert concentrates on human beings and their stories. By collecting them, the artist gives a material form to ephemeral biographies that are often only recounted in an oral tradition. This process extends "the temporal and spatial range of human communication" (Foote 1990: 379), especially in Western cultures. Choosing the form of "Lives" for the telling of the different stories also associates his book with numerous "Vitae" or lives of illustrious people, a literary genre known since antiquity and very important for a wider knowledge of individual historical personalities, for example in art history.[11] In this way, it is not only relieved of the transience of speech; it also enters into relation with other written memories, official archives, history books, novels, etc., which form the written basis of Western European culture. But integrating these testimonies into the written archive contains another aspect: as the archive nourishes the collective memory of a society, the integration of new archival material also changes this memory. In the artistic appropriation of the archival act, "the archive, although historically embedded, is not about the past but about the future of the past and is a vital source for inquiry as well as a subject of inquiry that can inspire new ways of envisioning and living in the world" (Carbone 2020: 258).

By taking advantage of the flexible nature of the archive, its mutability, and the continuous process of forming cultural memory, the artist perpetuates history through the production of artistic documentation. In his artistic act, he transfers fleeting, orally transmitted memory into the material form of a book. In this way, he not only makes these voices part of written history, but through the artistic scope of his activity, which through its exhibition and resonance as a "work of art" has a different effect than a historical publication, he also points out this flaw in the established historiography: "He questions absences, exposes missing or silenced voices, [and] addresses gaps in institutional archives and collective history - bringing attention to the fragmentary and incomplete nature of archives" (Carbone 2020: 260). While other artists render these blind spots of historiography visible through fictional archives (Carbone 2020: 260), Phunsombatlert makes himself a witness to the narrative and documents it in book form. By recording the memories of Caribbean immigrants underrepresented in other historical archives, Phunsombatlert integrates them into the canonical form of historical and cultural documentation.

Another important aspect of this dialogue between books is the nexus between the Atkin's book and botanical history: Phunsombatlert's exchange with the Brooklyn seniors develops in the context of a practical workshop. It is centered around the handling of flowers and plants "to create personal cyanotype gardens", as the artist writes in his description of the project.[12] The participants are combining and installing their chosen plants and they create their own cyanotypes. They are

9 Biography of Jose A. Felix.
10 The technical re-enactment of the cyanotype was indeed part of the artistic project, but is not integrated in the book directly.
11 Important examples of this genre are Vasari, Boccaccio, Vespasiano da Bisticci and many more taking example on the genre of the lives of emperors from Antiquity. The traditions of orally collected life stories could not be investigated her. This could be an important question to query the role of the European book traditions here.
12 https://bundithphunsombatlert.com/work/sunny-garden-in-blue. Last accessed on March 1, 2022.

not only re-enacting the initial act of Anna Atkins, but the creative handling of the plants, the cyanotype images and blueprint fabrics connects the nature of plants, their touch, smell, visual remembrance and effect on the memory of the individuals to the documentation in the book. The technical procedure to obtain a cyanotype is allusive in yet another way: The photographically captured object must have been brought into direct contact with the imaging surface. The image is thus not seen through the technical eye of the camera, but is cast onto the surface of the image as a direct imprint. In addition, the image is captured by direct sunlight; the sun, significant to Caribbean stories, plays a crucial role in the creation of the image. By citing this special technique in the visual effect, the artist also conveys the immediacy of the plants; their presence is implied in the moment of the book's creation (fig 5).[13]

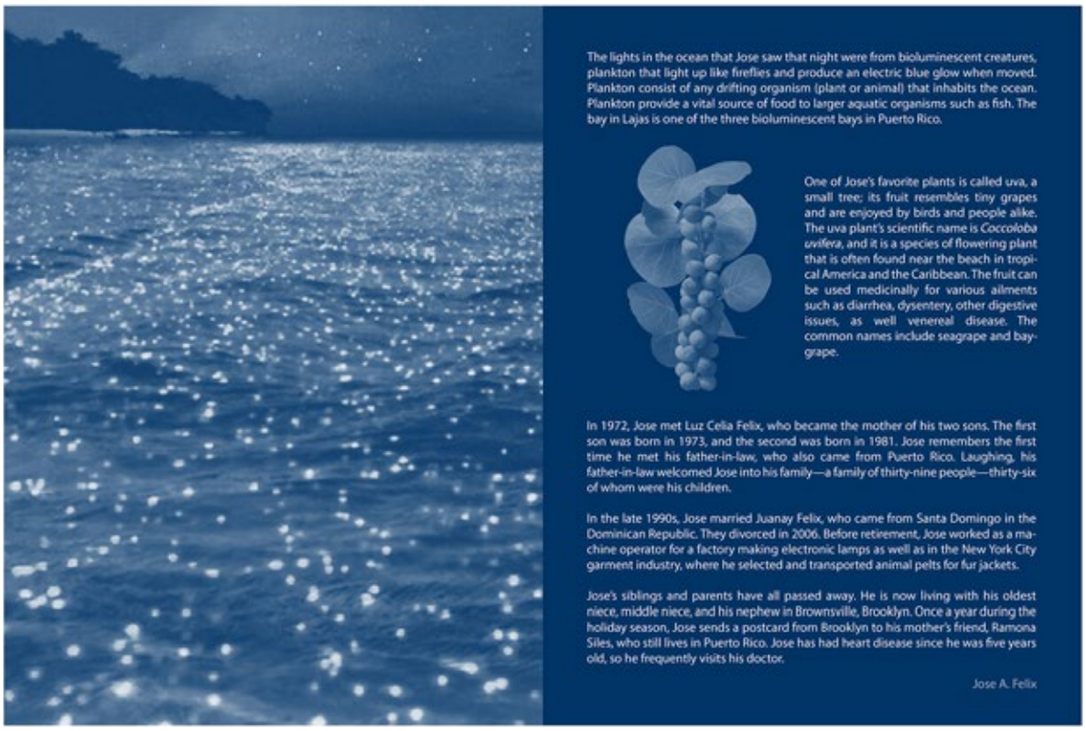

Fig. 5 Bundith Phunsombatlert, *Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn*, *Jose A Felix Story (page 2)*, Ongoing project, Archival digital and cyanotype versions, Book version: 14 1/4 x 20 inches (each page). Copyright: Bundith Phunsombatlert

The workshop created new memories that enrich the book with the souvenirs of smell and haptic sensations. The juxtaposition of the stories, the portraits, and the plant depictions expand the effect because, in addition to the narrative, the person telling the story also becomes present in his or her portrait. The plants appeal to further senses of the reader/viewer in their scent, their feel, their use. The historical dimension Anna Atkins's project leads to the role that plants and gardens played in Caribbean culture. While Atkins's project was inscribed in the European context of scientific endeavour to document and order natural knowledge, this same expertise was of primary interest in colonial expansion in the Caribbean. Phunsombatlert opens a field of tension that interleaves pre-modern and modern knowledge production through the personal histories and the Caribbean flora.

13 The book is not executed in cyanotype, even though Phunsombatlert made cyanotypes with the participants in his workshop.

Natural histories of the Caribbean

Illustrated natural histories representing the flora of the islands are part of the visual culture the colonists developed on their encounter of the Caribbean since the earliest days.[14] The description of discoveries was not only a narrative of heroic adventure. The natural resources made accessible by the colonial expansion constituted an object of economic ambitions among Europeans. At the same time, Caribbean flora became subjects of the same triangular movements as colonists and African people, who were enslaved and brought on the islands: While they carried with them plants from Africa, the settlers imported plants such as sugar cane and indigo to instrumentalize the highly fertile soils for their profit (Chakrabarti 2010: 143). For Europeans, "plants were a resource, while for the slaves these were entwined in their daily lives in complex ways" (Chakrabarti 2010: 144). The seemingly objective collection of knowledge in floral illustrations is in this context part of the colonial conquest of the Caribbean on the one hand, and the empowerment of a Caribbean cultural identity on the other:

> The plantation system had thereby shaped the social realities of the practice of medecine in Jamaica. It had two orientations; while the British were involved in exploring and exploiting the botanical potentials of the island, the slaves in their daily lives, as well as through their own intellectual traditions, were creating new meanings of its natural world, finding new modes of survival and cure and in the process establishing their new life in these islands (Chakrabarti 2010: 149).

This empowerment develops based on the role botanical knowledge plays for the enslaved people: *Jardins de case*, small gardens for the plantation of fruit and small vegetables, and bigger gardens (*jardins vivriers*) for sweet potatoes, ignams and other basics for personal use of the enslaved, were part of the plantation organization since its beginning. (Benoît 2000: chap. III, 95-128) Benoît shows that even before the beginning of colonization, there was a culture of kitchen gardens that both the original Taino and Carib populations used and that connected the enslaved people to the nature in which they now lived (Benoît 2000: chap. III, 95-128), providing an anchor for the culture of plants, languages, and rituals (Chakrabarti 2010: 149). Victor Schoelcher, in his account of the lives of enslaved people (1842), documents their relationship with various plants, the garden and the use of plants represented a space of development for cultural identity and freedom (Benoît 2000: chap. X, § 15). Born from the question of who will supply the food for the enslaved people and in what form, self-sufficiency based on gardens created a "beginning of liberty to which they became accustomed."[15] Thus, while the garden was a (small) space of homecoming and freedom, the individual plants served a purpose beyond that of simple sustenance; rather, it is in the *jardins de case* that a variety of therapeutic and "magical" plants are found, plants that can be beneficial or maleficent (Benoît 2000: chap. IV, § 14).

In the exchange with the indigenous people, botany became a field of creolization. The resulting knowledge and traditions of use represented a clearly "creolized" culture – in the people who brought and passed on knowledge, the plants introduced and found, their use in the treatment of known and novel diseases, and the maintenance and development of food traditions – that emerged from the cultural complexity that resulted from colonization, displacement, the plantation system, and the slave system (Chakrabarti 2010: 150). Victor Schoelcher points to the garden as a source of empowerment, as indicated by the title of his ninth chapter, "Poison is for the slave what the whip is for the master, a moral strength" (Schoelcher 1842).

14 See Lozère 2020. See also: Delbourgo 2017: 37.
15 Lavollée 1841, in Benoît 2000: chap. III, § 21).

The idea of objectivity implicit in the cyanotype illustrations of Anna Atkins, in their pursuit of scientific knowledge collection, are mirrored in Phunsombatlert's work by the individualization through the biographies and personal memories. Using the Caribbean flora as anchors of these memories points to the darker side of botanical knowledge collection in the colonial context. At the same time, it opens the field of thinking about Caribbean flora and its role for the people as a space of identity creation.

In his adaptation of the botanical theme of *British Algae* in his *Sunny Gardens*, the artist is not only expanding Atkins's photographic collection to include the motif of immigration. By linking Caribbean microhistory and botany (or plant-inspired memory), he also forms a thinking space in which European knowledge production and postcolonial memory culture respond to one another. Through its dialogue with a historical model, the artist's book becomes an object that is both archive and presence, documentation and rewriting, an object that is as much about the sun and the sea as it is about touching and feeling plants - in memory and artistic practice.

From Feeling to Touching, from Telling to Showing: Atta Kwami

The *Grace Kwami Sculpture* (fig. 6), an artist book created in 1993 by the Ghanaian artist Atta Kwami, can also been read as an archival work used to integrate new histories – the history of the artistic work of Grace Kwami, a Ghanaian sculptor of the first generation of artistic education in Ghana – into the written documentation of art history. But Atta Kwami, an artist, art historian and son of Grace Kwami, created an object that reaches out more actively to the haptic worlds of its audience.

Fig. 6 Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, London / Ghana, 1993, Edition: 6/32, photo-lithography, etching, screen printing, and color Xeroxes on Somerset Satin 300 g/m2 paper, 7,5 x 27 x 37,5 cm. Copyright Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

The book contains 48 unnumbered, folded pages. It is generally presented in a standing position with the unfolded leporello-like pages forming an eight-legged spider.

This presentation shows the playful relation between the title and the presentation of the book: The title *Grace Kwami Sculpture* refers both to Grace Kwami's sculptures as well as the book's quality as a sculpture.[16]

With this book, Atta Kwami explores the artistic activity of his mother, Grace Salome Kwami (1923-2006). She graduated in 1953 from Kumasi College of Arts (later Kumasi College of Technology), where artistic training in pottery and terracotta were part of the artist and teacher education, along with weaving and textile arts (Kwami 2013: 73). Grace Kwami belonged to the first generation of internationally active Ghanaian artists, as Atta Kwami recounts from his own childhood memories, in which his mother's artistic work and life were closely linked (Kwami 2013: 27-28). She worked mainly in terracotta, but also made drawings and paintings.

Artist and art historian

Grace Kwami Sculpture aims to contribute to our appreciation and knowledge of Ghanaian art (Kwami: Preface). Atta Kwami has here a dual role. For in addition to his artistic activities, he is also an art historical author, as is evident in his publications. In the preface to *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, he describes his intention to expand knowledge of Ghanaian art with this work, thereby clearly placing the work in the genre of art historiography.

Whereas Phunsombatlert documented oral narratives in his work and placed drawings and photographs illustratively alongside text, Atta Kwami uses the interplay of text and image in a different way. He draws on an archive produced over a decade, comprised of photographs of his mother working, but also drawings from her hand. Even if the artist had the concept of the book in his head and collected the photographs on purpose, they had an independent and documentary existence before becoming part of the book's composition. However, the act of transferring the photographs into the form of a book re-contextualizes them, and their message assumes sharper contours that correspond to the book's message. While they may have represented snapshots within the photographic traces of Grace Kwami's life, they now become windows into a narrative given by the frame of the book.[17] They no longer speak for themselves or exist in the context of a loose collection of images that can be viewed unordered and individually. They are arranged in the space of the book and given headings and contributing texts to follow Atta Kwami's direction. The latter inserts the portraits and views of the work into a sequence that acts simultaneously as a miniature exhibition and art historical source for the artist's work.[18]

The Making of the Book, The Making of Art and Knowledge

Alongside this transfer, Atta Kwami puts a clear focus on the making and the artistic process. He again introduces this in his preface by pointing out the different techni-

16 Atta Kwami created this long-prepared project as a fellow of the Royal College of Art in London in 1992-93 and printed 32 copies (plus 4 exemplars for the artist). It was shown for the first time at the Artist's Book Fair in London in May 1993. Six of 32 copies are held at the Smithsonian: Record <I>Grace Kwami Sculpture</I> | Collections Search Center, Smithsonian Institution (si.edu)

17 See https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/andrea-stultiens-the-kaddu-wasswa-archive (last accessed: July 18, 2022) and also: http://africultures.com/the-kaddu-wasswa-archive-entre-recit-personnel-et-memoire-collective-11421/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=520 (last accessed: July 18, 2022)

18 In her observation of *The Kaddu Wasswa Archive* (2010) realized by the photographers Andrea Stultiens, Arthur C. Kisitu and Kaddu Wasswa, Érika Nimis points out the importance of the visible hands holding and possibly scrolling through the book-form archive. In her analysis they are less the trace of the handling and thus a way of reading the archive and more a means of representating the onlooker – in this case the photographer herself. See Nimis 2014: 560.

ques used in the making of the book.[19] He also shows this in the book itself: the four large sheets of paper are folded and not cut open at the top, which grants the leporello-like book more stability. The edges are left uneven, which means that here you can see the moment of making the book – the materiality of the surface is not relegated behind the finished object, but becomes part of the artistic effect and leaves a reminder of the process.[20] The making of the book continues to be tangible in the binding too: A coarse twine was pulled through two holes reinforced with metal edges, making the object a book (fig. 7). The twine is visible on the spine of the book. When closed, the book is transported in a box covered with artisanal paper, designed with a sun or even spider-shaped form.

Fig. 7 *Grace Kwami sculpture* detail. Copyright: Photo Niklas Wolf/ book: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

But the making is also an important part of the insight into his mother's work. Kwami uses the possibility of the photographic imagery in combination with the page order to create an increasing closeness (fig. 8, left) – while the first page shows Grace Kwami at work, the onlooker sees her from the side, her hands in a precise movement, her gaze concentrated on her craft, the next pages with four photos zooms into a working scene (fig. 8, center). Here her hands are shown in the manipulation of the terracotta, documenting not only her gestures, but also her handling of the material. The last picture in this sequence shows the small terracotta head *en face*. Here the objects take the main role, returning the onlooker's gaze (fig. 8, right). The modelling instruments in the foreground, the stabilizing stick in the head and the hands on the left side are again pointing to the unfinished process.

19 "The images presented here form an array of different printmaking processes: - etching, screen printing, lithography, computer printmaking as well as colour xeroxes" (Kwami: Preface).

20 With his wife, artist Pamela Clarkson, he created a workshop of paper production in Ayeduase in Ghana. He used Somerset Satin 300 g/m2 paper for the printing of the book in London (https://library.si.edu/exhibition/artists-books-and-africa/grace-kwami-sculpture-full; (last accessed October 2, 2022). Kwami's paper-producing activity in Ghana illustrates his interest in this material aspect of his work and needs therefore to be considered here. See Hark 2020.

Fig. 8 Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, 1993, book page Copyright: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

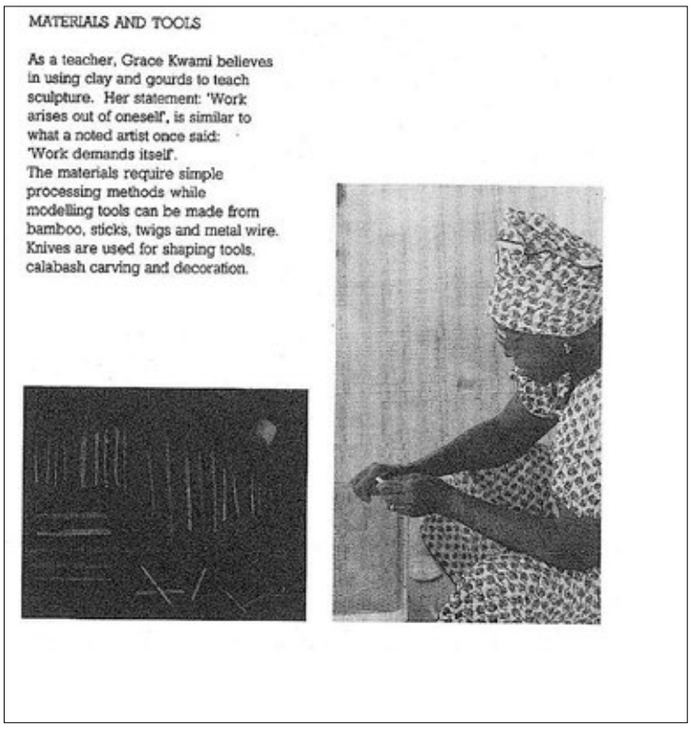

Fig. 8a Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, 1993. Copyright: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

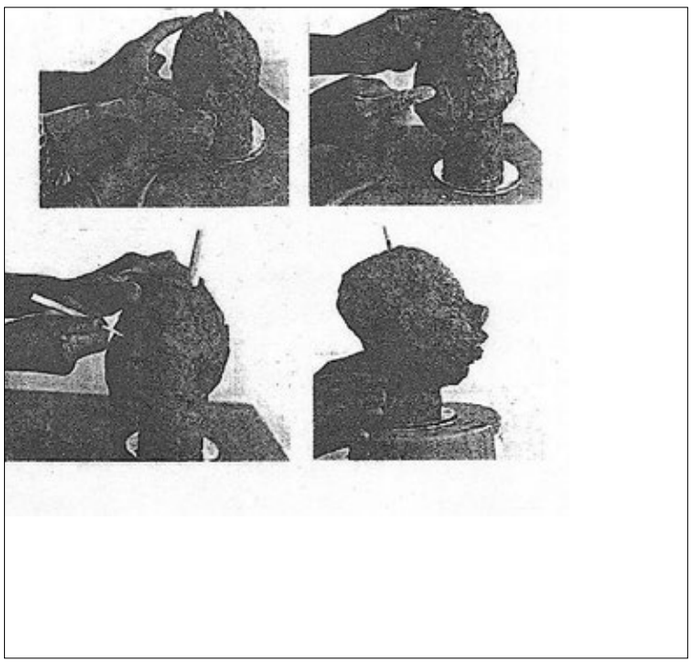

Fig. 8b Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, 1993. Copyright: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

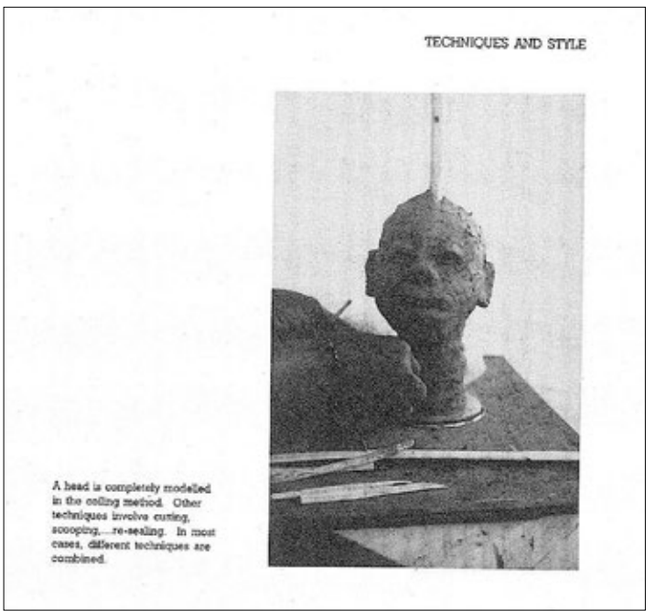

Fig. 8c Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, 1993, book page Copyright: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

Even on pages showing pictures in a gallery arrangement (fig. 9), he reintroduces the materiality of the work in textual form, citing his mother: "Clay is the most common art material. G.S.K".

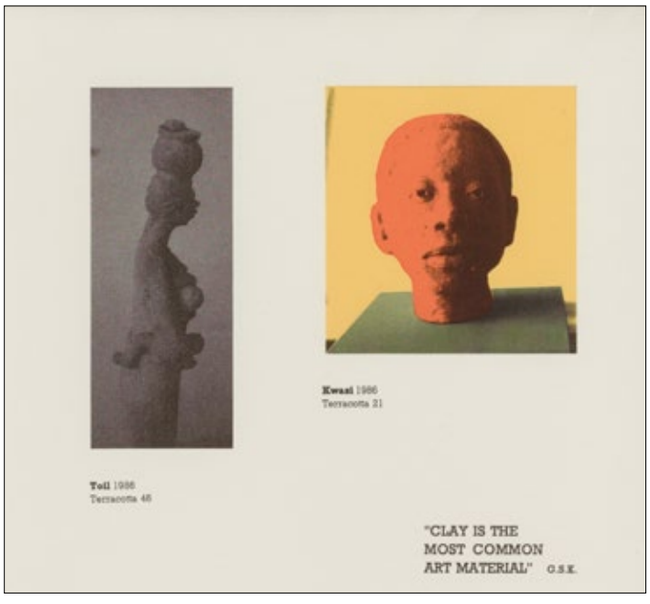

Fig. 9 Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, 1993, detail. Copyright: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

Elsewhere, Atta Kwami also makes concise use of the possibilities of the juxtaposition of seeing and reading by drawing attention to certain details through the text: "A head is completely modelled in the coiling method. Other techniques involve cutting, scooping ... re-sealing. In most cases, different techniques are combined" (Atta Kwami, Preface). Also in this short text, the viewer is involved in the practice of artistic work through the captured moment. The description does not focus on material or interpretation, but specifies the seen moment, the work in the material, through further details. The photographic image here is used to "faire voir" – the image functions "as a shown seeing" (Dobbe 2010: 160). The use of the book with its possibilities of continuous telling using the page sequence creates a complex space that makes the onlooker discover different strands of the narrative at a time. The common presentation of text and image in dialogue is especially tangible on the page showing a sculpted vase (fig. 10): "Do her vessels not represent personalities?"

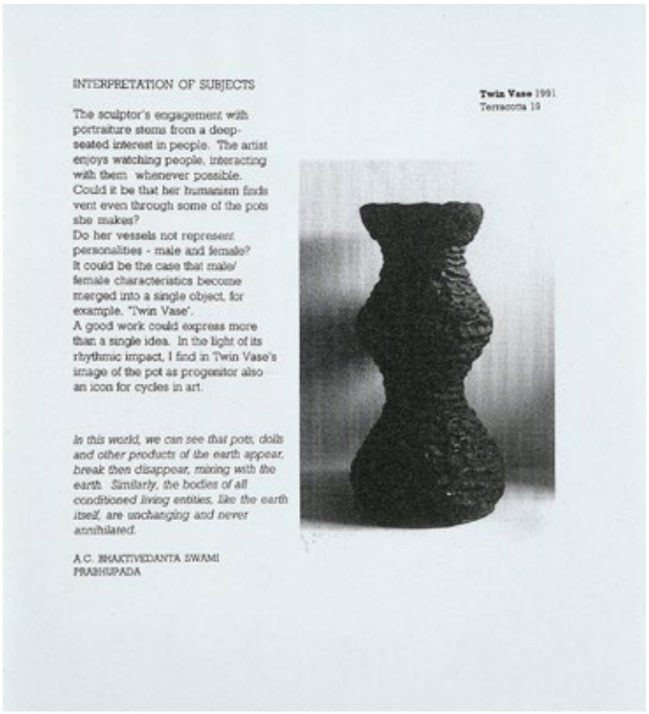

Fig. 10 Atta Kwami, *Grace Kwami Sculpture*, 1993, detail. Copyright: Smithsonian Libraries, National Museum of African Art

Again, the observer is invited to come nearer, to approach a direct dialogue with the object – which could be an individual personality – as insinuated in the text. Using the surface of a book page, the artist creates a confrontation of the observer with his mother and her work in different approaches displaying on the different pages.

Arranging them in the three-dimensional form of a leporello unfolding in spiderlike arms, makes them even more communicative, as they are not only combined in the follow--up of their pages, but also facing each other in the standing position. The arachnoid form, as Atta Kwami points out in the preface, refers to the symbolic form of Ananse, a traditional and religiously important spider. Ananse represents a mediator between the world of the gods and that of the human, a deity "existing halfway between the earth and the sky and had the power to restructure both the world of the divine and the human" (Zobel Marshall: 31-32). As a trickster figure, Ananse "controls the fundamentals of civilisation, wisdom (knowledge) and stories (history)" (Zobel Marshall: 32) in the tales told by the Asante. Kwami here uses the form of the art book for a figuration of the art of storytelling and creativity (Pinther/Wolf 2020: 3), as well as a personification of history writing. The spider form also makes the object oscillate between different formats, a sculpture in space and a book at the same time. In the form of a standing exhibition (Pinther/ Wolf 2020: 3) it playfully contradicts its book format: Scrolling through the pages is not possible any longer. Now it is the onlooker who needs to move around the book.

Through the tangible materiality, the visible craft of the artwork and the focus on the making within the book, the maker of the book becomes thus even more present in the finished work – standing in dialogue with and testifying to the life of Grace Kwami. The book format creates different levels of communication. It tells (in text) and shows (in image), but it also pushes viewers to active contemplation through movement, making them move around the object. Atta Kwame uses the possibilities of storytelling implicit in the bookish form and at the same time contradicts its natural

way of interacting with the reader – sitting and strolling through the pages of the book. He creates an order in the following of his pages – and again contradicts it in the leporello form, which creates more possible combinations of pages to be seen next to each other.

This creative use of the characteristics of the books is part of the last work presented here too, *the journal intime* Lambeaux.

Endless Diary, Endless Stories: Gilles Elie dit Cosaque

In his serial work *Lambeaux*, the video and graphic artist Gilles Elie dit Cosaque (*1968) has been creating multimedia collages on double pages designed like pages from writing notebooks since 2009. The different rulings, the constant size (33×22 cm) and the visible traces of staple binding refer to the staged origin of the surface the artist uses here, namely notebooks or school books. However, he prepares the pages by hand, giving them the appearance of a prefabricated frame to integrate the associations bound to them in the reading of his work. As soon as this reference is understood, he breaks with it by presenting the double pages side by side in frames. He usually puts together about 16 pages for an exhibition (fig. 11), making them, as he himself states, readable as one coherent narrative.[21]

Fig. 11 Gilles Elie dit Cosaque, *Lambeaux*, ongoing project since 2009, 12 pages of an exhibition, multiple materials on paper, 33×22 cm. Copyright: Gilles Elie dit Cosaque

This narrative is not linear *per se*; it develops in each collage and in the interplay of the different frames. The story told thus assumes an endlessly evolving and endlessly adaptable character to the reader/observer. Using diverse materials to create the diary pages, Cosaque creates an impression of spontaneity. Cosaque inte-

21 https://www.ouest-france.fr/bretagne/groix-56590/gilles-elie-dit-cosaque-s-expose-sous-un-autre-jour-5207838 (last accessed: January 15, 2022)

grates the material diversity of the elements into his collages in such a way that they are reminiscent of ethnographic notes and collections, compilations of specimens and rapid noting of observations. At the same time, different temporal levels emerge, which become evident in the artist's drawing and painting gestures and the age and nature of the various pasted objects: writing, print, and photographs gather the most diverse moments. While already mentioned in the integration of collected photographs in the work of Atta Kwami, Cosaque goes further in his re-contextualization of photographs, printed pictures, journal articles and other material. In his compositions, the materials at hand are over-written, questioned, and subject to skepticism.

The anatomical view of a human body (fig. 12) has been made unrecognizable as a person by a red color line over the eyes, presenting a de-individualization of the model, which is already abstracted in the biological representation. In contrast, however, the woman, dressed only in a skirt and a headscarf, remains visible in all her individuality. It functions as a mirror - or is it the inside view that is the mirror?

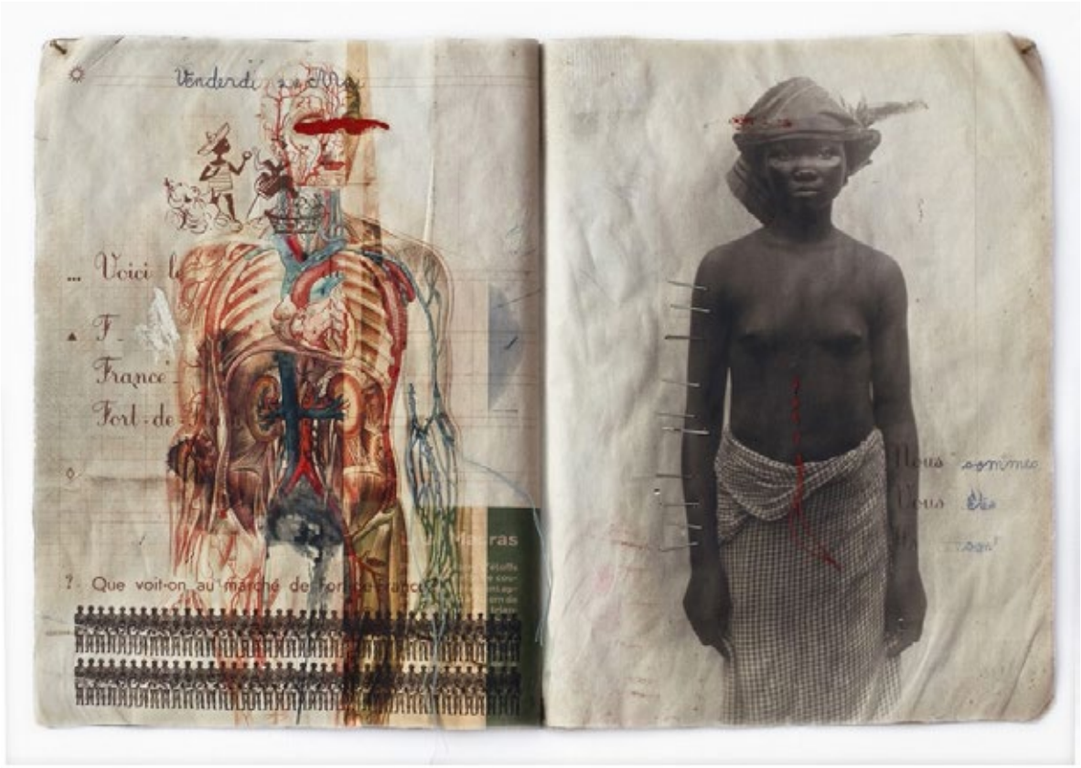

Fig. 12 Gilles Elie dit Cosaque, *Lambeaux*, ongoing project since 2009, multiple materials on paper, 33×22 cm. Copyright: Gilles Elie dit Cosaque

Conjugation exercises that overlap their image relate the representation to pupils/writers: "Nous sommes / Vous êtes / Ils sont". The alternation between pre-printed school writing and child-like handwriting creates a reminder of centralized schooling and education (by the French state, which centrally directs education), and the student's voice adapting to these specifications, yet making statements about his own, or a group's, communal existence: "We are / You are / They are". The photographic image, staging neutrality and scientific observation in the motionless posture (the only exception are the hands which are hold in a slight movement: her right hand seem to stroke the folds of fabric of the skirt, holding it, but almost without movement), is re-contextualized by

metal staples. These seem to clip the figure to the page and into the notebook. They hold the young woman's arm with metallic brutality. Red thread is used to embroider the reflection of the pelvic artery into the page, making the inside visible from the outside. This reinforces the impression of mirroring and twisting that occurs between the anatomical view and the photograph. The person becomes the object of the gaze, the anatomical diagram into whose interior we look becomes the individual protected by covered eyes. Different levels of the story are also connected by the further details of the collage: The date in a child's handwriting with a spelling mistake ("Venderdi 29 May") gives the page a moment in time; it records it not as an abstract but as a concrete moment. The small caricature shows a market scene and a black figure with short trousers, striped armless shirt and wide straw hat, offering one of the fruits lying next to him to a lady depicted with light skin in a long, flared dress with overdress and *coiffe* on her head. Here, too, the juxtaposition of script, different fonts signaling different themes, sources, contexts, and images plays an important role.

Next to the anatomical representation one reads "... Voici le .../ F.../ France.../ Fort-de--France". Other lines are left blank, probably to give space for writing exercises. Identified by a question mark as another type of task, one reads below, "Que voit-on au marché de Fort-de-France?" ["What do we see at the market in Fort-de-France?"]. The answer is given in a detail from the iconic picture *Description of a Slave Ship* from 1789 (Finley 2018).[22] The change of media, from writing to image, however, leaves this answer suspended - a visual figure of thought in response to a school question to be written down. The change from writing to image answers a concrete question, formulated in writing, with the associations the image evokes, thus becoming multifaceted and always depending on the individual reading of the reader/viewer.

The superimposition and juxtaposition of the anatomical drawing and an excerpt from the icon of the representation of the slave trade with answers to these school questions, the alternation between pictures and text and a writing style that points to a child behind the ductus, all creates a complex *thinking space*. Allusions and references in combination with the characteristics of an individual and private encounter with a personal diary bring together an artwork that is personal and shared within the French Caribbean people at the same time. The recognition of school practices that were (and are) shared by generations of young Caribbeans and the pictorial allusions to a common past create a terrain of understanding that might be at the heart of the concept of creolisation.

This concept is characterized by its endlessly unfinished quality – it evolves continuously with its people and their lives. The openness of Cosaque's artwork seems to integrate the foundations of this concept in a work that its endlessly individual – because it integrates the individual readings of each observer/reader without giving concrete answers – and at the same time representative of several shared experiences, memories, and – in consequence of this shared nature – cultural memory of the French (if not more globally) Caribbean. The viewer becomes part of the artistic process by completing the reading of these "images de pensées" [thinking images]. The "immédiaté visuelle" makes the

22 During the research for this article I could not find a final answer to the question of whether there was a specialized market for enslaved people in Fort de France. Jessica Pierre-Louis follows the traces of a marketplace in St. Pierre, the former capital of Martinique. Her research seems to indicate that the concrete locations of specialized markets are rare. See: "Le 'Marché aux esclaves' du Mouillage à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique. – Tan Listwa" (Last accessed : July 26, 2022)

surface of the page a field of thinking (Caraës/ Marchand-Zanartu: 7) and a vibrant example of the crossroads between créolisation and créolité – between the ever-shifting process of cultural becoming and the creation of Caribbean identity[23] (Febel 2013: 163). Especially the continued work of Cosaque and his open collages represent Glissant's concept: "Creolisation is the unpredictable" (Glissant 1996: 89; Febel 2013: 164).

Lambeaux therefore goes far beyond the imagination of a creolized *journal intime* – instead, Cosaque's work materializes the "new form of historiography described by Glissant for the undocumentable history of colonial experience", which should be a "polyphonic historiography" (Febel 2013: 176). To do this, Cosaque finds a particularly apt artistic form in his works, which creates precisely this polyphony through its reference to the cultural significance of the book and the notebook, a reference to the blind spots of written history, and through the juxtaposition of image and writing, historical material and seemingly individual "memorabilia", such as photographs or excerpts from notebooks. Through the use of such media, the reconstruction or reorganization of memory is here captured pictorially. The "unfinished nature" of his work thematizes the process of creolization as well as a multiplicity of memories[24] in which images and memories are shared and connect people, but do not write a linear and finished common history. Taking up the role of a storyteller – *le conteur* – Cosaque becomes at the same time a "warrior of the imaginary" – a "warrior of the imagination"[25] - and an artistic historian, sharing these characteristics with some other important creative personalities of Martinique: from Césaire to Glissant to Chamoiseau to Raphael Confiant, whose works repeatedly link historiography and literature, imagination and reflection, political and cultural philosophical thought, and a shared past in the narrative documentation of memory.[26]

Cosaque materializes memories and at the same time tells endless stories – using the traces of the past. Overwriting institutional documents, he interrogates canonical historiography – a printed and thus visible and disseminated form of normative knowledge production. His collages alienate, expand, contradict and place this historiography in new contexts. It is both the textual and pictorial side by side that are at work here. The artistic act in which the artist collects and assembles the materials is an active moment of dealing with memory and historiography. Sharing the definition of history (*histoire*) and memory (*mémoire*) that makes a distinction between the written and the oral, canon and individual memory, the artist here demonstrates processes of remembering (because the materials record moments in the past, stand for moments in which the artist has collected the image/cut-out etc and the associations he brings into connection with the contemplation and use of the same) and historiography, or imaging, outside the canonized writing of history. However, his collages do not represent a completely detached narrative either; they use set pieces and fragments that are part of the French-influenced historiography and construction.

23 "Creolization is therefore understood today more generally as a concept of cultural contact, encounter, intermingling, or mutual transformation of different cultures, which has a close proximity to the more identitarian concept of créolité" (Febel 2013 : 163).

24 "For the Caribbean, the challenge of ensuring the existence of a collective memory touches on the central questions of self-positioning: writing Caribbean history means, above all, imagining this history, or rather histories in the plural" (Ueckmann/ Febel 2017: 13).

25 "[Guerrier de l'imaginaire] I think that Patrick Chamoiseau is himself a 'Warrior of the Imagination' and that his writing practice is in keeping with the healing performances of the ancient storytellers of his country. He taps into a magic, operates a transmutation" (Chantal Thomas, "Préface", in: Chamoiseau 2016: II).

26 Concerning Chamoiseau Ledent writes: "Yet his vision of the Caribbean writer as a storyteller who uses diversity and creativity as paradoxically peaceful weapons against the destructiveness of globalization and standardization applies to the region as a whole, regardless of linguistic boundaries" (Ledent 2008: 454).

Conclusion: *Façonner l'histoire* – Re-writing the Future

Façonner l'histoire –Shaping History– evokes the two main aspects of this analysis. The idea of "shaping" includes the artistic moment of creation, and it also suggests the flexibility of the material and the supple nature of the outcome. It is crucial to keep in mind that history is malleable. History is a construct, an edifice, built up on historical facts. But history draws on innumerable facts, and history writing can only refer to a selective part of the past; it can only be a shadow, an echo of historical reality. The facts upon which history writing relies are – especially in western cultures – written sources. These sources contain large lacunae and often document the perspective of the "conquerors", and it is this perspective that shaped the canonized historical narrative, meaning that which is written, printed, published, taught etc. The questioning of these narratives is not new, and ongoing research is both pointing out blind spots and integrating new perspectives.[27]

Artworks participate in the redressing of incomplete history telling by granting these long-forgotten stories a special visibility. In the field of art and the archive (Enwezor; Callahan), the artist book is a very special form of presenting historical re-writing to an audience. The analysis of the three artist books created in the context of the Black Atlantic in this paper shows a very large field of possibilities of using the artist book as a "a zone of activity" (Drucker 1995: 2). Nevertheless, in using the form of a book as the container of their creations, these artists instrumentalize the format in their *mise-en-scène*: They complicate the expectations associated with canonized history writing – and re-writing – regarding the usability of books and the general habitus that is inscribed in information in books. Their uses of the past, of historical pictures, their re-use of text and cut-out articles, or visual references to historical models re-contextualizes these materials and subjects and creates something new that nevertheless still remains a reflection of the past. In his text "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation", Chinua Achebe articulated his task as helping his "society regain self-confidence and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement." One way of restoring this lost dignity, for Achebe, was to look at his community's history, for, he wrote, echoing Aimé Césaire, "the short cut to the future is via the past."[28] In this context, the form of the book becomes more than a creative genre: its role in the preservation and also official establishment of historiography is used by the artists to fix little-known, unseen memories threatened by oblivion and to inscribe them in a cultural memory based on written culture (according to European intellectual traditions).[29] While the works presented here each represent individual works, they have an on the collective memory. At this point, the question becomes how media inscribe themselves into cultural memory, how they reveal and make visible individual or collective positions, and thus serve as a transformational surface between the individual and the collective.

27 To name just one example, see Zinnenburg Carroll 2014.
28 Cited from Ledent 2008: 453.
29 The role of written culture is a Western idea. While the artists presented in this essay inscribe an alternative, hitherto less visible knowledge into a medium of Western culture, others prefer strategies that show the relevance of other forms of history in oral or even artistic form. See Zinnenburg Carroll, 2014.

According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is based on "stabilité and durée", which is why he assumes (on the basis of Eurocentric studies) memory to be written and fixed (Ueckmann/ Febel 2017: 9). Marc Bloch remarked that a good deal of collective memory is made up of *mémoire communicative*, a set of stories, oral traditions, additions, individual memories, etc. shared by individuals within social groups like villages, ethnic groups, social classes, religious and families (Coueille 2015: 1-2). Only a few elements of this memory enter Historiography, the history found in textbooks. Through reproduction and dissemination it constructs historical consciousness, where the voice of the individual recedes behind a shared history. This leads to the underrepresentation of memories that have not been recorded in written form, detached from the narrative of the individual. It is precisely at this point that the artist's book can be relevant as an interface, insofar it assumes its functions as an archive. The artist is fighting against the automatisms of "remembrance and oblivion", frequently dominated by other forces (Ueckmann/ Febel 2017: 13). It is not merely a matter of questioning these mechanisms, but of instrumentalizing their possibilities in other directions. The artist book cannot compete with other printed sources because of its very reduced circulation, but it cites them and, moreover, compensates for this deficiency through its power as a work of art. Its reception is not based on reproduction and mass circulation, but on the effect of the individual object, which challenges higher concentration, a deeper look.

The connection between book and memory is not only created by its use as a surface of documentation. It also relies on the intimacy of the touch and one-to--one study of the book pages by the reader, producing the privacy and individuality of memory. In practice, books can be closed and so be a hidden treasure and vessel of their contents. The book is thus a medium with multiple reading directions, enclosing already in its format several levels of reading traditions and cultural references.

The artist books that were presented here are re-writing history, documenting and re-ordering memories, re-creating an order that was invisible or intangible. Their form is the aesthetic, cultural, historical and material frame in which the artist inscribes them. At the same time it is exactly this frame that both artists relativize, deconstruct and expand in their artistic practice: By presenting a continuous "diary" page by page in compositions of individual frames, Gilles Elie dit Cosaque creates superimposed and interposed frames, the notebook, the image frame and the totality of his collages already finished and those still to come. Phunsombatlert refers to a historical model in his archival work on Caribbean memories, and shows at the same time the hidden layers of historical knowledge production. Atta Kwami's artist's book is an art history book, a tribute in text and image to his mother – and a sculpture at the same time.

These observations can only be a first glance – the potentials of shaping history are as multiple as the forms the artist books are taking, enriching the book culture in its polyphonic and ever shifting narrative.

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A Plea for a History of Black Atlantic Visual Arts

Christoph Singler

> I *do not view myself through a predominantly African lens. For me, there is no African art, there is no Senegalese art. My challenge is not to try to be African – I am African.*
>
> Viyé Diba

> *Thus, it might be discovered that the species Black may have a face as part of its essence, whereas its colour is merely an accident. Colour does not in any way define black.*
>
> Frank Bowling

The time is propitious: major exhibition spaces around the world have finally opened their doors to Afro-descendant artists and the number of art institutions run by Africans or Afro--descendants is rising. Yet – a sign of the times - Dak'art 2020 set its theme as the return to the forge, as the symbol of African ancestral creativity. Malick Ndiaye, the event's artistic director for that year, was intent to bring to an end to the discontinuities present in the history of African art and identify those common threads that run through it which can be seen as independent to the disruptive impact of colonialism on art in the African continent.[1] A few years earlier, the Diaspora Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale highlighted the diaspora's capacity for critique and opposition to all forms of nationalism.[2]

Is the 'Black Atlantic' nothing but an imaginary entity? The term was first coined by Paul Gilroy and hailed as a substantial contribution to how the African diaspora, or at least a large part of it, could be considered. Critics pointed to the need to move beyond the narrow conceptual and geographical framework in which Africa remained a fantasy and South America appeared almost totally absent. But despite these objections, the concept established a new relationship between Africa and its Atlantic diaspora. Diaspora art was no longer perceived merely as an appendage of African art. Efforts in the early 20th century focused on African retentions in the Americas;[3] this archaeological concept is no longer a major priority for artists, in spite of the significant development of the archival turn in the Black Atlantic regions.[4] Meanwhile, in Africa, Achille Mbembe's Afropolitanism (2006) evokes the cosmopolitan nature of African cultures in which ideas and objects had circulated freely long before colonialism.[5]

1 www.dakart 2020
2 The publication in three languages of this issue of *Africanidades entails* a very high cost for translations. I regret that I cannot provide examples in what follows, due to space limitations. Also not included are the different philosophies of African art, for the same reason. That said, I hope the online format facilitates the exchange with our readers.
3 Farris Thompson, Ortiz, Rodrigues, Herskovits, etc.
4 This does not detract from the importance of the archaeological research currently being conducted in the Americas. For contemporary artists working around the archive it is not so much a question of finding works of art as of finding various traces of slavery and post-slavery.
5 See Eyo Ekpo (1977), among the first African scholars to challenge the overly narrow perspectives of European ethnography.

To date, no global research into Black Atlantic visual arts has been published.[6] To adopt such an angle would perhaps lend greater consistency to the Black Atlantic, bringing together different local practices under a single focus of study. Contacts between the two sides of the Atlantic have proliferated ever since African independence, giving rise to wider knowledge of the continent's art and allowing the diaspora to influence contemporary African art. Everlyn Nicodemus (2009) argues that the Black Atlantic also brought about a change in 20th-century African art. She identifies the starting point of modernity in Aina Onabolu's revolt against the colonial prejudices that considered African artists to be unsuitable for inclusion in Western contemporary art.[7] Meanwhile, in a conversation with Huey Copeland at the Afro Modern exhibition in Liverpool in 2010, Glenn Ligon highlighted the appeal of the concept as a means to open up new horizons for Black artists in the United States (Copeland 2009).

Twenty years after Jan Vansina, John Peffer rightly observed that no work has been produced in art history that is comparable to what has been published on African history (Peffer 2005: 95-96), let alone work addressing both shores of the Atlantic (in musical studies the situation is far better). Furthermore, according to Bennetta Jules-Rosette, mixing African art with African diaspora art can only lead to "chaos": it is important to "identify traces of homogeneity and difference in the metamorphoses of globalised art" by exploring art and its representations "layer by layer" (Jules-Rosette 2008). A number of attempts have been made to write partial histories of this blurred space: important contributions include Visoná-Blackmun's work on Africa (2000), Sharon Patton (1998) and Richard Powell (2003) on the United States and Emanoel Araújo (1988) and Nelson Aguilar (2000) on Brazil. In the field of so-called 'traditional' arts, seminal texts have been authored by Farris Thompson (1983, 2008), Isabel and Jorge Castellanos on Cuba (1994) and Sally and Richard Price on the Maroons in Guyana (2000). Several major exhibitions have also focused on the subject: *Histórias afro-atlânticas* (2019), produced in Brazil, remains the most comprehensive to date, followed by the more modest *Africa Modern* (2010). With no history of African or African diaspora art currently available, how could we write a history combining the two? This might be not so much a challenge than a presumptuous extravagance. Would a history of this kind contribute anything new?

I will attempt to present some perspectives such an enterprise might open along with its multiple obstacles, not least of which are the different frameworks seeking to 'fix' their often elusive objects. What follows will resemble a hotchpotch of elements well known thanks to the work of experts. The Black Atlantic is a vast echo chamber, where any attempt to differentiate between retention, analogy, parallelism, connection and appropriation appears doomed to failure. Yet we can focus on contrasting and comparing existing research. The aim here is to identify common threads in different parts of the globe, which are not necessarily to be found everywhere or at the same time. It is not the "traces of homogeneity" evoked by Jules-Rosette that support the case for a history of the Black Atlantic, even in a virtual state. The

6 Singler (2020). Eddie Chambers (2020) calls for comparative studies between Black British Art and African American Art, saluting Celeste Marie Bernier, *Stick to the Skin: African American and Black British Art, 1965-2015*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. Actually, it is a series of portraits of some 50 artists around the sole themes of memory and resistance, which greatly reduces the breadth of subjects addressed by Black Atlantic art. Chambers' remark points to a gaping hole, one that is larger than he realizes.

7 On Ainabolu see Chika Okeke Agulu (2016).

question is: "homogeneity" of what and at which level (cultural, formal, racial or political)? To adopt this focus would be to deny the cultural diversity present within the Black Atlantic. A history written on these grounds would focus on the circulation between African and diaspora art and its fluctuations in both directions depending on the period. Yet it is also a history of interruption and attempts to fill in the gaps with synecdoche, whereby individual artists are assumed to represent continuity. In a film by Manthia Diawara (2008), Édouard Glissant restates the stance adopted by many visual artists from the diaspora: "On the slave ship, we lost our languages, our gods, all familiar objects, songs, everything. We lost everything. All we had left was traces."[8] Regardless of the fact that traces are elusive or clearly visible, they should certainly be explored extensively. Each trace is an invitation to continue the search, to bridge the space between one and the other, but it also invites us to construct (imagine) an itinerary. To take the quintessential Caribbean image, the ocean – that opaque space, abyss or cemetery – is history. The slave ship envisaged by Gilroy provides the Black Atlantic with an unstable, intangible anchor, evoking the simultaneous fracture and re-composition of the being, as Wilson Harris imagined in his text on Limbo dance (Harris 1999: 156-160).

For Africa, European colonisation represented another kind of rupture. Here, the debate concerns the nature and effects of Europe's definition of modernity as opposed to a *sui generis* African modernity (Chika Okeke Agulu 2017). This is a misleading controversy, in which change continues to be associated with "modernity". One recent example is that of Olowé d'Isé (Abiodun 2014), an artist who has made considerable changes to the formal language of sculpture in the Yoruba region. It is important to note, however, that what is referred to as "modernism" in art covers only one aspect of Western visual arts in the 20th century. Many Western artists were rather sceptical of modernity.

On one hand we have Senghor defending the continuity of African traditions, and on the other, there is Glissant, and many Caribbean artists and writers, opposing just that. Nevertheless, this rupture does not imply that the only solution for the respective national cultures was "assimilation". On the contrary, a basic premise is that Afro-descendant cultures have contributed or are contributing to their own formation, if we can define these nations as being still in a state of nation building. Moreover, they, in turn, have been able to influence contemporary African culture.

Deframing

Manthia Diawara (2018) remarks that Édouard Glissant takes a particular interest in what is outside of the frame. For Glissant, difference is not synonymous with opposition between the self and the other: "it knows no frontiers of language, territory or power". Would it be possible for us to take this philosophy of *Relation*, which contrasts with the "linear, discriminatory monolingual nature of the Eurocentric vision", as a starting point? Diawara emphasises the importance of disaffiliation, perhaps the least glossed of the central themes in Glissant's philosophy: creolisation, Relation and opacity.

8 Cité par Diawara (2018).

In this essay, I propose that frames and notions such as radicalism, resistance, subversion, centre/periphery, hegemonic discourse versus subaltern studies, exclusion, decentring, hybridisation, transformation, recovery, etc. be side-lined, at least temporarily. They rest on narratives that are as binary as the discourse they seek to critique. They project in advance what the outcome should be which often leads to tautology- Not only do we have no idea as to when these ideas apply, it also remains unclear why we must rid ourselves of any Western input and ideas that may turn out to be useful. Where does alienation or appropriation begin? Both the ideas of Édouard Glissant and Achille Mbembe emerged from dialogue. Instead of trying to impose a new non-hegemonic framing, let us see how far we come writing this story as if that change were a given. As it develops, the (currently hegemonic) frame will lose its shine. (Speaking of a single history of the Black Atlantic assumes that these notions are never absent, shifting back and forth between the background and the foreground.)

The idea that European colonialism in Africa stamped out the multiple local traditions found there should also be set aside, along with the notion that slavery brought about a rupture (more or less marked, but never complete) with African visual culture. Traces remain due to the conservation of religions, especially in a number of specific regions (spirituality, philosophical principles, "secret societies" and other, more or less phantasmatic entities to Western eyes).

Theoretical frameworks are based on ideas a priori. Frames fix their objects while pretending to remain outside. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida rightly asks what a frame does to the object it surrounds. He warns that, "whoever has produced and manipulated the frame does everything possible to erase the effect of the frame, most often by naturalizing it *ad infinitum*". The frame thus seems to be a part of the construction of the object that we then perceive as independent of this construction. The least that one can say, with Derrida, is that by selecting, the frame excludes. If deconstruction "must neither reframe nor dream the pure and simple absence of frame" (Derrida: 85), let us at least pay attention to what our own framings do. Some authors suggest a "flexible" frame to allow for a larger scope, but an elastic frame is no longer a frame at all. The painters who have tried to modify its contours abandoned it altogether.

The Black Atlantic is a space of multiple realities, rather than inviting us to create still more frames it questions the categories and concepts that we attempt to apply. It is precisely here that essential doubts, questions and controversies should be allowed. With regard to terminology, none of the past or current "-isms", generally supposed to serve as theoretical frameworks, can pilot the agenda: their real significance for the visual arts is up for debate.[9]

The same applies for the identity issue, highly complex, which must be contrasted with diasporic discourses. To follow the ideas of Stuart Hall, the diaspora may be viewed as having an energising effect on identity. Yet the expediency of this idea is not a given. The multiple belongings advocated by Hall not only endan-

9 Panafricanism, Negritude, Afrocentrism, Afropolitanism, Liquid Blackness, Post-Black, Post-Soul, Afrofuturism, Afropessimism. What interests' art history is the cultural politics that these theories have implemented or attempted to implement.

ger citizenship, they also obscure the contribution made by Afro-descendants to their respective national cultures. Nevertheless, they remain useful as a response to aesthetics that tend to stifle art in the name of a stable cultural identity. In the United States, there was a debate in the 1930s between ancestralism, as supported by Alain Locke, and "modernist" art, defended by James Porter. Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff rejected any formal language that would reaffirm racial segregation (Gibson 1991). The same debate took place in other regions of the Black Atlantic at a later date. Emanoel Araújo, founder of the Museu Afro-Brasil, defines ancestrality as: "a halo hanging over the collective subconscious, both a receiver and the main performer of principles that can be traced back to Paleo-African art or perceived in Neo-African art from the diaspora" (Araújo 2000: 43). It is all the more important to grasp the scope of its application.[10] In Brazil, Kabengele Munanga (2000) questioned whether "Afro-Brazilian" art was not simply a branch of Brazilian art. In Brazil, the approach has so far been guided by anthropology and the question of heritage (beyond the traces left by Glissant). The catalogue for the *Body and Soul* exhibition (2000) centres around artists that emerged from the 1930s onward, when Afro-Brazilian art began to be more visible and to form part of Brazilian modernism; these artists continued to link their work with religions of African origin.[11] Munanga's reasoning, as continued by Roberto Conduru, is based on the formal language adopted by the artist regardless of the colour of his skin. He deems the presence of one or more traits of this heritage to be adequate to consider an artwork to belong to this corpus. This "formalist" stance collecting "African signs" contrasts with a history that focuses on the art produced by Afro-descendant artists, without formal restrictions. Are the two mutually exclusive? The former stance permits the observation of the distribution of aesthetic languages beyond ethnic boundaries, while the latter is more open to evolving practices, echoing Darby English's (2007) call for attention to be paid to what artists are actually doing.

The concept of Jürgen Osterhammel's book on the 19th century, which aimed to set out a history of globalisation, appears to me to be a useful alternative model. Although the results are not particularly convincing, it confirms the traditional axis between East and West, with the Global South getting the raw end of the deal; however, the approach used points to the possibility of history multi-site.[12] The narrative is reduced to fragments or summaries, with the aim of "sketching a portrait of an era" that would emphasise the constants without sacrificing particularities and differences as part of an "elusive totality". Osterhammel concludes by quoting Fernand Braudel:

10 I avoid, however, "cartography" that claims to frame the "totality" of the places and circulations of agents, institutions and works. It is useful as a first step, but it becomes problematic, not to say dubious, when it claims that positionality defines a work. The artist in diaspora carries a lot of things from his childhood and culture of origin.

11 See Aguilar (2000).

12 It is divided into three main sections: approaches, panoramas, and themes; each one is in turn divided into chapters. In the opening, which corresponds to "approaches," Osterhammel establishes anything but a theoretical framework. He begins with the notions of "memory and self-observation" (Europe invented organized collective memory - public libraries, museums, national archives - and technologies of visual recording - photography and film. The thesis seems to me attractive but questionable: they are probably even more technologies of production and control of others). Life after time: chronology, notion of epoch, calendar, and periodization; caesuras and transitions; intermediate time (of transition); acceleration). Finally, the notion of space: space--time; mental cartographies - the relativity of visions of space; spaces of interaction; power and space; territoriality, diaspora, border. The second part ("Panoramas") is more devoted to events, while the third contains eight themes: energy and industry; work; networks; hierarchies; knowledge: increase, densification, distribution; "civilization" and marginalization; religion.

> The historian first opens the past [the door] with which he is most familiar. But if he seeks to see as far as possible, he must necessarily find himself knocking at another door, and then another. Each time a new or slightly different landscape will be under examination and no historian, worthy of being referred to as such, could fail to juxtapose some of these landscapes. But history gathers them all together; it is the sum total of all these neighbours, meeting points and endless interactions.[13]

There is no longer a master narrative based on abstractions refined to such an extent that they end up eroding the contrasts between perfectly contradictory phenomena. Rather, several common threads are possible and must remain visible.

A Shortlist of the Challenges

The first question is: who will be the focus of this history? Afro-descendant is a term predominantly used in Latin American countries today, it concentrates on a non-matrix racial relationship as it refers to a history that repeats itself; the return of diaspora aesthetics to the continent also requires clarification. The one-drop rule here, a yardstick for social practice that automatically places any person with dark-skin in *apartheid*, should be applied. The concept of Afro-descendants obeys this rule, whilst simultaneously blurring the boundaries between black and white, paving the way for multiple identities. But does this only apply to Afro-descendants? Bachir Diagne (2007: 46-48) suggests that the grammar of African art – if such a thing exists – must be (re)learned by both contemporary African and diaspora artists. But could it also be accessible to non-Afro-descendants? South Africa, Cuba and Brazil come to mind, where initiated white artists may create Afrodescendant art. Precisely the opposite could also be argued: not all Afro-descendant artists necessarily produce "Afro-descendant art".[14] Roberto Conduru (2013) insists on the need to consider Afro-Brazilian art in terms of African cultural values (mixed with values from other sources), thus going beyond the artist's skin colour. This applies equally to European art. Picasso's work was exhibited in Senegal in 1972; he was portrayed as an artist in keeping with classical African art. Indeed, the concept of the Black Atlantic also encompasses the influence exerted in both past and present by African and Afro-descendant art on the majority culture in question. It is important to take these two approaches into consideration, one formal and the other based on ethnic or cultural origin. There is no need to choose between them: we must simply recount the choices made in such a place on such a date by whichever individual being a part of whichever school of thought.

It will undoubtedly also be necessary to consider visual culture in a broader sense, even if the aim is not to produce a cultural history, as this would presuppose a continuum between "traditional" art and "globalised", individual art. By contrast, cross-disciplinarity, in dialogue with cultural anthropology, appears unavoidable to me. Dance and music in particular have repeatedly inspired the visual arts; as well

13 Fernand Braudel, "Sur une conception de l'Histoire sociale", *Annales. Economies, societés, civilizations*, vol. 14, n° 2 (1959) : 318-19.

14 In any case, the question has been raised on several occasions around the abstraction practiced in the United States by black artists. See Anne Gibson (1991).

as providing motifs; they also influence the structure of visual discourse. This is about circulation between the religious sphere and artistic practice, without this necessarily being a constant. At the individual level, we must establish the degree to which a social group's ethical values shape its art, whether this is art produced by different communities or "profane" art. In any case simply drawing up lists of the visual signifiers of "Africanness" will not be enough.[15]

The multiple sites and timescales involved render the situation still more complex. How can the Black Atlantic be preserved as a whole and on what grounds if we maintain respect for the particularities of each place? In the Americas, where mass enslavement created a large African diaspora, the Black population is scattered across many different regions and nations: the Caribbean, the United States, Brazil as well as communities in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia (not to forget Argentina and Uruguay, where the Black population was decimated during the 19th century). Rather like the different cultural regions in Africa, and the postcolonial states of the present day, each of these territories merits its own history. Incidentally, it appears to me that Afro-Latin studies, a field recently introduced into the United States academy, seem ill equipped for our endeavour. They take for granted a given geopolitical framework which until further notice will not but limit the transatlantic dimension of Afrodiasporic culture.[16] What about the relationship between North and South America (starting with the Haitian Revolution)? What we are trying to avoid in Africa should also be applied to its diaspora.

The periodization of (American) colonial spaces should be examined in conjunction with the history of African art and the history of art in the colonising countries. In Europe, there was a smaller African presence during the colonial era but it left a significant mark on the majority culture, not least in the form of the artworks amassed to fill European museums with trophies providing evidence of the continent's "civilising mission". The presence of Afro-descendants in the history of countries with a large African diaspora serves as an example. This should be explored, as well as the representation of Afro-descendant subjects by Western artists, which would allow the history of art in the West to be linked to the history of art in its colonies. The 2018 exhibition *The Black Model* offered a glimpse of this history, but we are more familiar with Afro-descendant artists in colonial Christian art (see Conduru 2007 on Brazil, among others). The art of African religions, which was produced amid a situation of slavery and is therefore little-known, remains in the shadows but archaeology will no doubt be able to provide us with new evidence.

I am arriving at the threshold of my proposals, which revolve around the idea that the common denominator linking both sides of the Atlantic is the outreach of African art, the crossovers it underwent and the art it has inspired.

15 This is what Kimberley Cleveland proposes to do in *Black Art in Brazil. Expressions of Identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013.

16 There is no reason why Afro-Latin Studies should not be interested in transatlantic circulation. Nevertheless, I do not see what they can contribute other than the studies that have been done in this field or that are to be done. One finds here the fact outlined by Derrida: the framer places himself outside while "naturalizing" his construction.

Common Threads of Visual Practices

So far, my emphasis has been on the diaspora's complexity. If continuity has been threatened on both sides of the Atlantic (albeit at different times), in Africa the rupture introduced by European colonialism has not been the "end of tradition": it is part of its history and our efforts must focus on ascertaining how it has been dealt with, what attempts have been made to pick up the pieces and what new paths have been taken.

Given this rupture in Africa, how can we assert a possible lineage based solely on "ancestral" visual characteristics? The question here is: what were enslaved people actually able to take with them to the Americas. In some regions, so-called "nations" were able to survive but different populations were often mixed to avoid uprisings. Glissant's observation, cited above, comes into play here but the matter goes beyond mere material objects. No matter how fragmented they may be, there has certainly been "retention" and this has undoubtedly concerned intangible cultural forms that have influenced Afro-American art.

First, the idea that visual form is inhabited by a spiritual force, producing a unique relationship between the visible and the invisible. Historically, this was a necessity in the diaspora, where religious practices of African origin were often criminalised and subject to persecution.[17] This idea was frequently echoed by historians of African art and puts in jeopardy any approach based on Western formal vocabulary. This could be backed by contributions from anthropology, but greater nuance is required for contemporary art.

A frequently cited trait is the theorem according to which there exists an intimate relationship between the artist and his society. We know that certain ethnic groups or broader political entities ordered artworks from outside the community and that certain districts could be reserved for foreign artists. This suggests that objects and practices are likely to have circulated across quite large distances well before the modern era in the West; and this also implies that artworks were not necessarily the expression of a collective spirit, but could also have been the product of individual artistic personalities or specific studios.

Another topic is the distinction made by Jean Laude, amongst others, between the arts practised in royal courts and those of village communities. This difference has also been observed in the 20th century, when urbanisation led to the emergence of urban folk art (Kasfir 1999) and the circulation between these three spheres should be observed. And any interaction between these spheres and the outside world would represent the heart of this project.

Finally, the rejection of art for art's sake and Western "formalism" appears indisputable. Black Atlantic art is said to be based on social commitment, which is advocated across all Black artistic disciplines. What is at stake is the relationship between the collective and the subjective, and this merits more in-depth study.

17 Cuba, Haiti, Brazil... The last official Haitian "anti-superstition" campaign was conducted in 1941, today the religious war is being revived by Pentecostal churches in the Caribbean and Brazil.

Research into the African continent has revealed the complexity of relations between artist and patron (a private individual or institution, sometimes belonging to a different ethnic group). In the 20th century, there was the development of an urban art establishing less "organic" relationships between the artist and their environment. On the American side of the Atlantic, and in the United States in particular, artists not only came up against an artistic *apartheid* but also felt isolated at times from "their" own (Black) audience; or found themselves vehemently taken to task when they employed abstraction or non-narrative visual languages.18 An aesthetic that aims to reflect a particular community's cultural identity can prove to be a straitjacket for artists when it dictates the formal path to be taken in the name of the fusion between artist and community.

When it comes to the last few decades of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century, it will be necessary to explore the extent to which Black Atlantic arts coincide with mainstream formal languages. Black Atlantic art is no longer necessarily on the margins of this system. Ideally, Black Atlantic artists should aim to reach a broader public outside "their" community.

A Tentative Timescale

1. 1600-1880

Broadly speaking, the first period began in the 15th century with the first European sea voyages to Africa, the colonisation of the Americas and African slavery. The end of the period may be situated between the Haitian Revolution in 1791 and the final abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888. On the African side of the Atlantic, histories of sub-Saharan African empires are generally available but knowledge of stateless regions remains lacking. What is of particular interest is non-Islamic art during the period of sub-Saharan classical art (to explore this, oral history must be sought in addition to any existing sources provided by travellers); following European colonisation, the influence of Christian art can be seen in Benin and the Congo from the 16th century onwards.

The start of this period is defined by the proliferation of contact between Africa, Europe and the Americas: as the Black Atlantic emerged, the arts began to evolve in different directions. Production was slow but it is worth noting the investment of Afro-descendant artists in Christian religious art (in regions under Catholic domination), while practices associated with African religions in the period preceding the 19th century are less well-known. There is a lot still to be done in this area, but gaps will inevitably remain.[19] It is interesting to note how fragmentation leads to recomposition, which is a common motif in literature (Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Glissant) but has received inadequate attention in the visual arts. There is certainly a dreamed Africa, but there is also research into its vestiges and memory.

18 Gibson (1991) on abstract expressionism. See also texts by Romare Bearden, Frank Bowling or, for the Caribbean, Aubrey Williams, a reflection discussed by Leon Wainwright in this dossier. His reading differs from mine: Williams defends abstraction as a way to free himself from the narrative character of figuration. The debate was revived around post-Black, launched by Thelma Golden in 2001 in the exhibition *Freestyle*. For a critical position on English, see in this publication "Necessary Abstractions" by Huey Copeland.

19 What we know more are the representations of Afrodescendant characters by white artists in painting, sculpture, and engraving (see the exhibition in Paris in 2018)

Prior to the 19th century, the artworks known to us today were made from metal or terracotta, while the first works in wood or fabric date back to the 19th century and are now scattered throughout Western museums. It remains unclear whether they were produced for the European market. We will address the subjects explored by African artists during this period to identify the oldest stylistic and intellectual elements that may have crossed the Atlantic.

2. 1880-1920

The colonisation of the African continent marks the start of the second period; at the same time, the post-emancipation era of the American countries led to social and ideological changes. The principle of miscegenation as a cornerstone to nation-hood in Latin America, contrasts severely with racial segregation in the United States. In practice, the status of Afro-descendant populations did not substantially vary. The first returns to Africa by the diaspora took place during this period even if they were somewhat sporadic (returns occurred from the 18th century onwards, with the Agudas in Benin and Nigeria, the creation of Liberia, etc.).

At the same time, artworks came to be systematically gathered in Africa, mostly for collections in Europe and the United States, through pillage, theft, confiscation and coercion as well as purchase or donation. A variety of ground-level individuals were involved in this, including dealers, soldiers and administrators, who sometimes transformed themselves into impromptu ethnologists claiming a "scientific" interest. At this time, the fledgling discipline of ethnology was almost the only academic movement that sought to study these works; they were viewed as artefacts from religious or magical contexts and thus far removed from art as defined by Europe. Art from Africa's royal courts soon came to be differentiated from art produced in non-state regions, notably with the pillage of Benin City; whilst in the Americas Afro-American art was viewed as folklore at best. The battle to free it from this ghetto is still being waged to this day; the change in the terminology used by referring to it as "tribal art" (Musée Branly) was largely inadequate, much like the contemporary name changes now being applied to ethnological museums.

Attitudes changed at the start of the 20th century. Following the avant-garde artists, a number of critical studies sought to free it from the grip of ethnology (especially Einstein). However, the predominant view was that it was a "primitive" form of art (an adjective shared with Oceanic and Native American art) that lacked any history or evolution and was therefore collective and to be filed alongside artworks by children and "lunatics".

During this period, African and Afro-American artists took their first steps in Western "modernism" (from the Global North). Black artists began to be included in the Western art world as a result of their adoption of its formal languages. The degree of tolerance to their presence and the level of advancement of their participation varied.

3. 1920-1960

The third period may be situated between the end of World War I, as the struggles for independence began, and the end of *apartheid* in South Africa, echoing Okwui Enwezor's *short century*. Meanwhile, the United States was witnessing the Great Migration and the dawn of the civil rights movement, which continues to this day with Black Lives Matter. In Cuba, the century began with the massacre of

around 3,000 people in 1912. "Racial democracy" was being slowly eroded in Latin America, while significant emigration began to take place from the Caribbean to France and Great Britain in the 1940s. The two World Wars played a major role in undermining the European hegemony.

Access to Western academic training and to the practice of Western art remained difficult. Alternative practices, labelled outsider art, naïve art or folk art, were developed outside the art market and addressed in ethnological studies as art forms excluded from modernity or contemporaneity. European art-teachers opened art schools in Nigeria, Congo and Uganda, as well as Haiti, where many of the painters who trained at Port-au-Prince Art Centre were classed as "primitive". Teaching was limited to an introduction to the different techniques used in European painting, largely overlooking the history of European art. Was this intended to avoid westernising students, or did it serve only to infantilise local artists, leading to the development of a specific market limited to exotic arts enthusiasts? It is not our place to judge. In the case of Haiti, Carlo Célius (2007) has shown that this division is a product of modernity itself. In the United States, lack of access to the institutions frequented by white students prompted the Black population to introduce its own parallel education system, which produced its first results with the Harlem Renaissance. In the Caribbean, the national infrastructure was open to Afro-descendants. Wifredo Lam was able to a more or less traditional education in Spain, 1923. He began to adopt a more African style in his painting towards the end of the 1930s, as the first Afro-Brazilian works began to appear. It needs to be pointed out that many of the Black artists who became known in the 1950s and 60s were self-taught.[20]

Should a history of this period focus on the emancipation from Western normativity and a shift towards a greater "Africanness"? This is an ideological stance raising questions that will need to be answered before any history can be written. If Western "modernism" was influenced by African art, how can we disentangle the various threads? If African art is cross-cultural, why shouldn't it appropriate traits from Western art? For a very long time, the aim was integration, although this left a system established and managed by the white elite which remained entirely intact. From the early 20th century, the question has been raised for artists opting for Western art (so-called traditional art, for which the question has not been raised, should be studied alongside this); recently Olu Oguibe advocated legitimate appropriation (Oguibe 2002). Is "integration" possible without assimilation? To what extent is a clear separation between African and Western art worlds possible (and desirable)? This also applies to the diaspora: the Trojan horse that Wifredo Lam aimed to embody no longer seems to apply.

Towards the end of the 1940s, a few artists joined the avant-garde movements: Ernest Mancoba with CoBrA, Norman Lewis with New York expressionist abstraction and Afro-Cuban artists in Paris with surrealism.

Contact between the diaspora and the continent intensified from the 1950s onwards, with movement in both directions. The Pan-African congresses and literature and arts festivals organised between the 1950s and 1970s were quickly

20 See the symposium on art education in the Caribbean, University of West Indies St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago 2005. Leon Wainwright, in *Timed Out. Art and the transnational Caribbean.* Manchester: Manchester University Press 2011, pointed out that black Caribbean artists were long considered "anachronistic" in relation to the avant-gardes of the European metropoles.

supplemented by sometimes lengthy trips and stays on the continent by prominent diaspora figures (DuBois, Stokely Carmichael, Maryse Condé, Manuel Zapata Olivella, numerous musicians... the list goes on).

4. 1960 – Present

African independence marked a turning point, ushering in the contemporary period, with in-depth research into the new relationships between African tradition and European modernity. From around 1960 to 1980, the debate took place on both sides of the Atlantic: examples include Uche Okeke's "Natural Synthesis" and the Dakar School with its Senghorian aesthetic on this side of the Atlantic, and the Black Arts Movement in the United States (nothing of this magnitude in Latin America). Later, the contemporary diaspora of African artists and curators and the growing artistic infrastructure on the continent will be discussed, but above all the shared themes - decolonization, racism, the discriminatory Western art world - that bring the two shores closer together in the search for new ways of living together.

This period witnesses the arrival of performance, installation, video, collage techniques amongst others. Contemporary production on both sides of the Atlantic is characterised using forms, media and practices from Western art, while breaking away from the academy. Similar strategies are developing to compensate for the absence of state support, including the creation of artists' collectives and institutions by artists themselves. One of the forerunners was Abdias do Nascimento, who founded the Museu de Arte Negra in Brazil in the 1970s.

Among the contemporary discourses and artistic practices, I would like to highlight some of them here:

1. Regarding identities (the question, not the result), subjectivities and their malleability, depictions of bodies in portraits (often collective, sometimes "antiportraits") often featured bodies against a "decorative", punctuated, textile backdrop. The mask, hair and clothes appear amid the setting, either photographed or using other media.

2. The identity issue lends itself to collage in what could be considered a metaphor for contemporary identity. This aspect could be addressed in a chapter discussing the cross-cultural dimension of the arts of the Black Atlantic, where collage is a relatively recent practice which emerged in association with a range of contemporary issues such as migration, violence, erosion of utopias. Collage plays in this context a double role. On the one hand, it highlights the de(con-)struction of belief and knowledge systems. On the other hand, it reunites what has been broken, threatened to break or has never been united. In this sense, it is also a repair kit, an offer of reconciliation, without denying the wounds and boundaries of identity. Starting from the ambivalence between destruction and construction, it can be a metaphor for a heterogeneous global world, but also for the interaction of cultures.

3. In the broader sense, understood as a sign system, writing would be another topic to study, ranging from the texts produced in Islamic regions to the sub-Saharan African ideograms studied by Clémentine Faïk-Nzuji (1996). Signs appear on masks and other sculpted surfaces, bodies, textiles and walls, but they also include Western text and distortions, extending to textures or just the trace that remains.

4. The battle between figuration and abstraction, which covers a vast area ranging from African writing to geometric abstraction, has become obsolete since the arrival of post-minimalism and conceptual art. Nevertheless, this period merits further exploration as it is the last example of controversy surrounding the appropriation of Western languages; installation - – which has African precedents - and video have not given rise to any such issues. At the 'Reshaping the Field: Arts of the African Diaspora on Display' conference, organised in November 2021 by Nana Adusei-Poku, participants rejected essentialist approaches to African diaspora visual arts.

5. Does contemporary art represent a rupture with earlier periods or can we identify "constants" running through Black Atlantic visual arts (not necessarily simultaneously)? An iconographic approach would show that these "constants" are exactly where innovation and creativity occur (contemporary masks, representation of bodies, etc.). I would like to mention several motifs linked to diaspora memory in particular: Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson grouped together a series of these motifs under the concept of afrotropes, which are more common in the diaspora but have only begun to be cited in Africa more recently. They link closely to memory and are primarily associated with slavery: the slave ship crossing, a central motif from Gilroy's work, torture instruments, hunts for runaway slaves, etc. Afrotropes, which are not necessarily figurative, postulate a cultural (memory-based) subconscious and lend it a tangible form. They emerge "in particular social and political constellations of the Black experience" and at times of extreme crisis, they are always on the brink of emerging, to highlight what is latent in stories, fantasies and fictions from the 18th to the 21st century. Thompson and Copeland do not describe the forms of this (re)emergence, but afrotropes erase the line between past and present, constituting an "anti-archive" beyond the constraints of the oral according to Foucault. Beyond the iconographic dimension, this state of constant latency could also take the form of layering, allowing a play with the background and the foreground, with the emergence and disappearance, visibility and invisibility, between the thickness and transparency of the layers (this connects with the importance of the text or sign, always understood as palimpsest).[21]

The Spirit of the Approach

This history would begin by focusing on intra-African dynamics, including the dialogue with foreign influences. Since no living culture is self-sufficient, the forms of appropriation and transformation that these influences bring to local production are what interests us here. It would then naturally move on to the relationships established with the culture of the colonial powers and the conquering religions (Islam and Christianity). On the other side of the Atlantic, it would consider the fragmentation, retention and change experienced by African heritage, as well as the forms that emerge when these fragments are put back together. It would address divergence, controversy and rupture (some of these are the constants in this history).

Usually, a project of this kind is entrusted to regional experts. However, a regional structure would muddy the waters, producing little more than an agglomeration of fragments we have already. Local histories, which have received too little scholarly

21 Dickerson, Joselit, Nixon (2017: 17). Cheryl Finley (2018) studies the slave ship motif in particular.

attention to date, must take into consideration the circulation of styles, techniques and ideas. In Latin America in particular, there are *sui generis* voices and reflections that the transnational perspective of the Black Atlantic must bring out of the shadows, provincializing the national context that has been suffocating them for too long. The different temporalities, as well as the contrasts and disjunctures present within the diaspora, may serve to render contacts and parallels still more significant.

The idea is to create chapters based on the themes suggested above, several of which could serve as a common thread running through this long history. A history of this kind would allow certain hypotheses, too often taken for granted, to be tested. My own personal ambition would be a history that would hold up before artist monographs, which are still lacking at the moment; in other words, a history that would put theories to the test rather than using them as a framework. It would be haunted by the fear of stifling exceptions that do not confirm the rule.

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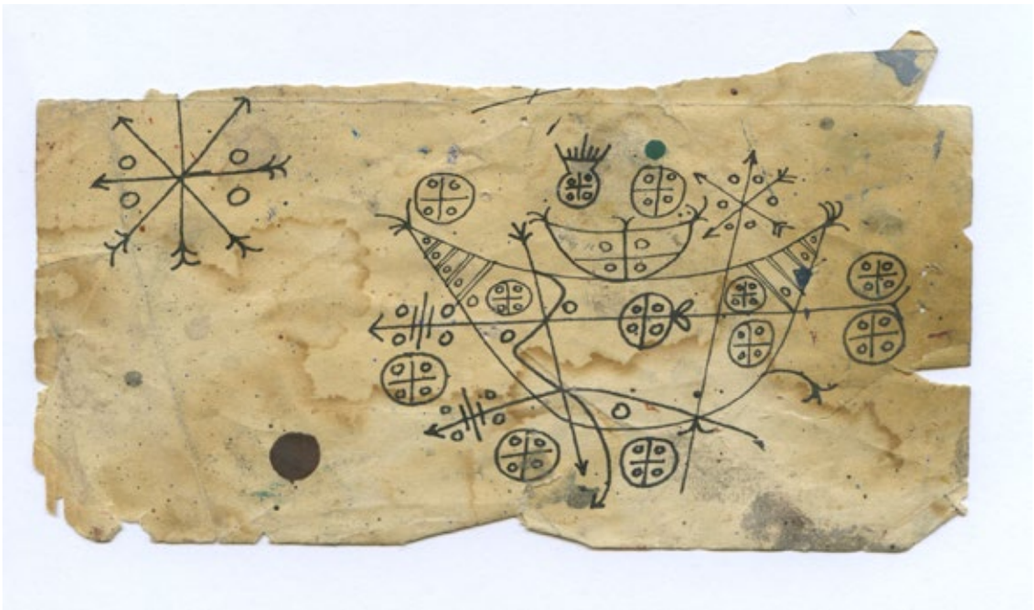
Recomposing the Fragments. Motifs of Diaspora in the Work of Guido Llinás (Cuba 1923 – Paris 2005)

Christoph Singler



Ill. 1. From the artist's archive: Gandó Abakuá (Ekpe), drawing copied by Llinás from Lydia Cabrera: *Anaforuana*. Madrid: Ediciones R, 1975: 87.

Ill. 2. *Umbral*, 1977, woodcut, 93 x 66 cms

Ill. 3. Untitled, 1977, woodcut, E/A, 84 x 66 cms

The threshold -the matrix - fading. Memory / Fragility / Elusiveness

Ill. 4. Ink-Collage, 1992, Ink, 29,5 x 18,5 cms

Fragmentation of his own works

Ill. 5. *Peinture*, 1965-1967, oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cms

Ill. 6. *Collage Painting,* 1991, 130 x 97 cms

Layers. Transparency / Opacity / Appearing, disappearing (→ Memory, etc.) / Overwriting. Confrontation/ Entanglement / Scrutinizing readability.

Ill. 7. *Ancestral*. For *Masques d'artistes* exhibition, Salons Malmaison 1987.

Ill 8. *Pintura Negra*, 1968-1970, oil on canvas, 115 x 120 cms

Identity. Primitivism / The *Demoiselles* deframed.

Recomposition: From Geometric Abstraction to the Sign-Form.

Paulo Nazareth: A *Craque* in the Mid-field

Roberto Conduru

The trivial, sometimes ordinary, somewhat precarious, apparently improvised and slightly aestheticized materiality that characterises the work of Paulo Nazareth relates to the life conditions of subaltern groups in Brazil, as well as in other contexts of the African diaspora and in Africa.

As with some other Afro-descendant artists in Brazil – I am thinking of Seu Gabriel (Gabriel Joaquim dos Santos), Arthur Bispo do Rosário and Nêgo (Geraldo Simplício) – Nazareth produces his works using what he finds around him: Art, just as the world, starts at his feet. However, unlike artists who are adscribed to a single place, specific materials and modes of making, Nazareth manipulates a wide range of artefacts in multiple ways and acts, apparently without spatial limitations. He moves across a territory wider than, for example, the *Casa da Flor* that Seu Gabriel built from crockery fragments, inspired by a dream, or the hospice where Arthur Bispo do Rosário built an alternative universe for himself with objects at hand, or the *Jardim do Nêgo*, that Geraldo Simplício has been modelling with earth and loam around himself. Nazareth´s field of action is broad because, as it is stated in his book, he "lives and works around the globe".1 Nevertheless, the artist seems for me similar to Seu Gabriel, to Arthur Bispo do Rosário and to Nêgo, less for the precarious material he scavenges on a global scale, and more for his poetic subjectivity, by the way he reinvents the imaginary with what he collects and manipulates, and goes off the beaten track.

Although his works seem to emerge naturally, consistently and quietly from his experience, nonetheless they are the result of artifice. As part of his everyday life, he thinks and makes them; and in making them, he lives. Certainly, there is continuity, but there are also gaps, choices, a conscious letting go of control. There are mediations and decisions. Taking advantage of how language can have sometimes an indeterminate meaning. Nazareth moves with certain ease between languages, as well as among various contemporary approaches to making and exhibiting art. He engages his own body, appropriates things that come his way and rearticulates them as images, artefacts and environments. He is a wanderer, collector and a multimedia installation artist all at once.

1 "Biografia" (Biography), in Paulo Nazareth 2012.

Ill. 1. Paulo Nazareth, installation view, *Beyond the Black Atlantic* exhibition Hannover Kunstverein 2020. Photography by Raimund Zakowski © Kunstverein Hannover

Nazareth is not the first artist to seek ways to articulate, intertwine, and fuse art and life. Gideon Lewis-Krauss has said that, inverting most artistic practice, "what Nazareth's performance does, ingeniously, is present itself as play disguised as work" (2019). However, just as he involves his life in such games, and involves other personalities working in the field of the visual arts, he makes this game a way of life. Indeed, his journeys from Brazil to the U.S., and Europe, en route through Africa, could be seen as actions that aim to subvert colonial hegemonies and centres. These artistic projects are, at the same time, ways of knowing and cultivating his Amerindian, African and European ancestry, and ways of intertwining personal and collective stories with the history of mankind.

When he says that his training in art began in childhood, in his family and community environment, Nazareth does not want to assert himself as a self-taught person, in contrast to how Heitor dos Prazeres, Maria Lira and Eustáquio Neves, among many other Afro-descendant artists are often described. On the contrary, he does not neglect to mention that, for him, as is the same for Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos, Abdias do Nascimento and Jorge dos Anjos although in different circumstances, dialogue with other artists was essential; in his case, the conversation with Mestre Orlando, a visual artist, and the puppeteer Tião Vieira. For Nazareth, as for artists such as Estevão Silva, Arthur Timóteo da Costa and Rubem Valentim earlier and Ayrson Heráclito, Rommulo Vieira Conceição and Rosana Paulino, institutionalised artistic education has been essential to his career, namely his time as a student of Visual Art and Linguistics at the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte.[2] His art training occurred in different contexts –

2 About Paulo Nazareth´s formative years: "Biografia" (Biography), in Paulo Nazareth, 2012, and Paulo Nazareth 2019.

in more or less formalised ways, inside, connected or outside cultural institutions – but what should be emphasised especially is the breadth and heterogeneity of his formative process and, above all, its existential dimension.

Unsurprisingly, then, Nazareth is well aware of the limits and challenges art is facing today. In one of his first works, *A History of the Americas [I will make myself a pop artist] [conceptual, (contemporary)]* from 2005, he spelled out an intervention plan within a framework of Pop Art and Conceptualism, an approach far from utopias and ingenuity. Nor is it surprising that he uses the structure and support offered by the international gallery Mendes Wood – with which he has collaborated since 2011 – as well as other institutions, for his performances. And it is just as unsurprising that he simultaneously shows a perfect understanding of the conventionality of art and confidence in the poetic moment be it intense, banal or degraded, as in the series HERE IS ART – PAMPHLET.

These ideas do not soften his commitment to different causes; on the contrary, they enhance his participation in the struggles against racism, colonialism and social inequality, among others.

Nazareth tackles directly the persistent attraction of the primitive exotic in the art system, the craving for potent impurities on the margins, more or less distant from the hegemonic centres. He often uses irony, as in the Banana Market/Art Market work that he presented in 2011 at the Art Basel Miami Beach fair. There, in front of a Volkswagen Kombi loaded with banana clusters, he exhibited himself carrying a plaque with the inscription "My image of exotic man for sale". He also scrutinizes the profound contradictions inherent in the taste for the exotic, as when he says, in a text on Sonia Gomes, that "the eye that iz no people iz eye that refuse see the other" (Nazareth 2017: 119).

Like Antonio Obá, Jaime Lauriano and Priscila Rezende, among other Afro-descendant artists based in Brazil, Nazareth fights racism by blurring the environment, making opaque what is supposed to be transparent and even non-existent. He makes visible that racism is structural and that it contributes to the inequalities of Brazilian society and elsewhere.

In this struggle, it is notable that Nazareth goes beyond the polarisation between black and white, which is increasingly dominant in the debate. He identifies himself as black and, through his work, asserts black empowerment. Even so, his professional name associates Paulo, from his birth name, with Nazareth, a name the artist adopted from his maternal grandmother – "mestiça", "afro-indigenous", "a nobody", "a woman from an indefinite place" – and he distils his experience of life "midway", because he understands that "contemporary art is the very construction of that place" (Nazareth 2019: 20-23). He has also said: "In my 'mestiçagem' (being of mixed race) I make myself / I am indigenous and black / It's incredible".[3] Moreover, he has even presented Minas Gerais, the state where he was born, as the "heartland of Brazilian racial mixture".[4] However, to emphasise his African ancestry as part of a multi-ethnic experience, does not mean he praises, racial

3 Paulo Nazareth in Kiki Mazzucchelli, "Sobre marfins, dentes e ossos", 2012.
4 Paulo Nazareth, "Possíveis anedotas", 2012.

mixture. In fact, Nazareth explores the visual, linguistic and bodily effects of racial mixture in order to question the identity markers and their adverse social consequences. In photographic images such as those in the series *What is the colour of my skin? / Qual é a cor da minha pele?*, made in 2013, Nazareth poses alongside people with darker skin tones than his own, like artists Carlos Martiel and Moisés Patrício. This allows him to reverse the many and perverse strategies of discrimination by playing with the chromatic gradations of the epidermis.

He said: "I am not black, nor Indian, nor white ... (...) too white to be black .... and too black to be white. This is not bad; I have been transforming myself ... remaining the same".[5] Like the found objects he appropriates, manipulates and transposes to the world of art, he transforms himself. He does so by wayof these objects and in relationto other artists as well as other actors outside the art world. Nazareth makes art games into a serious game, with which he seems to have fun and even enchant himself. He acts like a player who is aware that football is a global business nowadays, but when he enters the field, he tries to have fun while playing, even though he knows the implications at stake.

The mention of soccer makes me think of the word *craque*- crack, in English. In Portuguese, *craque* is a noun that designates someone highly skilled in what he knows or does and is a term used widely in soccer. However, *craque* is also an interjection that resonates with breaking, splitting, or breaching. Enchanting, engaging, Paulo Nazareth, like many Brazilian soccer players, is a *craque* who comes from a peripheral context, from the margins, and has reached the centre. He is also an artist who, through his work, in a calm, good-humoured, almost docile and apparently harmless manner, digs a critical break in the middle of the field.

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5 Paulo Nazareth in Janaina Melo, "Conversas e caminhos de viagem", 2012.

Joe Ouakam and the Anti-Aesthetic Avant-Garde

El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

In a film by Ican Ramangelissa entitled *Sans Rien* (2015), we hear a voiceover and a man moves into the middle of the screen. His beret and glasses make him rather a caricature and his thin face is framed by trimmed hair, a white beard, and his eternal pipe. He stands in the autumnal courtyard of the arcaded house, which doubles up as his studio and is overshadowed by an immense baobab tree. The character shown in this scene is the standard-bearer of an artistic avant-garde in Senegal. His name is Issa Ramangelissa Samb, although he is also known as Joe Ouakam (Fig. 1).[1] Throughout his life, his body has haunted different places. His iconic silhouette formed part of the décor and represented a chapter in the history of art in Senegal. This article presents a portrait of Joe Ouakam's art through his relationship with the body, understood as a living performance. It seeks to explore the relationship between his art and life, analysing the ways in which he helped forge new connections between art and society.

Fig. 1. Issa Samb, December 2015 at the Laboratoire Agit'Art, *ZAT : Zone Temporairement Autonome (Temporarily Autonomous Area)*, exhibition in defense of the courtyard threatened with destruction. Photo: ICAN Ramageli.

As a painter, performer, sculptor, actor, critic and writer, Joe Ouakam was a contemporary art icon. Born in 1945, he attended the National School of Arts and at

1 The name 'Ouakam' comes from the name of the Lébou neighborhood in Dakar where the artist comes? from.

Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, where he studied Law and Philosophy. Both politically and artistically, he was motivated by revolutionary ideas at a very early stage in his life. His work was an overt performance, combining art and life, one overflowing into the halting flow of the other. The image of Joe Ouakam was made popular by the Laboratoire Agit'Art, which was a collective of intellectuals and multidisciplinary artists that emerged in an unsettled political context during the post-independence period. The collective was founded in the wake of May 1968, at a time when subversive activity had shaken up Senegalese politics. It was co-founded in 1974 with actor and poet Youssouf John and was made up of painters, filmmakers, musicians and writers. In practice, the collective was led by two artists: Joe Ouakam and El Hadji Moussa Babacar Sy (known as El Sy).[2]

The Laboratoire Agit'Art emerged at a time when new conceptual practices were arising in Africa. In the mid-1970s, the local political powers replacing the colonial authorities were in crisis. The process of reconstructing or establishing new systems for governing independent countries was overshadowed by the arrival of a series of dictatorships and repressive regimes. According to Okwui Enwezor, most of the practices that could be labelled "conceptual" emerged during this tumultuous postcolonial period. It is clear that rejection of Senghor's formalism in favour of new experiments could only result in a prioritisation of the production process over the product, the ephemeral over the permanent and political ideas over aesthetic concerns (Enwezor 1999: 111).

The Laboratoire Agit'Art declared itself to be against the Dakar School's modernism and Senghor's ideology of Négritude. The upheaval it advocated took the form of performances organised by the collective that rejected Senghor's pictorial policy and adopted new multidisciplinary techniques (combining sculpture, painting, installation and performance), encouraging significant audience participation. It involved subverting ideas, practices, frameworks and artistic codes. In the approach taken by Agit'Art, orality and performance enabled modes of action that spoke to the Senegalese context, the history of the continent and the multiple ways in which art exists in the community. In the context of this collective project, a postcolonial modernism (Okeke 2015) emerged alongside a political uprising and an anti-aesthetic stance (understood as action taken against artistic institutions underpinned by a Western modernity embodied by Senghor). This stance prompted the artists to set up what is commonly referred to as the first arts village at Camp Lat Dior. They were driven out on the night of 23 September 1983 by President Abdou Diouf's regime, which took power in 1981.

Issa Samb's practice found meaning in this pivotal period for Senegalese art. The manner in which he expressed his art changed. His painting became performative, evoking the trace of something that his body in the present left in its wake. The expression of the body in Joe Ouakam's work was a way of reminding us of the present. What it left behind was less important, as the past did not play a major role in his work. Indeed, given the strength of the performative body and of the moment itself, he claimed that his work was situated solely in the present:

2 Djibril Diop Mambety, El Hadji Sy, Amadou Sow and Bouna Médoune Seye were among the artists to have participated in the collective.

> I live in the present. If I move out of the present, it's to look ahead and very rarely to return to the past. The past has very little, if any place in my work. My work focuses on things in the present and that's what lends it its transient dimension. It's also why I stopped producing photography: to avoid pinning things down and coming back to them. I've always been careful about that. As soon as I realised it was making me want to historicise, I stopped. The past doesn't play a key part in what I do" (Kouoh 2013: 18-19).

Issa's declaration regarding the "presentism" (Hartog 2012) of his artistic practice is echoed by two aspects of his work: his performance and his relationship with objects. His stance on the past underpins the idea of permanence, focusing on the "living" body of the performance in a movement that evokes each instant before relegating it to the past. The transient nature of his work contrasts with the omnipresence of the objects peopling his studio. As much as the avant-gardes prized the ephemeral, rejecting fetishism of objects, Issa's installations are magically able to bring out the soul in everyday objects. In this regard, Elizabeth Harney observes that in the many workshops held by the Laboratoire Agit'Art, objects often functioned as an accessory and became secondary to the conceptual dimension of the performance. While the use of recycled materials, installation, accumulation and assemblage represents a way of countering the modernist hierarchies between high and low culture or between elitist and popular art that are inherent in Senghor's discourse, this mode of production is part of an overt quest to promote a new kind of art amid a political context that adapts to reflect its environment and adopts the codes of an international market (Harney 2004: 112).

Issa Samb works with everyday objects. The resulting associations are made unique by the places, situations, and contexts that lend an aura of strangeness to the pieces. Through recycling, the artist explores capitalist society and the waste it produces. As a result, interpretations of this recycling in terms of poverty and lack of materials must be nuanced. Recycling is a choice dictated by a vision of society and art whereby the language, modes of narration and grammar must be reviewed and corrected. Poverty cannot explain the adoption of recycling practices because the drive to question the materiality of objects prompted artists to gradually abandon the techniques that they had learned at art school in this historical context. In Joe Ouakam's individual practice and rational universe, his performance "digests" the objects. The artist himself absorbs the people who enter his space, which is transformed into a studio, a living space, and a permanent exhibition. Joe Ouakam resembles a collector whose obsession, as described by Susan Pearce, appears pathological in his relationship with objects (Pearce 1994). Collectors are not artists. They possess an object but they do not transform it; instead, they store and preserve it for posterity. Artists, meanwhile, enter into a conflict with the object, which is purely material and whose integrity and meaning are very often disrespected and transformed.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that Issa Samb's installations echo the spirituality of the *Xàmbs*, which are a set of objects traditionally placed in an area of the family home as a place of worship. Often positioned in a backyard, they serve as a retreat for the spirits. These sacred places remain alive in the yards of the Lébou community in Dakar, representing a space for preserving a living intangible heritage and a

mystical part of the house where offerings are made to the spirits of the ancestors. *Xàmbs* are altars that speak of the present in that they reincarnate the living spaces of ancestors who have died but not left. The "presentism" that can be seen in Joe Ouakam's artistic practice appears to be literally attached to death and to a body that is no more.

Xàmbs are altars that speak of the present. They bring the sacred installation closer to a profane performative act and transform life and traditions into a scenic device. Joe Ouakam re-enchants this device in a contemporaneity that frees it from "distinction". He plays the role of a broker or a catalyst when he blurs the aesthetic boundaries between the spiritual and material, the sacred and the profane. In Issa's studio, objects act as subjects rather than objects. They are more than just accessories; they are actors who participate in the abolition of the frontier between art and life, between animate and inanimate, between body and mind.

Joe Ouakam's work is entirely subversive and fundamentally political, rather like the themes that he focused on in the 1990s: Gandhi, Mandela, Lenin, colonial France, Soweto, the Senegalese flag, etc. (Ibong 1991: 206), which develop a narrative between art and the state. In the same vein, Issa burned all the paintings selected by Senghor for the exhibition *L'art sénégalais d'aujourd'hui* [Senegalese Art of Today], which was held at the Grand Palais from April 26 to June 24, 1974. He refused to allow his art to be used to justify an instrumentalization or an illustration of *Négritude* under the Dakar School label (Kouoh 2013: 13). The political dimension of his visual vocabulary echoes the iconography of the socio-plastic movement *Set/Setal*,[3] which emerged in the late 1980s and was characterised by citizen engagement among young people who decided to clean and decorate their neighbourhoods themselves. Drawing on socio-political concerns, *Set/Setal* was backed by Joe Ouakam. The artist described the grassroots energy of the movement:

> Beyond its political nature, *Set/Setal* raises the issue of elementary visual expression. In the neighbourhoods, many of the people who painted the walls are neither professional painters nor decorators. They are children and teenagers who started to use colour on the walls. Among these idle young people sipping from the teacup of the unemployed, slumbering talents that were waiting to be discovered suddenly brought the walls and tarmac to life. It is a grassroots expression; the professional decorators and artists come much later, sometimes called upon by the municipal authorities (Enda 1991: 21).

This rupture occurred amid a quest for a new model of society, as political and aesthetic benchmarks were overturned. This was explored in depth in a series of performances entitled *Plekhanov*, one of which was dedicated to Pierre Lods, to whom Issa Samb paid tribute in an essay entitled *Poto-poto Blues*. Another of Issa's political performances was in *Omar Blondin, Ré-ouverture du procès* (2016). In this film by Ican, Joe Ouakam sets out to reopen the case of Senegalese student and anti-colonial activist Omar Blondin Diop, who was found dead in his cell in 1973.

Omar Blondin was a prominent figure in the May 1968 student protests in Paris and served as an assistant to Daniel Cohn-Bendit. He played an active part in the

3 Expression in Wolof that means "clean" or "to clean".

electoral campaign for Trotskyist Alain Krivine, who was head of the Communist League. He was expelled from the École Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud and deported from France in 1969 for "subversive activities." Omar Blondin Diop was arrested in November 1971 in Bamako. He was accused of freeing his imprisoned comrades by burning down the French Cultural Centre and the Ministry of Public Works in protest against the exorbitant works taking place prior to President Georges Pompidou's visit to Dakar in 1971, also attacking his cortège with Molotov cocktails (Cherel 2020: 90). On March 23, 1972, he was sentenced to three years in prison for "undermining state security" (Cissokho 2022).

In Ican's film, Joe Ouakam continues in a monotone: "On May 11, 1973, Omar Blondin Diop, born on 18 September 1946, a former student at the ENS in Saint Cloud, was found hanging in the prison cell at Gorée where he was being held for political reasons." On May 10, 2013, a gathering was held at Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) in Dakar entitled "Omar Blondin Diop: 40 Years Later." It was attended by various left-wing figures in Senegal and by the family of Omar Blondin Diop, who are calling for the case to be reopened.

The circumstances of Omar Blondin Diop's death remain a mystery to this day. However, unlike the newspaper *Le Soleil*, which reported the official verdict of suicide, Roland Colin, chief of staff to Council President Mamadou Dia (1957-62), explains in an essay entitled "Sénégal notre pirogue" (*Présence Africaine*, 2007) that Omar Blondin Diop had received a visit in prison from Interior Minister Jean Collin, with whom he had had an altercation: "The minister, it was eventually revealed, had ordered the guard to punish him. The next day, he was found hanging in his cell" (Cissokho 2022). In Ican's film, Joe Ouakam wonders in a deep, calm voice: "Did he kill himself by hanging or was he hung after he died?" Wearing a lawyer's robes, he turns towards a mannequin dressed all in black and placed in front of a white wall, where he writes: "my brother Oumar Blondin Diop." This performance positions Issa in a specific period of the Senegalese Left.

Joe Ouakam attempts to abolish the frontiers between art and politics, the body and mind, to forge a body that thinks, a body that itself is discourse and is expressed through performance. However, he does not strive for a performance that structures a space and assigns commonplaces as part of a protocol involving experts and an audience, anticipated and converted into a temporality that presents art in its sacred spaces. Here, performance merges with everyday life. It expresses an art that destroys the temporality of art venues and escapes its intended framework. It blurs locations by inventing a new dimension in which art welcomes and inhabits us. It is no surprise that monologue and soliloquy are inextricably intertwined here.

Joe Ouakam stood at the crossroads and acted as a catalyst between spheres. His multiform practice diverged from the codes governing art at a time when the narrative of artistic modernism in Senegal was dominated by the critical thought of president and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor. With a vision that encompassed art, politics, and epistemology, he played with the magic of objects in unusual assemblages and installations, lending them a performative dimension that disrupted the formalism embodied by the Dakar School of painting. Like his studio, which was a space for reflection and production, his multiform discourse was given new magic

by a fragmented aesthetic. Rather like the trees and waste materials in his courtyard, which he included in his art as part of a whole, he remained an enigmatic figure who was well-known among Dakar's residents, especially those in the Dakar--Plateau district at the heart of the city.

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Re-membering the Mammy in Betye Saar's Works

Shaweta Nanda

Fig. 1: Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Getty Images free access

Stereotyping Black Women as Aunt Jemima/ Mammy/ Domestic Help

The Mammy has been enshrined as the paragon of domesticity, loyalty and subservience in the popular American cultural imagination. The Mammy in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and Hattie McDaniel's (1895-1952) immaculate performance in David O. Selznick's adaptation of it (1939, fig. 1) are some of the more memorable and resounding instances of this figuration. Scores of advertisements such as those of pancake flours and maple syrups along with commonplace objects such as cookie jars, bells, and/or salt shakers in the post-Emancipation era further entrenched the stereotype of Black women as maternal, selfless figures who are perennially grinning. Visually Mammy/Aunt Jemima[1] is codified as a soot black, obese

1 Although the Mammy figure is associated more with the nursery and child rearing and Aunt Jemima with the kitchen and is known for her exquisite culinary skills, I have used the two terms interchangeably in this article. Both these figures operate within networks of domesticity and the difference between these two can be considered to be negligible. My arguments about stereotyping of Black women are applicable to the figures of both Aunt Jemima and the Mammy.

woman who is dressed in a (red) bandana, oversized dress, and an apron. Belying common assumptions and expectations that anti-Black racist memorabilia are a thing of the past, Chico Colvard in his recent documentary, *Black Memorabilia* (2017), makes a shocking discovery: in order to cater to the steady (global) demand, "Black collectibles" such as Mammy cookie jars, bells, Jolly Nigger Banks, continue to be freshly produced, rather mass--produced. Moreover, these newly manufactured racially charged objects are often marketed as antiques.

The Mammy stereotype has been deployed as a tool by the white heteropatriarchal capitalist society to camouflage, maintain and justify the oppression of Black women on account of their race, gender and class in ante and postbellum American society.[2] Hazel Carby maintains that the objective of stereotypes is "not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations". These "controlling images" make "racism, sexism, poverty and the other forms of social injustice appear to be natural and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Carby in Collins 2000: 69). Furthermore, anti-Black racist ideology negates the reality of Black women's intellectualism, aspirations for upward mobility and competence to excel in jobs other than low paid domestic work. These result in the overrepresentation of Black women in the domestic work and service industry from post Emancipation to current times.

While there has been an uptick in the demand for anti-Black memorabilia, Black artists and intellectuals have made sustained efforts to counter the demeaning visual iconography. In June 2020, America's 130 years old prominent food brand, Quaker Oats,[3] decided to dispense with the brand name, Aunt Jemima that was deployed to market pancakes and syrups. They issued a public statement underscoring that "Aunt Jemima's origins are based on a racial stereotype" (cited in Kessler 2020). Even though this might be a step in the right direction, much needs to be done. I examine the enduring legacy of this demeaning anti-Black stereotype in addition to tracing how Saar deploys a plethora of found objects, anti-Black collectibles, vintage photographs and textual components to realize her goal of turning insidious images into tools of empowerment. I also unravel how Betye Saar's (*1926) treatment of these images has changed or evolved over the years. Saar's invention of the gun-toting Aunt Jemima in her iconic work *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972) inspired later Black women artists such as Renee Cox. Saar resumed work on the Aunt Jemima stereotype in 1998 and 2000 with her two exhibitions, *Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima* (1998) and *In Service: A Version of Survival* (2000). In addition to dismantling the anti-Black stereotypes, Saar excavates the harrowing memories of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and Jim Crow. She uses the assemblage to commemorate the stories of Black women's labour, struggles, and resilience that are usually expunged from the dominant discourse.

2 For a detailed discussion on the issue see Shaweta Nanda 2014: 291- 304.
3 For details see https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/aunt-jemima-brand-will-change-name-remove-image-quaker-says-n1231260.

The Advent of the Gun-toting Mammy

Fig. 2: Betye Saar: *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), assemblage, 11,75 x 8 x 2,75 inch.

Picture not available, for viewing please click on: https://revolution.berkeley.edu/liberation-aunt-jemima/

Geared at collating community responses to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1929-68) assassination in 1968, *Rainbow Sign*,[4] a cultural center, rolled out a call for artists to showcase their works on "Black Heroes". Devastated and enraged at Dr King's demise, Saar utilized this opportunity to create *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972, fig. 2), which she designated her first openly political art work. Saar's choice of subject and the manner in which she chooses to respond to the call to commemorate Black heroes is pertinent.[5] Celebration of Dr. King's life and his legacy of non-violent direct action would have been an obvious choice. However, in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, Saar repurposes quotidian household objects. Contrary to their usual ends of inscribing and perpetuating the humiliating stereotypes, Saar deploys them to draw attention to the unsung labor, toils and experiences of otherwise forgotten Black women.

A popular pancake advertisement depicting Aunt Jemima wearing her classic red bandana forms the background of the assemblage. An Aunt Jemima figurine, meant for holding a pen and a notepad, forms the foreground of the work. Saar replaces the notepad with three things. First, is the postcard that depicts a Black Mammy in the conventional dress of the house servant. However, challenging the popular representations that present Black women taking care of their white wards, this postcard shows, what Saar describes as, "a mammy with a mulatto child, which is another way Black women were exploited during slavery" (*Berkeley Revolution*).[6] Thus, Saar visually foregrounds the

4 For detailed information on the history and legacy of the *Rainbow Sign* and how it hosted prominent Black artists such as Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Betye Saar, Maya Angelou, and James Baldwin, refer to Max Lopez and Tessa Rissacher's "*The Rainbow Sign*." https://revolution.berkeley.edu/projects/rainbow-sign/. Saar spoke at length about the creation of Aunt Jemima: "I'm the kind of person who recycles materials but I also recycle emotions and feelings.... And I had a great deal of anger about the segregation and the racism in this country." (http://www.artnet.com/artists/betye-saar/)

5 Saar details how and why she created *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*: "I created *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* in 1972 for the exhibition "Black Heroes" at the *Rainbow Sign* Cultural Center, Berkeley, CA (1972). The show was organized around community responses to the 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. assassination. This work allowed me to channel my righteous anger at not only the great loss of MLK Jr., but at the lack of representation of black artists, especially black women artists. I transformed the derogatory image of Aunt Jemima into a female warrior figure, fighting for Black liberation and women's rights. Fifty years later she has finally been liberated herself. And, yet more work still needs to be done."

6 In an interview cited at the *Berkeley Revolution*, digital archive, Saar explains different components of the assemblage: "For many years, I had collected derogatory images: postcards, a cigar-box label, an ad for beans, Darkie toothpaste. I found a little Aunt Jemima mammy figure, a caricature of a Black slave, like those later used to advertise pancakes. She had a broom in one hand and, on the other side, I gave her a rifle. In front of her, I placed a little postcard, of a mammy with a mulatto child, which is another way Black women were exploited during slavery".

oft hidden history of sexual exploitation and rape of the enslaved Black women by white men. Simultaneously, Saar bursts the myth of asexuality of the Black Mammy and also undermines the narrative of the purported sexual unattractiveness of Black women.

Second, the lower half of the postcard is covered with a white sheet. The sheet represents her domestic duties. Beyond this obvious symbolism, the white sheet is also reminiscent of the Ku-Klux-Klan,[7] a white supremacist group which has been described by many as an exemplum of homegrown white terrorism.[8] Klan members were often dressed (and pictured in Hollywood) in white gowns and white pointed hoods especially when conducting their night raids wherein they terrorized and/or lynched Blacks. The organization was formulated with the explicit aim to reinstate white supremacy and reverse the gains made during Reconstruction.

Third, references to the enslavement are littered in the form of the cotton that is strewn in front of the Aunt Jemima figurine because Africans were enslaved primarily to work as bonded, unpaid workers on the US-American plantations. Within the space of an assemblage, Saar deftly overturns the visual regime of servitude, servility and disempowerment by superimposing a Black fist (emblematic of the Black Power Movement), on the white sheet. Moreover, Black Power fist is hoisted around the band that has colours of the Black Nationalist Flag that is red, yellow, black and green.[9] The flag symbolizes Black political activism and struggle against racism and oppression. Saar further strengthens the militant iconography of the work by arming Aunt Jemima with a black rifle in one hand and a huge broom in the other. The broom transforms into a weapon of self-defense and/or attack instead of simply depicting Jemima's domesticated status. These three elements- the Black fist, hues of the Black liberation flag and the gun- indicate to the spectator that Black people, instead of being subjugated, will now retaliate against the violence that has been committed against them with ferocity. Saar deploys irony and sarcasm to underscore the subversiveness of this reconfigured stereotype. She juxtaposes the gun- an obvious emblem of her militant disposition- with the broom and naive grinning of the Mammy that are indicative not only of her servitude as they are now reconfigured as instruments of power.[10]

The Liberation of Aunt Jemima is a groundbreaking work for two reasons. First, Saar flips the script on the derogatory Mammy stereotype and recasts her as a militant icon for Black liberation. Second, in the conflation of the worlds of art and politics, the work showcases the influence of Black Arts movement, the artistic wing of the Black Power Movement. Both movements derive their intellectual synergies from Black Nationalist leader Malcolm X's (1929-1965) vision. Stressing the significance of the cultural arena for attaining Black empowerment, Malcolm X argued that Black people "must launch a cultural revolution to *unbrainwash* an entire people" (Robson 2008: 9).[11] It

7 In *I'll Bend but Not Break*, Saar uses a similar white sheet and stitches KKK on the sheet to make the connection between the two explicit.

8 Finlay Greig in his report for *The Scotsman* reports that more than 140,000 people have signed the petition for KKK to be "officially labeled as a terrorist organization." The petition states: "Black Americans have suffered the most under this terror group. Terrorism is the use of violence and intimidation in pursuit of political aims... We ask if ISIS or ISIL is labeled a terrorist group for their acts, then surely the KKK fit the clear description of a terrorist." https://www.scotsman.com/news/world/ku-klux-klan-terrorist-organisation-white-supremacist-hisotory-ex plained-kkk-leader-attacks-black-lives-matter-protesters-2879382

9 The Pan-African Flag which is also known as Afro-American Flag or the Black Liberation Flag was formally adopted by UNAI -ACL (Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) on August 13, 1920.

10 I am indebted to Christoph Singler for this argument.

11 Robson proclaims that Black Arts movement was born the day Malcolm X was assassinated.

aims at achieving the goals of self-determination, self-reliance, empowerment and reconnection with the (African) cultural past, and heritage for the Black people. The Arts were conceived as central to the political upliftment of the Black people. Saar integrates these concerns in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972).

Furthermore, while Saar creates *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* in order to vent her indignation at King's murder, the work exhibits Malcolm X's (1925-1965) influence ideologically. In opposition to King's praxis of non-violence, Malcolm X championed "revolutionary violence" and armed self-defense as the means of securing equality, independence and civil and political rights for Black people. Inspired by Malcolm X, Huey Newton (1942-1989) motivated Blacks to arm themselves for fighting against racialized oppression and police brutality. He argued, "With weapons in our hands, we were no longer their subjects, but their equals".[12] In addition to self-protection, guns played a pivotal role in challenging the contours of racial hierarchy in optical terms too. Eric Baker contends that guns in American culture are signifiers of white supremacy.[13] Thus, the image of Black Panthers (mostly men) openly carrying firearms in public served to challenge white supremacy and conveyed the message of Black empowerment in visual terms. Guns, thus, became props that foregrounded the message of Black empowerment. The convergence between Black Panthers, who were called "gun-toting militants" by their detractors (Morrison 2021[14]), and Saar's gun-toting Jemima allows me to argue that Saar challenges both racial and gender hierarchies.

In addition to re-envisioning the subservient Mammy as a heroic warrior, Saar launches a crusade against demeaning anti-Black stereotypes. She clarifies her mission to "transform and empower negative images into positive information" in a statement cited in LeFalle-Collins (2000: 5).[15] Found objects and advertisements that are often dismissed as trivial, play a crucial role in shaping popular cultural discourse. Trudier Harris observes that in most conventional representations Mammy is associated with kitchen. Kitchen in this case is not only a physical space but also has connotations of tractability, conformity and genuflection (Harris 1982: 172). Saar engages with three diverse representations of Black women in this assemblage using pancake advertisements, the Mammy figurine, and a postcard portraying a Mammy with a mulatto child. However, the Black woman is not located inside the house or pictured in her usual haunts that is the kitchen or nursery, in any of these images. Harris further contends that while the traditional maid is obsequious, reticent and identifies with the status quo, direct political activism is the defining feature of the "Militant" Mammy (Harris 1982: 24). The Militant Mammy has no qualms about resorting to violence overtly in order to fight for rights or to resist oppression. Saar's representation of Aunt Jemima fits in with Harris's delineation of the characteristics of the Militant Mammy. Laced with arms, Saar's Aunt Jemima emerges as a powerful Black heroine and warrior who would dismantle white supremacy. Thus, Saar

12 For details refer to https://humanities.byu.edu/the-black-panthers-performances-of-gun-ownership/.
13 Please see https://humanities.byu.edu/the-black-panthers-performances-of-gun-ownership/.
14 For details refer to https://whyy.org/articles/decades-later-a-new-look-at-black-panthers-and-their-legacy/.
15 Saar writes, "In the late 1960s, I began to collect the derogatory images of African Americans, now called Black Collectibles. I feel these images were important as documentation of how whites have historically perceived African American and how we have been portrayed as caricatures, as objects, as less-than-human. These are manufactured images and objects often were in many cases the only source of how we saw ourselves. The Civil Rights Movement and the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. motivated me to use these images in my art. I began to recycle and transform Sambos, Toms and Mammies in my assemblages. The Mammy, a character invented by whites to portray a female servant, is depicted as obese with exaggerated features.... The "mammy" knew and stayed in her place. In 1972, I attempted to change that "place" by creating the series *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*. My intent was to transform a negative, demeaning figure into a positive, empowered woman who stands confrontational with one hand holding a broom and the other armed for battle. A warrior ready to combat servitude and racism" (Saar 1998: 249).

deploys anti-Black racist images coupled with "contemptible collectibles" (Patricia Turner's term 2002: 5) that have been used by the dominant white capitalist economy and ideological set up to popularize stereotypes.

Legacy of *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*

The Liberation of Aunt Jemima soon became popular. Black intellectual and activist, Angela Davis, famously credited the piece for marking the beginning of the Black women's movement (Sayej 2018). It influenced generations of Black artists such as Jamaican-American artist Renee Cox (*1960). Cox admits that Saar's work propelled her to create *The Liberation of Lady J. and U.B.* (1998, fig. 3).[16] Cox pays homage to Saar's work by using the title of Saar's assemblage as part of the title of her own photomontage. Cox continues Saar's crusade against popular food brands such as *Uncle Ben's Brown Rice* and *Aunt Jemima Pancakes* that ridicule Black bodies and identities for reaping economic benefits. The food boxes of both the items that display the derogatory labels and images form the backdrop of Cox's photographic work. This proceeding unravels how politics, economic abuse, racism, anti-Black stereotypes intersect in commercial advertisements, a crucial component of popular culture. The foreground of the work is occupied by Cox's own incarnation as a superhero named Rajé. Rajé is seen holding the hands of a newer liberated avatar of Aunt Jemima on one side and Uncle Ben on the other. The determined and somber expressions of the three figures along with the manner in which they are striding forward arm-in-arm lend dignity to them. Their upturned and outward gaze also suggests that they are embarking upon a monumental endeavor.

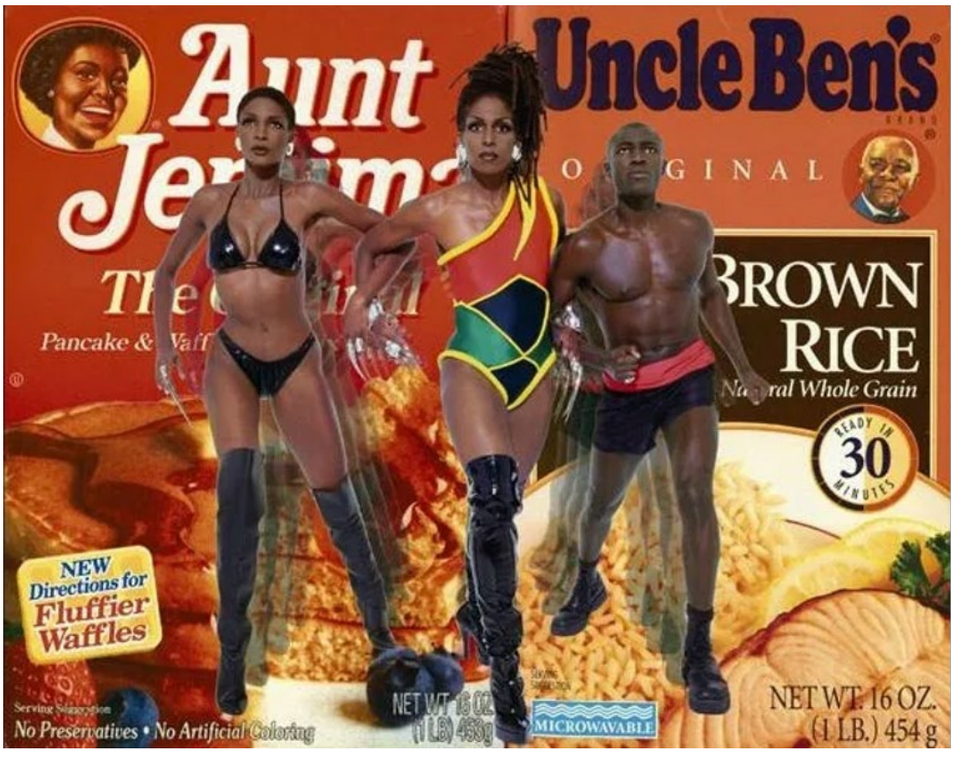

Fig. 3 Renée Cox, *The Liberation of Lady J. and U.B.*, 1998. Cibachrome print, 48 x 60 inch (121,9 x 152,4 cm). Courtesy Renée Cox

16 Cox in her interview with Artress Bethany White (1998: 55).

Rajé has Afro-braids and sports black leather boots that place her in the tradition of Black political resistance because Afro hairstyles, Black berets and leather attire (including boots, and jackets) and Black sunglasses are the pivotal elements of the visual legacy of the Black Panthers in the cultural arena. Moreover, Rajé's superhero bodysuit is black and has other hues (red, yellow and green) associated with Pan-Africanism and the Jamaican national flag. Thus, like Saar's use of the Black fist, Cox also makes her political stand explicit by foregrounding Rajé's braids and colors of Black nationalism in her version of *the liberation of Aunt Jemima*.

Despite their similarities, the manner in which Cox and Saar liberate Aunt Jemima from stereotypical boxes is different. Cox breaks the mold and re-imagines Black supermodel, Roshumba Williams, and actor Rodney Charles as the liberated Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, respectively. Cox dresses up these avatars in Black leather clothing associated with the Black Panthers and releases them from the prison of servile smiles and the red bandanas. Released from the age-old boxes of brown rice and maple syrups, Uncle Ben and Aunt Jemima exude strength and youth, appearing younger, muscular, self-possessed and commanding - a far cry from their subservient, older, weaker stereotypical counterparts. Like Saar, Cox also dismantles their (mis)representation as asexual figures. Cox's models exude virility, glamour and pulchritude. In contrast, Saar's empowered Aunt Jemima retains her stereotypical physical characteristics like the obese body, soot black skin, trademark kerchief and sheepish grin, for Saar primarily focusses on the attitudinal shift. Moreover, Cox's rendition of liberation doesn't feature arms or bombs. Instead, she depicts a Black superheroine, Rajé, liberating Lady J. and Uncle B. With sharp protruding nails, all three figures certainly strike a defiant pose. While here they are liberated by another Black figure, Saar underscores Jemima's self-empowerment. Saar chooses to fully arm her Jemima with a pistol, rifle, and her usual broom. Thus, a victim no more, Saar's Aunt Jemima seeks retribution, and becomes a heroine who exercises her agency.

The difference in Saar and Cox's approaches are further reflected in the titles of their works. Unlike Saar who retains Aunt Jemima's name, Cox not only demolishes the stereotypes visually but also transforms their names. She addresses Aunt Jemima as Lady J. It appears that Cox wishes to dissociate her newly empowered figure from the world of servitude. The term "lady" signifies a woman of the upper class, usually a white woman. Thus, Cox underscores Black women's upward mobility. I, however, suggest that the term "lady", especially when used in reference to a Black woman, could be contentious owing to its complex history. Lisa Thompson argues, "conservative sexual behavior is the foundation of the performance of middle-class womanhood" (Lee 2010: vii). The Black Lady model is predicated on emphasizing women's morality or purity while diminishing Black women's sexuality. It adheres to the Victorian view of female sexuality as negative and that of Black female sexuality as the dark, abhorrent, undesirable 'Other' that needs to be restrained and/or decimated. As a result, the respectable Black Lady paradigm, like the stereotype of the Mammy, continues to repress Black female sexuality by upholding the Black woman as an asexual entity. The conception of the "Black Lady" also functions as another "controlling image" (Collins 2000: 69) for it serves to further subjugate Black women instead of liberating them (Patricia Hill Collins 2000: 80, Lisa Thompson 2009: 3 and Shayne Lee 2010). Thus, the new supposedly liberated role model of Lady B. and the anti-Black

stereotypes seem to converge awkwardly instead of being diametrically opposite. Moreover, this new model appears to be more menacing because unlike the Mammy/Aunt Jemima stereotypes that were created by the white heteropatriarchal capitalist order, the Black Lady model emerges from the Black community -the Black bourgeoisie- itself.

The work lends itself to multiple, often contradictory, meanings owing to Cox's use of humor and irony. Richard J. Powell observes Cox stages a "fantastic escape" of two fashion models from the food packages and showcases the "thin line" between stereotypic characterizations and idealized depictions." Cox responds with "humor and ambiguity rather than a solemn denunciation" in order to examine if Black people can truly achieve liberation from the internalized racism (Powell 2002: 231). Cox represents the emancipated avatars of Jemima and Ben as models and/or athletes. Although they get rid from one kind of stereotype (signified by the pancake advertisements), Cox propels the viewer to question if they have attained liberation in this age of cultural commodification of the Black bodies. Thus, these idealized escapes allow space only for limited kinds of alternate possibilities such as sports and fashion industry and preclude the progression of Blacks in scores of other fields such as science, technology, politics, academia, corporate, among others.

Saar's Return to the "Unfinished Business of Aunt Jemima"

One cannot deny the political and legal gains made during the Civil Rights Movement that resulted in desegregation of educational institutions and public facilities along with the prohibition of discrimination in the hiring practices and employment on the basis of race, gender, religion or nationality.[17] Despite the advancement, Saar returns to the subject of contemptible *Black memorabilia* in her works in the late 1990s. She contends that *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* remains an "unfinished business" owing to the "persistent racism" in the United States.[18] Anti-black stereotypes, discrimination in hiring and housing coupled with police brutality, mass incarceration and systematic racism are some of the ways in which Black people continue to experience discrimination and injustice. I argue that Saar's choices concerning the art form and materials are intricately linked with her threefold intellectual project of excavating and honoring her African roots; critiquing European colonization and enslavement of Africans and foregrounding Black women's stories of labor and work that are often expunged and/or denigrated by both capitalist white patriarchy and dominant Black bourgeoisie. I now turn to *Lest We Forget, The Strength Of Tears, The Fragility of Smiles, The Fierceness of Love*, from *Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima* (1998).

17 Civil Rights activism also paved way for Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and Fair Housing Act of 1968 that made discrimination in voting rights and buying and selling of property illegal.

18 Saar explains that incessant racism in the USA in different hues propelled her to return to the subject: "Now at the end of the millennium, I am even more aware of the persistence of racism, especially in the arts, and specifically the current trend of the reinvention of the negative black stereotypical images. I interpret this trend as surfacing the subconscious plantation mentality and a form of controlling black art. In response, I began a new series of assemblages which comprise this exhibition Workers and Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima" (Saar 2000).

Black Women's Palimpsest

Lest We Forget (fig. 4) is composed of three ragged and worn-out washboards that have been stacked horizontally. Saar visually traces the dreadful history of the Middle Passage by enlarging the image of the (in) famous British slave ship, Brookes, in the central panel. The image depicts hundreds of Black captives who were fettered and shoehorned in the ship. Raped, abused, beaten, starved, stripped, and their bodies distorted, many of the captives died painful deaths during the arduous journey of the Middle Passage. While the ship represented trade, prosperity, and glory for the English colonizers and imperialist masters, for the Blacks, it meant death, dehumanization, and entombment in a life of endless slavery. Saar's rifle-toting Aunt Jemima returns in this artwork in the panel on the right. The washboard on the left carries a blurry photograph that depicts a Black woman bending over a sink and scrubbing clothes. While the panel on the extreme right instantiates the subversive humor of the first *Aunt Jemima*, the one on the left deploys a vintage photograph to celebrate Black women's labor and resilience.

Fig. 4 Betye Saar, *Lest We Forget, The Strength of Tears, The Fragility of Smiles, The Fierceness of Love*, 1998, Mixed media and wood figure on three vintage boards, 22 ¾ x 30 ¼ x 2 in. (57.8 x 76.8 x 5.1 cm). Courtesy Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida, Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 2006.32, Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York, NY. Photo Credit: N/A

This work follows the tradition of the triptych, a format frequently used for religious subjects in Christian churches. Tatty Martin (n.d.) explains that it is used by the artist to present varied perspectives on a subject matter or to narrate a sequence. Since a triptych enables the artist to construct a visual narrative, Saar appropriates this classical art form to create a narrative of Black women's *herstories* in America. She exhumes the traumatic memories, visceral pain and dehumanization endured by

her African ancestors during different points in history including the Middle Passage, enslavement, segregation and the post-civil rights world too. The three interconnected panels of the triptych showcase not only the ridicule and stereotype heaped on Black women in America but also the agony of enslavement and the unending backbreaking labor performed by Black women in menial underpaid jobs.

Composed of both verbal and visual elements, each washboard appears complete in itself. The visual dimension is supported by the corresponding textual elements such as titles or short quotations that Saar adds to the washboards. I contend that Saar re-visits the 'sites of trauma', as it were, and wages a battle against 'forgetting' and erasure of Black women's experiences.[19] My reading is bolstered by an analysis of the textual elements that accompany the visual ones in this triptych.

"Lest We Forget" is embossed on the central panel and is meant to be read with three other texts that are written on the three washboards. The central panel reads, "Lest we forget the fragility of smiles of strangers lost at sea". Saar exhorts the future Black generations to remember the traumatic journey of the Middle Passage. Despite the horrors of enslavement, the slave ships were also the sites of rebellion and survival. Thus, Saar issues a warning that the smiles one witnesses on the slave ships are fragile, for not only death, but insurgency is also always bubbling under the surface. The panel on the left that showcases Black woman's labor reads "Lest we forget the strength of tears of those who toiled". Saar overturns the usual connotation of tears as a sign of weakness and associates tears with strength. Saar accords dignity to these Black women workers whose jobs were often considered to be inconsequential. Arlene Raven designates this triptych as a "memorial portrait" where memories and tears merge with each other (1998: 8). Thus, Saar excavates, celebrates, and consecrates the memories and labor of her unnamed, often unarmed, battered but undefeated, dignified, and resilient ancestors "upon whose shoulders [we] now stand" (title of another of Saar's assemblages).

The washboard that appropriates an anti-Black collectible is accompanied by three texts. Linking her art and quest for political action, Saar creates a campaign slogan. On the right panel, linking her art and quest for political action, Saar creates a campaign slogan. "Liberate Aunt Jemima" is stitched in red on Jemima's apron. The second quote, "Extreme times, calls for extreme heroines", is embossed on the lower end of the washboard. While the re-conceptualization of Aunt Jemima as a Black "heroine" was implied in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, Saar now overtly declares that the armed Jemima is an "extreme heroine" who would play a pivotal role in attaining Black liberation. Saar critiques the socio-political times as not being egalitarian, inclusive and conducive for Black people's growth for she terms them as "extreme times." Underscoring the relevance of such texts and props such as guns in Saar's work, LeFalle-Collins observes, "whether working with dignifying or degrading images of Blacks, Saar manipulates their historical contexts by giving these people voices through a slyly twisted text and subversive gestures" (2000:6). The inscription at the top of this washboard reads, "Lest we forget; the fierceness of love." Saar challenges one's hackneyed understanding of love wherein love is conceived of in terms of peace and nonviolence primarily. For Saar, love is intricately linked to political activism, fierceness and the creation of alternate radical possibilities. The

19 Saar maintains that "her concerns are the struggles of memory against forgetting" (1998: 249).

Mammy in her artwork is driven by that same love to strive for justice for Black people and the eradication of systemic inequalities.

Assemblage draws its name from the act of orchestrating together found objects to create three-dimensional art works. Created out of a variety of materials such as the washboards, vintage photographs, etchings and derogatory collectibles, this assemblage not only indicates a diversity of materials but also a multiplicity of artistic influences. Saar was fascinated by white artist Joseph Cornell's (1903-72) use of wooden boxes as framing devices.[20] Saar's use of washboards in this triptych as framing apparatuses reflects Cornell's influence.[21] Saar also sought inspiration from the works of Black assemblage artist Noah Purifoy (1917-2004). Purifoy was part of the group of artists who organized *66 Signs of Neon*, an exhibition created out of the debris of the Watts Rebellion (1965) that wrecked Black neighborhood of Watts in Los Angeles.[22] Purifoy created an assemblage called Sir Watts (1966) by using found objects that were rescued from the debris of the Watts towers. Purifoy's influence is palpable in Saar's propensity to deploy assemblage art to commemorate Black history.

The washboard does not function merely as a framing device or an inert object meant for aesthetic purposes. Washboard, the central motif in this triptych, is a "signifier of labor, especially women's labor" (LeFalle-Collins 2000: 5). It enables Saar to weave a narrative about Black women's labors. The ragged surfaces of these washboards are evocative of the visceral and sensory memories of the ways in which Black women suffered, ranging from painful hunched backs, bruised hands and sore legs (Kaplan 2021: 198). By foregrounding the opposition between the manner in which Black women in service are viewed by those they serve and how their legacy could be re-viewed by Black women visual artists such Saar herself, she accords dignity, respect, and recognition to these unnamed, underpaid and undervalued Black women workers.

Saar is lauded as a "visual storyteller" (Carpenter 2004: 98) who excels in the art of "making something out of nothing."[23] Saar uses materials that are mundane, cheap, old, and often discarded as junk. However, unhackneyed meanings are generated when Saar places these along with textual material in fresh permutations and combinations. Raven observes that there are many repetitions and continuities in Saar's assemblages in Workers + Warriors. For instance, Saar uses the same photograph of Brooks, the British slave ship, both in this triptych and in *I'll Bend But I Will Not Break*. Similarly, the vintage photograph of the Black domestic help from the triptych has also been used in *National Racism*. The image of the gun-toting Mammy coupled with the slogan, "Liberate Aunt Jemima" recurs in multiple works. I argue that it is an artistic strategy. Saar recycles repeats and reuses images and slogans to stress the sheer tediousness, repetitiveness and hardship that Black women performed. This incessant repetition is also a way to re-affirm, reclaim and commemorate ordinary

20 Saar remembers that viewing Joseph Cornell's (1903–1972) assemblage art in Pasadena Art Museum in 1967 was a watershed moment in her growth as an artist. Cornell created small wooden boxes that housed his exquisite assemblage art. Olivia Laing observes, box is the primary metaphor of Cornell's life and works.

21 In many of her other works Saar uses window frames, doors and panels as framing devices.

22 The Watts Rebellion is a name given to the series of riots that broke out in the largely Black neighborhood of Watts in Los Angeles in 1965. "The Watts Rebellion lasted for six days, resulting in 34 deaths, 1,032 injuries and 4,000 arrests, involving 34,000 people and ending in the destruction of 1,000 buildings, totaling $40 million in damages" (History.com Editors).https://www.history.com/topics/1960s/watts-riots.

23 Celeste-Marie Bernier and Nicole Wilson (2020) use a similar phrasing within quotes to describe Saar's work.

Black women's hard work, ingenuity and resilience in surviving against all odds. I further argue that Saar's usage of the old material in newer contexts and forms could be likened to a palimpsest, a parchment where an old script is erased and/or overwritten to create a new narrative. Similarly, Saar plucks out her objects from their original contexts and combines them to create a new text. This new narrative is much deeply layered as it is made up of multiplicity of visions. These objects embody the remembrances of their past owners/users and contexts of their production and use which interact with Saar's personal memories and artistic vision, thereby resulting in what Ishmael Reed would term as "communal historical artifact." Reed maintains that these works could be seen as an act of "historical documentation" where the communal fuses with the personal and is woven into a work of art (Reed cited in Carpenter 2004: 94).

From Outward Militancy to Covert Subversion

In *Power* Saar uses four washboards to form a table.[24] She pastes a baking powder tin advertisement that showcases a classic derogatory image of Black women as Mammies and Black children as Pickaninnies.[25] Since Black women, especially in the South, were known for their cooking and exquisite recipes, many advertisements commercially exploited the stereotypical images of the Black bodies to sell their products. The Black woman in the advertisement here ticks all stereotypical characteristics associated with the Mammy. The Black boy next to her also appears to be taken out of the visual archive of the racialized Jim Crow representations of the Black children with thick red lips, a broad nose, dark skin coupled with ghoulish eyes and dancing gait. The Mammy is located in her usual haunt, which is the kitchen, with the black boy and a cat. She is gazing at the cake (which she appears to have baked) that is placed on a wooden table and is seen rising from the batter.

Sharon F. Patton maintains that postmodernist works often lend themselves to a method of analysis where contradictory meanings are conveyed by words and pictographs in the given piece (1998: 234). Patton's observations apply to Saar's combination of visual and verbal elements. The apparent optical conformity of the scene is severely undermined by the textual narrative of the work. Saar eschews the inclusion of an armed mammy, focusing on symbols of servitude. She subverts the racialized iconography of this work, however, by working the signifiers of dissent and rebellion into the same seemingly conformist scene. I would examine three details to support my argument.

First, Saar obfuscates the letter 'D' from "POWDER" so that the spectator watches the word "POWER" pop up from the rising cake. The kitchen which is the epicenter of servitude is then transformed into an arena of activism and change, where the Mammy is both demanding and asserting her power. Her sheepish grin emblematic

24 Power (1998-99) has been published in the collection of Saar's work, namely *In Service: A Version of Survival* (2000). Image not available.

25 Visual representations of Black children caricaturize them as Pickaninnies. They are portrayed as being unkempt and shabbily dressed. They are ordinarily depicted as stuffing watermelon in their large mouths. While their eyes are characteristically painted as being bulging, their skin is ebony in colour and lips are overtly red. "They were routinely shown on postcards, posters, and other ephemera as nameless, shiftless natural buffoons running from alligators and toward fried chicken (Pilgrim 2000). https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/picaninny/homepage.htm.

of her supposed simple-mindedness is replaced with somber expressions while she carefully eyes the cake. The cake rising from the depth of the batter creates a visual image of the upheaval and insurgency that has and would continue to erupt from the very depth of the white households and conventional kitchens. Saar refrains from deploying a weapon or any other external object such as a broom or an iron. It is insinuated that the Mammy's empowerment, instead, would emerge from the same flour and baking powder that seem to have shackled her over the decades.

Second, the presence of a Black child is another noteworthy element in this kitchen. In other works of the series, such as *Lullaby* (1999), Saar expresses the pain of Black mothers who have to take care of their white wards while their own children lie in the grass, unattended. As opposed to Saar's representation, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970)[26] and popular advertisements featuring the stereotypical Mammy demonstrate that it is only whites who are the consumers of the exquisite dishes that are prepared by Black women. Saar seems to be dismantling this conventional expectation. The presence of the Black child who is happily looking at the prospect of eating the cake (usually denied to him) could be seen as Saar's challenge to the visual legacy of Blacks in servitude and not as consumers, especially of the products of their own labor. Furthermore, the rising batter visually indicates not only culinary delight and satiety of desire, but also signifies the hope of more empowering and fulfilling possibilities for Blacks in the future.

Third, the presence of a cat in the kitchen could be read as a sign of subversion within the master's household. While dogs represent loyalty, cats are associated with independence and intelligence in popular culture; in the iconography of Western art, they are symbolic of sensuality and lust.[27] Moffitt explains that the cat motif usually has negative implications as it is identified with a lubricious woman (Moffitt 1994: 24). Kitty Jackson avers that it also evokes the "mystical feminine energy" coupled with "images of witches", "darkness and black magic" (2019: 2). I, however, wish to argue that even within the safe confines of a home, the cat is not a domesticated animal, but a hunter. In Saar's work its pose is also relevant; it is not sleeping or resting but is standing alert on all fours under the table where the cake sits. She also appears to be growling while staring back at the spectator directly. Thus, like the Mammy in Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone: An Unauthorized Parody* (2001),[28] who would murder the master's sons to reinstate her own power inside the household, the presence of an upright, growling cat within Saar's assemblage signifies a similar subversion.

My reading of *Power* acquires further credence if one examines the context in which the work was first showcased. One possible reason for the shift from an overt call to arms to a more subdued call for dissent and subversion would be the white capitalist government's bogus "war on drugs". Starting in the 1980s, this crack-down resulted in surveillance, racialized social control, and "legally punitive measures" that

26 Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) showcases the story of Pauline, a Black woman who works at a white household, and her daughter, Pecola. Pauline prepares her signature dish, the Blueberry Pie, for her white ward and white employers and never for her own kids.

27 For instance, although Manet modeled Olympia (1865) on Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1534) which featured a dog, he chooses to paint "an upright, aroused, and spitting black cat" (Moffitt 1994: 22). Here, cat signifies female sexuality for it is associated with a prostitute.

28 *Wind Done Gone* parodies the Southern Romance, *Gone with the Wind* (1939). It could be placed in the category of, what Susan Donaldson names as, anti-plantation tradition novels for they undermine the manner in which novels like *Gone with the Wind* represent the antebellum South, enslaved Black people and the one-sided representation of the Civil War (1861-65).

eventually augured in an age of "mass incarceration in America".[29] The crackdown on Black communities had increased by the criminal justice system along with "a larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison" (Alexander 2010: 13). Saar created both of these series at a time (1998 and 2000) when Bill Clinton was President. Alexander counters the misconception that it was only the conservative Republican politicians who waged this war on drugs. She examines how Democrats including Bill Clinton and Barack Obama continued or rather fought the proxy war on drugs with much ferocity. The number of Black women who were incarcerated during President Clinton's time touched a record high. The draconian "three strikes law" was also enacted under Clinton's presidency.[30] Thus, Saar's decision to foreground oblique methodologies of subversion and resistance against white capitalism can be seen in the light of the precarious lives of Black Communities in the age of mass incarceration, police brutality and proliferation of anti-Black racism.

Conclusion

I wish to underscore that Saar's artistic intention is threefold. First, Saar, like other Black feminists such as Alice Walker In *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), is keen to re-member her Black foremothers. Second, Saar bears witness to the onerous and almost Sisyphean labors that Black women performed with dignity to survive the system that was not conducive for their growth. Third, her choice of found objects and her methodic repetition are intricately linked with her ideological and political agenda of Black women's liberation.

Saar's assemblages conduct a re-reading and re-interpretation of available histories. Her works are built out of carefully selected materials like washboards and elements of *Black memorabilia*. Saar not only reflects on the time and period of their usage but actively seeks to make space for stories that were unsung, forgotten and/or lost. Overwriting objects entrenched in histories of violence and discrimination against Black people allows her to draw attention to history and acts of historicizing in addition to the absences and erasures through which narrative coherence is achieved. In repurposing materials that were otherwise part of racist politics, Saar lets forgotten memories speak. The repetition and juxtaposition of materials in Saar's works function as a palimpsest forging interconnections and draw attention to the embedded and shifting layers of memories and meanings.

29 Angela Davis was among the first thinkers to draw attention to the "state of emergency" (Davis's term) and prison-industrial complex in America. For a detailed examination of "mass incarceration" of Blacks in America refer to Michelle Alexander (2010). Alexander furthers the discourse that was already gaining currency with many black thinkers such as Manning Marable, Angela Davis, Michael Eric Dyson and Tony Platt among others who represent what Plant designates as "a very long black tradition in anti-racist criminological praxis" (Tony Platt 2014: 5).

30 The law penalizes a person to a life imprisonment if one is caught three times for a drug offense which again is a non-violent crime. Also, not only did Clinton adopt a "tough on crime" approach, he also slashed public assistance and public funds in a major fashion.

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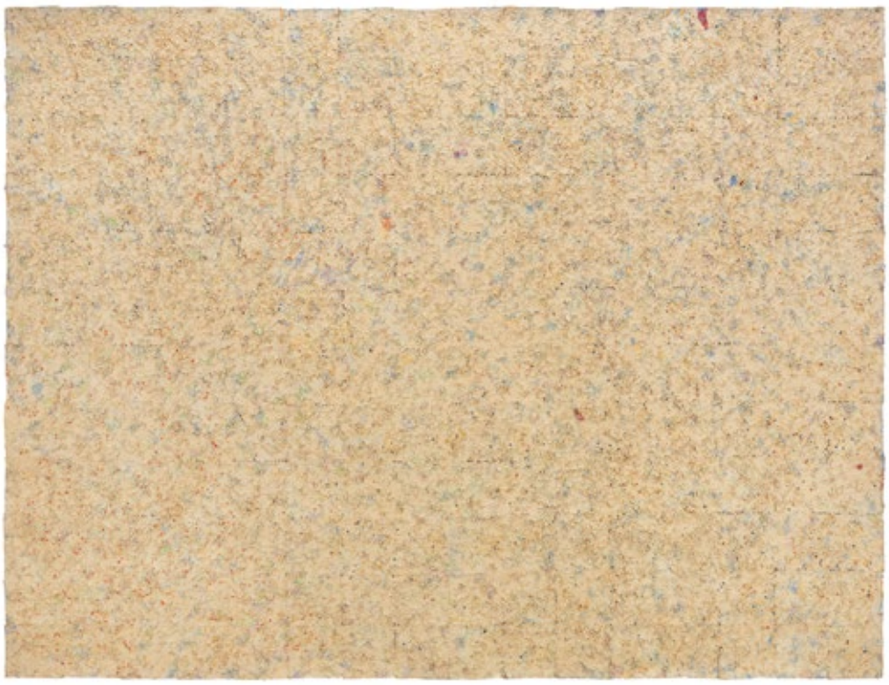
Necessary Abstractions, Or, How to Look at Art as a Black Feminist[1]

Huey Copeland

I. In this essay, I consider the art-historical implications of a methodological centering of black women in the making of the modern world, particularly for our understanding of 20th-century painterly abstraction in the United States. Ultimately, I will turn to the "errant forms" of Howardena Pindell and curator Naomi Beckwith's brilliant framing of works such as *Untitled #20 (Dutch Wives Circled and Squared)* of 1978 [Fig. 1], a sprawling canvas covered, like much of the elder African American artist's output from that era, with thousands of tiny hole punches (Beckwith 2018: 90). However, in order to provide a historical and theoretical frame for approaching her art and those of her contemporaries now just receiving their critical and commercial dues, I first want to lay out, in some detail, both the proclivities and blindspots of the broader American artistic field and their implications for black women practitioners.



Il. 1 Howardena Pindell, *Untitled #20* (Dutch Wives Circled and Squared), 1978. Mixed media on canvas, 86 x 110 inches (218,4 x 279,4 cm). Courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Albert A. Robin by exchange, 2014.15 Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

1 This essay is drawn from a Keynote Lecture delivered in March 2019 at Dakar's Musée Théodore Monod d'Art Africain as part of the "Anthropology and Contemporary Visual Arts from the Black Atlantic" seminar series spearheaded by Christoph Singler. In revising the text for publication, I have benefitted from the commentary of audiences at the Musée, Harvard University, Michigan State University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Wesleyan University. For their invaluable insights on earlier drafts, I thank: T.J. Clark, with whom I first thought about Olitski, Elise Archias, Sampada Aranke, Janet Dees, Hannah Feldman, Amy Mooney, and Krista Thompson. Thanks also to Lauren Taylor and Darlene Jackson for their invaluable assistance in assembling and securing the image program.

To do so, it is useful to revisit a few of the key contentions that have guided my thinking about the vexed intersection of race and gender, Western "fine art" and black radical aesthetics today (Copeland 2019: 116-118). Over the last 20 years, those of us working in North America and Western Europe have witnessed an explosion of market, exhibitionary, and critical interest in the modes of black abstraction, such as Pindell's, that emerged in the 1960s and '70s. Of course, folks in the black U.S. art world and its institutions have been advocating for abstract work by African Americans for decades, arguably none more so than the Studio Museum in Harlem, whose inaugural exhibition in 1968 featured the light sculptures of Tom Lloyd, and which has gone on to consistently mount solo exhibitions of major African American abstractionists, Pindell included. The inimitable art historian and curator Kellie Jones would revisit these legacies in her important 2006 show *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964-1980*, which, in its turn, looked back to April Kingsley's pioneering 1980 exhibition *Afro-American Abstraction* at New York's P.S.1. Yet crucial as these interventions have been in raising the profiles of black abstract artists, they have tended—as Jones's title "Black Artists" *and* "Abstraction" suggests—to see black artistry and abstraction as terms in need of conjoining rather than of always already belonging together.

From one perspective, this makes a certain cultural sense: as literary critic Philip Brian Harper reminds us in his recent book *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture*, within certain circles, the black U.S. tradition is one that, as poet June Jordan noted in 1985, "abhors all abstraction."[2] For is not a form of abstraction key to those very processes of racialization and stereotyping—think Samboes, Mammies, and all their outrageous progeny—that have tended to render the visual what black feminist critic Michele Wallace (1990: 41) famously called "a negative scene of instruction", in which black folks are ceaselessly caricatured within the visual field at the same time that their contributions to modern artistic practice are rendered effectively invisible? Such processes have also, I think, profoundly impacted the cultural fates of black women, as the opening gambit of theorist Hortense Spillers's influential essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" begins to make clear:

> Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar", "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother", "Aunty", "Granny", "God's Holy Fool", a "Miss Ebony First", or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented (Spillers 1987: 65).

"The black woman", in other words, is culturally imagined and violently produced as a kind of *necessary abstraction*, without, however, being attributed capacities for abstract thought and mark-making despite the overwhelming evidence provided by her very survival, thereby crystallizing the seeming misfit between the racial and the non-objective.

Confronted with this impasse, writers aiming to think black being and abstraction have often resorted to approaches that seek out African diasporic referents buried within abstract visual languages, compare abstract painting to jazz in order to license

2 June Jordan 1985: 129, quoted in Philip Brian Harper 2015: 69.

its unfurling, or throw their hands up altogether in relying on the identity of the maker to solve the problem. Recently, Whitney Museum curator Adrienne Edwards has done vital work to address this problem by exploring the relation between chromatic and racial blackness in twentieth-century abstraction by artists on all sides of the color line (Edwards 2016). But how do we develop a language, a critical framework, for thinking the multifariously hued abstract work of black artists, male and female, that honors, to paraphrase the art historian Rosalind Krauss, these practitioners' careful work on the signifier?[3] How might we imagine the potentiality of abstraction as a site of political possibility for imagining the world otherwise, especially given that figurative work seems to more directly address the unfolding of black life?

II. Answering such questions is, in fact, the ostensible aim of critic Darby English's *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*. His book, it must be said, owes much to a 2004 article by photographer Dawoud Bey that demonstrated how mainstream aesthetic discourse has come to appreciate black artists as signs *of* diversity, while suppressing the diversity *of their practices*, with particularly deleterious consequences for work and thought on abstraction. For Bey, these consequences were, in fact, emblematized by the case of Pindell, whose scathing performance video *Free, White, and 21* of 1980 was critically lauded yet whose earlier works like *Dutch Wives* were effectively forgotten for decades. English's critical project ends up being quite different, but nonetheless instructive as it trades in a vulgar formalism of the sort in which the Yale-educated Pindell was trained and which still shapes many approaches to abstract art.[4] I thus want to spend a few moments laying out his argument before articulating my own, which both gives us other objects to see and, more fundamentally, I hope, furthers an understanding of what it might mean to look as a black feminist from a U.S. perspective.

In one sense, *1971* is a welcome and much-needed addition to the burgeoning art-historical literature on African American art of the 1960s and 70s, a discourse that has tended to focus on conceptual practice, performance, printmaking, and figurative painting, often with a political bent. Yet English's aim is not merely to recover color field painting; he holds out this art, perhaps above all, that of Peter Bradley and of his inspiration, the white artist Jules Olitski, as offering alternatives to the black nationalisms that, to English's mind, both saturated the cultural field and delimited imaginings of aesthetic and political possibility. As he put it, "by mobilizing modernism as a politics, these figures (and the experiments they factored into) illuminated the crisis of artistic freedom precipitated by the black liberation movement" (English 27). However, in order to critically advocate for the specialness of abstract art by black practitioners, English feels compelled not only to summarily dismiss his scholarly antecedents, from Jones to Ann Eden Gibson, who, by his lights, "appropriate abstract art to a racialist cause", but also to cherry-pick words and phrases from black artists, theorists, and art historians that suit his argument despite his warning to avoid "selective quotation" when engaging contemporaneous white critics.[5]

Most illustrative in this regard is English's engagement with the legendary American modernist critic Clement Greenberg, who worked alongside Bradley and an interracial cast of abstract artists to produce the DeLuxe Show in Houston, the subject of English's

3 Rosalind Krauss quoted in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, and Benjamin Buchloh, 1993: 9.
4 English's critical approach to the narration of black abstraction in 1971 is presaged by his "Review: Kobena Mercer, ed., *Discrepant Abstraction", caa.reviews*, October 7, 2008, http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/1171#.XFm1_C2ZPOQ. He makes clear his debt to Bey in "Darby English and David Breslin on *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*", January 9, 2017, https://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/516?series=45.
5 English, 2013; 7. See Ann Eden Gibson, 1991.

3rd chapter. While Greenberg never, to my knowledge, ever said a word in print about the work of an African American artist, he maintained friendly "relationships" with a number of black practitioners, including the Guyanese-British painter Frank Bowling. In fact, Greenberg's letters to Bowling were recently published by curator Okwui Enwezor and they vividly illustrate the complex logics of racialization at work in the critic's mind and in the culture at large, all of which English is at pains to suppress. Take this missive that Greenberg sent from Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) on December 10, 1975:

> That racist business. You too run over at the mouth…. Some people think I'm anti--Irish or anti-Anglo-Saxon or anti-Gentile or even anti-Jewish, not to mention being a male chauvinist. So I'm anti-black too. Well, I do delight in ethnic, racial, & sexual distinctions. Among them are the different smells: do you realize that Germans smell different from English, & Italians from French, & that they all smell different from Jews? And that Zulus smell different from blacks over here? It's not just respect to body odor but also breath. Also, domestic interiors smell different, as I'm sure you know, & it's always along ethnic or racial lines (1975: 232-233).

This is an incredibly strange text that is obviously worthy of further analysis; here, I want to call your attention to Greenberg's complex olfactory schema, which has all the trappings of a racist taxonomy of aesthetic discrimination. But smell, for Greenberg, is less "an index of character" than of cultural positioning within the socioeconomic field that then opens onto various subjective horizons of possibility as well as onto questions about the relation between the various senses in any act of aesthetic appraisal despite his public privileging of the optical above all in engaging works of art.[6]

Our eventual turn to Pindell will occasion an undoing of such racio-aesthetic schemas. Here, I simply want to note how English keeps his distance from such productive complications, especially those stemming from the dynamics of gender, to say nothing of modeling an intersectional approach to the manifestation of those dynamics in the aesthetic and cultural fields.[7] Thus, unsurprisingly, his narrative does not consider the ways that African diasporic women's cultural practices may inform, intersect with, or intervene within what he construes as the modernist tradition: while Alma Thomas is spared a few lines, English barely engages the work of black women abstract artists such as Pindell and Barbara Chase-Riboud. It must be said, however, that English is not alone in this regard; indeed, his oversight is itself symptomatic: in the historical recovery of black abstract artists, it is men and their formal innovations—Jack Whitten was painting with a squeegee years before Gerhard Richter, Artforum reminds us!—that have garnered the lion's share of interest both from critics and the market, since their practices can often be more easily mobilized to justify rather than challenge the modernist canon (Michelle Kuo 2012).

Now, thankfully, further work is being done to unearth, celebrate, and reframe the work of black women abstract artists One exhibition mounted in 2018 is particularly worthy of note: *Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*, curated by Erin Dziedzic and Melissa Messina for the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, a revelatory showing of work by twenty-one black women abstractionists, many of whom were being shown within a museum context for the very first time despite having active careers since the 1960s. These artists included

6 See *Clement Greenberg*, 1960, in Clement Greenberg 1986: 85-94.
7 On intersectionality, a critical approach developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s that centers black women given their structural positionality, see: Leslie McCall, 2013: 785-510.

figures such as Mildred Thompson, whose white-on-white relief constructions of found wood beg to be considered both in their own right and in relation to the white monochromes of the late Robert Ryman as well as to the black-on-black sculptural assemblages of the white artist Louise Nevelson (Dziedzic and Messina 2017).

This and other intergenerational exhibitions are welcome interventions, to be sure: they not only continue Gibson's work of righting the historical record in her 1997 book *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, but also expand what might be found at the intersection of blackness, the feminine, and the aesthetic (Gibson 1997). As such, the catalog accompanying *Magnetic Fields* tends to focus on historical overviews and biographical accountings, as is perhaps befitting a discourse still in various minds about itself: as Brent Hayes Edwards argued about the black anthologies of the 1930s that crisscrossed the Atlantic, such initiatives serve not so much to confirm as to found the traditions they ostensibly document, with all the risks of exclusion and simplification such a process entails (Edwards 2009: 44). Consider curator Valerie Cassel Oliver's essay in the *Magnetic Fields* catalogue, entitled "Kindred: Materializing Representation in the Abstract", which argues that black women abstract artists "have eschewed figuration to construct new visual languages around corporeal representation [aimed at] reconstitut[ing] the whole of blackness" (Cassel Oliver 2017: 50). These lines are wonderfully suggestive, and we shall return to them as well in order to explore how Cassel Oliver's conceptual framework might be further operationalized as black feminist praxis.

III. With this mapping of the discursive terrain in view, we have now arrived at the heart of the matter: what would it mean to develop a black feminist materialist approach to late-twentieth-century American abstraction—regardless of the identity of its maker—that pays heed to, indeed, takes its stance *from* an understanding of the political, ontological, and visual predication of African diasporic women in the modern world? Can we develop criteria of aesthetic evaluation based not on the achievements of an inherently racist, sexist, homophobic and patriarchal canon, but instead stemming from the assumption that—given the necessary imbrication of the formal and the social, the artwork and the world—the historical positionality of black women is uniquely situated to open onto the most radical of political and aesthetic commitments, whatever form that they might take? In cobbling together my own framework of analysis, which I am calling, for lack of a better phrase, black feminist materialist, I have found it useful to revise my own previous engagements with certain theoretical, artistic, and discursive touchstones, particularly those held out by African diasporic women's various forms of cultural practice. As perhaps goes without saying, within the history of the modern world, roughly from the 15th century to the present, no figure or site has been so constitutively and consistently excluded from the scope of the human and the universal than the black woman, whose unassimilability as an intellecting subject within the Western socius has rendered her, to repurpose a phrase from Slavoj Žižek, "*a universal singularity*", that one who is always already consigned to the out-outside.[8]

Of course, this presumption was already articulated in the Combahee River Collective's well-known "Black Feminist Statement" back in 1977:

> [W]e are not just trying to fight on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege

8 Here I follow James Bliss, 2015: 89; the quoted phrase derives from Slavoj Žižek, 2008: 17.

> to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any of these types of privilege may have….. We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our oppression would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.[9]

This freedom, of course, must be arrived at materially and discursively both in the art world and beyond given that the black female body has long functioned as the locus of what Spillers calls "a signifying property plus" within Western culture since the advent of transatlantic slavery (1987: 65). Her flesh everywhere riven, the fruits of her womb stolen, and her being reduced to a species of property, the female slave has been produced historically as a talking commodity whose shrieks of pain articulate the bases of modern capital, yet whose speech is rarely countenanced or heard.[10]

What's more, as literary scholar Tracy Sharpley-Whiting argues, "the black woman" remains subjected to optical regimes that would empty her of particularity and imprison her within an image conjured up by someone else and imposed from without (1999:10). It is no wonder, then, that black women cultural practitioners have time and again aimed both to expand our conceptualization of the visual and to play off other senses of it—the haptic, the sonic, and yes, even the olfactory, Clem!—in order to carve out spaces for some provisional autonomy given that the whole of the material world is potentially posed against them.[11] Such an understanding is central to Beckwith's essay "Body Optics: Howardena Pindell's Ways of Seeing", printed in the magisterial retrospective catalog she co-edited with Cassel Oliver and published in 2018:

> Visuality is obscured or deprivileged in Pindell's practice in order to foreground a somatic, or bodily, register for a work of art… [W]e are challenged to think about a racial arena whose first terms are not about *seeing* the black body, but rather about *feeling it out*. If from the late 1960s (when Pindell started her professional career) through to the present, a scopic mode of social and political engagement set the terms for thinking about bodies, then we should take a retrospective look at Pindell's oeuvre to see how her work, which deprivileges the very system of seeing, disrupts our models of how seeing, knowledge, and power operate (Beckwith 2018: 90).

Inimitably put. But Beckwith's approach has a much a longer history whose implications for our looking at modern and contemporary art we will further consider.

Just think back, as I have often done, to the ruse invented by an enslaved Harriet Jacobs and detailed in her astonishing narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: while hiding in her grandmother's attic for seven years*, just a stone's throw away from her erstwhile master's house, Jacobs nonetheless was able to send out letters, in her own hand, that were then ferried to locations across the eastern seaboard and mailed back to her grandmother where she knew her old master would intercept them. In so doing, she produced an illusion of herself elsewhere as a mobile free agent in order to preserve her bodily autonomy even though constrained in a space hardly larger than a coffin, a paradigmatic example of using a visual conceit to hold onto the actual self. Produced as a readymade, fantasized as a part-object, and forced

9 The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977), in Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith 1982: 18.
10 This line is culled from Huey Copeland, 2012: 210; its approach to the speech of the commodity is informed by Fred Moten, "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream" 2003: 1-24.
11 For further elaboration on this score, see Huey Copeland, 2010: 480-497.

to bodily enact her own "social death", Jacobs faced, and developed means of resistance, conditions whose structures anticipate much of what we take for granted as modernist aesthetic innovation.[12] Viewed in this light, the most vaunted achievements of the twentieth-century Euro-American avant-garde, from Marcel Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain* to Robert Morris's 1961 *Box for Standing*, cannot help but read as aestheticized rehashings of Jacobs's survival tactics, now enacted with uncanny objects in the gallery rather than upon fleshly things on the plantation (Jacobs 1987).

With Jacobs in mind and as model, we can begin putting these precepts into practice in relation to specific works emerging from the U.S. in the '60s and '70s that aimed to turn vision against itself, to disrupt the kinds of despotic scopic energies directed at black female bodies. The New York art world of that moment was witnessing what, to many, seemed to be the last gasps of late modernist abstraction, emblematized by the work of Olitski, Helen Frankenthaler, Frank Stella, and Kenneth Noland [Fig. 2]. Their work was advanced by Greenberg and his acolyte Michael Fried as a mode of Kantian immanent critique that saw the development of each medium, whether painting or poetry, as dependent upon its practitioners' ability to entrench themselves ever deeper in their area of competence and to excise all features not ontologically central to their chosen form. Thus, as we all know too well, painting needed to be flat, non-illusionistic, purely optical, its fullness and extent everywhere present, almost as if graspable within a single instant of perception.[13] Few artists better exemplify this mode of painting than Noland whose work the critic Leo Steinberg saw as possessing a "one-shot" efficiency aimed at a maximum speed of visual communication that he aligned with design technology (1975: 79).

Fig. 2 Kenneth Noland, *Shoot*, 1964, Acrylic on canvas, 103 3/4 x 126 3/4 in. (263.5 x 321.9 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum/Washington, DC/U.S.A. Purchase from the Vincent Melzac Collection through the Smithsonian Institution Collections Acquisition Program (1980.5.8). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC / Art Resource, NY © VAGA at ARS, NY

12 Harriet A. Jacobs, 1987; I borrow the notion of social death from Patterson, 1982.
13 Greenberg, "Modernist Painting"; Michael Fried, 1968: 116-47.

The mode of looking initially solicited by Noland's work, I want to say, is that produced and abetted by capital—advertising, logos, branding—but rooted, perhaps, in the viewing of black bodies as commodities trapped in the carapace of an invented racial blackness, an abstraction that prevented them from being seen as human, if at all. Taken together, what the rather idiosyncratic pairing of Sharpley-Whiting and Steinberg helps us to understand, is that the modes of looking that reduce a particular subject to a "black woman" and that allow for the apprehension of Noland's painting are undergirded by the same perceptual episteme and the same habits of looking. Vision is never neutral: it is necessarily overdetermined by the logics of race and gender; and it is a sort of implicitly biased "quick-seeing", I would argue, that a black feminist materialist optics often aims to travesty, since every work of art is a proposition—not only about what it is to see and be seen, but also about *how* we should look at that which appears before us both within and beyond the frame.

IV. With all of *this* said, let's now differently look at Pindell, Olitski and their contemporaries. Like English in at least this respect, in thinking the senior white artist's achievement I find myself indebted to the early work of Krauss, before *October*, the poststructuralist turn, and her necessary repudiation of Greenberg. In her catalogue essay for a 1968 Jules Olitski retrospective, she declared that his art questions the frontality of Western painting and as such must be seen obliquely, requiring the viewer to navigate it temporally and spatially [Fig. 3]. In a painting like *High A Yellow* (1973), for instance, the edges of the canvas declare themselves emphatically in order to delineate drawing from painting and to construct separate registers of seeing, the one immediate and cognitive, the other occurring only with focussed looking. In another picture, *Magic Number* (1969), the clear-cut margins induct us into the center of the painting by bringing our eyes and our bodies to its sides so that we can look across the surface and begin to understand its confounding logic: what appears to be a solid yellow field when viewed frontally is seen to be impregnated with green at an angle, as if the color were casting a shadow of itself (Krauss 1968).

Fig. 3 Jules Olitski, *High A Yellow*, 1967. Acrylic and vinyl paint on canvas. Overall: 89 1/2x 150 in. (227,3 x 381cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Inv.N.: 68.3

What Krauss gives us to see in Olitski, in other words, is no less than a painting both deeply corporeal and cunningly anamorphic. By these lights, his work's demand for oblique and bodily response, rather than mere optical/frontal attention, offers a compelling visual experience that for a moment might allow us to step outside our world of instant communication, racial, gendered or otherwise. In fact, the critical tide that would eventually damn Olitski to obscurity for decades was at least on one occasion openly articulated in ethnicizing and feminizing terms of taste. Here is one of the conservative critic Hilton Kramer's 1973 dismissals of the artist:

> The paintings to be sure, abound in pretty colors—the colors of sherbet and Indian saris and romantic sunsets—and thus have at times a certain decorative appeal. But it is the appeal of something superficial, something merely pretty. Beyond the prettiness of the color, one feels only the cold decisions and the mechanical calculations of an artist working to fulfill a narrow historical formula (Kramer, 1973: 25).

Olitski thus risked his work being seen as only decorative because it was at odds with the presumptions of the tradition that he was seen to extend; or, as Kramer's criticism implies, in following Greenberg's avant-gardist prescriptions so closely, Olitski had ended up, ironically, falling into an aesthetic of kitsch.[14]

Black artists working at the same moment, however, would explicitly draw upon other histories, encounters, and experiences that would enable them to disrupt quick-seeing in forwarding black feminist materialist practices variously trafficked in mainstream modernisms; the exigencies of life lived black in the United States; and, most important for my argument, African American women's traditions. In particular, I have in mind the stunning quilts, some still surviving from the 1920s, made by the community of women artists working for generations in Gee's Bend, Alabama, such as those of Martha Jane Pettway, whose daughter Joanna, also a quilter, describes the interleaving of life and work from which these world-making objects emerged [Fig. 4]:

> We were kind of a big family—seven sisters and five brothers. Back then we cut dresses to make quilts. Go to the field, pick cotton. Go to the gin, wrap it up, put the padding on the quilt. We just enjoyed it. This time of year, the cotton opens up. We pick cotton and go to quilting, after you finish with the cotton, you go back to quilting. All the time, something to do all the time. It isn't like it used to be. Used to have fun taking quilts from one house to the other one. Get out quilts down here, go up there, then go up that one. Quilt so many in a day. We're just sitting down thinking back about old times—how they do and what they do. And looking for days to come (Pettway 2022).

14 On the presumed foundational antagonism between the two terms, see Greenberg, 1961; for their vital recasting, see Clark, 1982.

Fig. 4 Martha Jane Pettway, *Center medallion strips with multiple borders and cornerstone,* n.d. © 2022 Estate of Martha Jane Pettway / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Cast in this light, the quilts come to us as vital modes of individuals' creative autonomy and as material evidence of how black women collectively aimed to disrupt the imposition of what political theorist Michael Hanchard defines as "racial time", in order to tend-toward-blackness, in the senses of both leaning into and caring for black beings.[15]

Most saliently, we might also see these quilts as ambitious modernist articulations, not only because they are made from scraps reconfigured into new patterns, but also because the very form of sociality that produced them represents a critical response, a haptic bulwark of safety, both against the cold nights and the terrors of modernity, which have time and again taken black flesh as its prime targets. These works are *necessary abstractions*, indeed, even if not "proper" ones: their hard-won aesthetic and material intelligence confound the West's production of the black woman and so enable a radical re-

15 "Racial time is defined as the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups." See Michael Hanchard, 1999: 220; Huey Copeland, 2016: 141-44.

consideration of artistic modernism as such. A proposition, then: if, as the social historian of art T.J. Clark argues, modernism goes with socialism, because the latter "occupies the real ground on which modernity could be described and opposed", then it is black women's resistive struggles that might be placed at the heart of the modernist enterprise since they, as the sisters of Combahee remind us, have had to oppose the constitution of the world *tout court* without even a proper politics to call their own (Clark, 1999: 7).

Indeed, the exigencies of this battle echo both formally and materially in subsequent artists' engagements with quilting and its structures. Doubtless, the most well-known example in this genealogy is Faith Ringgold's *Slave Rape* quilt series [Fig. 5], a group of figurative works begun in 1973 and sewn on fabric quilted by the artist's mother, fashion designer Willi Posey. If we pursue the more straightforwardly abstract, we could also look to a trio of male artists working around the same time. William T. Williams offers us a surface engagement that takes up the patterns of quiltmaking and transforms them into a kind of hard-edged abstraction quite legible to a Fried and his fans [Fig. 6]. Sam Gilliam's flirtation with quilting is also relevant if not so immediately apparent, leading him to twist and bend canvas as fabric, producing part-paintings/part-sculptures that, like the works of Eva Hesse, demand a slowed down corporeal time. Of African American male artists, Al Loving's engagement with quilting is perhaps deepest: he started his public career with hard-edged efforts, but, directly influenced by textile traditions, shifted to making works literally woven from the shreds of his own previous canvases, as if to eviscerate the very mode that brought him fame and to align himself with a black feminist material ethos [Fig. 7].

Fig. 5 Faith Ringgold, Help, *Slave Rape* series #15, 1973. © 2022 Faith Ringgold / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

Fig. 6 William T. Williams, *Trane*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 108 x 84 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Charles Cowles, New York 1981, 2.2

Fig. 7 Al Loving, *Square*, 1973-74. Mixed media on canvas, 93 x 93 inch (236,2 x 236,2 cm). Courtesy the Estate of Al Loving and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

Just as these male practitioners give us much to see and feel, I think the operative coordinates of black women's feminist materialism are productively charted by Fred Moten in his *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Building on the work of Spillers and Hartman, he roots that tradition in the experiences of enslaved women, so key to racial slavery and the "advances" that it made possible. For Moten, these women not only literally embody Marx's counterfactual notion in *Capital* of "if the commodity could speak…" but their resistance to becoming objects also shapes every form of black radical practice. In particular, he lights upon Adrian Piper's *Untitled Performance at Max's Kansas City*, in which the artist—with eyes blindfolded, hands covered, mouth closed, and nostrils pinched—aimed to produce herself as an object in an unwitting echo of the female slave's ontological status. What Piper's performance demands, for Moten, is precisely *not* the presumptions of formalist modernist criticism that posit the object as an autonomous form open to quick-seeing, but rather that emphasize the "holosensual, invaginatively ensemblic internal differentiation of the object" (Moten 2003: 235).

The phrase bears repeating: "holosensual, invaginatively ensemblic internal differentiation of the object". Which is to say, I think, that the work of art, not unlike the human body, is imagined to recruit all of the senses, to be a conjoining of disparate parts that fold in on themselves to produce a richly differentiated internal structure that demands a *feeling* out, to recall Beckwith, beyond the surface, the threshold at which a mere seeing of "the black woman" would stop and from which close looking can truly begin. Moten's phrase speaks beautifully, I think, to a whole range of works, including Pindell's, but perhaps most directly to the relief sculptures of Chase-Riboud, particularly her now 20-piece series, begun in 1968, in homage to Malcolm X [Fig. 8]. These works suggest a logic of invagination, of a woven and worked object folding into itself, but now activated to provide testament to the internal complexities of the great black nationalist leader, often imagined as an icon of black masculinism, but whom, as we know now, was more than a little queer and much more complex in his vexed positions than he is often given credit for.

Fig. 8 Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Malcolm X #3*, 1969. Polished cast bronze with spun artificial silk and mercerized Egyptian cotton, 8 feet 6 ½ inches x 3 feet 1 inches x 2 feet 8 inches (260,4 x 94 x 81,3 cm). © Barbara Chase-Riboud. Collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art

While Pindell's work of the 1980s would later explicitly turn to African and diasporic modes of production, her early work also manifests, I think, a black feminist materialist approach in its very facture and production. Her paintings are made up of quilted squares, each covered with those tiny hole punches that are meticulously glued to canvas, creating a multiplicity of views that cannot be held all at once. What's more Pindell occasionally sprinkled her canvases with glitter and sprayed them with perfume, creating a richly olfactory experience that not only crosswired the senses to expand what it means to look, but that also brought the base world of smells into the elevated realm of painting, which becomes a surrogate and emblem for the being of blackness in the social world however unseen or unfelt.

Pindell's choice to use those hole punches, however, is perhaps the most telling: she settled on the circular form while working as a curator in the Prints and Drawings department at New York's Museum of Modern Art between 1977 and 1980 as the requisite office supplies were easily available. This material choice was actually inspired by the artist's memories of traveling with her family in the segregated South: glasses to be used by black people were marked on their bottoms with red circles so that they would never touch white lips. Pindell thus takes a basic form that has been coded as racist, materially rediscovers it in her alienating workplace, and then makes it over into a building block for a mode of abstraction that both refutes the kind of seeing required of segregationist logic and that provides a means of reinvestment in her own life and practice.

Pindell's work, in other words, like each of the "late modernist" practices we've considered, differentially aims to *détourne* vision, to direct us back to the past of modern art and civil conflict, and to bring the black woman into the picture without her having to be there yet again as a site of surveillance and extraction. For is not any evocation of "the black woman" a necessary abstraction that can only asymptotically address the complexities of African diasporic women's lived experiences? Taken together, these works, following Cassel Oliver, point us to the whole of blackness without, however, hoping to contain them all. In embracing fragments, and often quite literally weaving them together, such works differently teach us how to look at "the black woman", "modern art", and maybe even ourselves.

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Racial Indeterminacy and Afro-Latin American Art: The Case of Antonio Argudín Chon

Cary Aileen García Yero

Antonio Argudín Chon was a Cuban painter and sculptor who regularly contributed to the visual arts scene of Havana during the 1940s-1960s. He exhibited in the most important art centers of the nation, and his pieces were selected as part of the most significant visual art events of this period, such as the Exposiciones Nacionales held by the Ministerio de Educación.[1] Despite his contributions, Argudín Chon's art has been largely forgotten.[2] The only institution that houses some of his paintings is located far away from his home country: The Bromer Art Collection in Switzerland. Bromer's curators found Argudín Chon's artworks accidentally in 2016 when they were visiting the art depot of Cuban art collector Roniel Fernández, whose father was a friend of Argudín Chon. Argudín Chon's canvases – nineteen of them – had been stored unnoticed for years in Fernández's depot.[3]

Argudín Chon created a unique visual language based on a combination of cubist and pointillist styles and the use of a wide colorful palette. He often combined bright reds, blues, greens, and yellows, and arranged them in circular or curved shapes that tended to create a sort of 'wave effect' around the figures that he represented, each repeated wave encapsulating a different contrasting color. This wave effect marked many of his imagery, infusing them with meaning and vitality. Thematically, his paintings reveal a deep concern with issues of race and nation. They involve representations of blackness, *mestizaje*, working class life, and issues of integration (which was the term most commonly used by the Afro-Cuban communities at the time to demand inclusion in the life of the nation) and racial equality.[4] Much of his output, I argue, could be organized as follows: 1) Paintings that engage in representations of blackness through recreations of people of color. 2) Paintings that articulate ideals of racial harmony, including notions of racial fraternity, the problematic ideology that underpinned Cuban political and social life since the late 19th Century, which argued that black and white Cubans are united as equal members of the nation.[5]

1 See catalogues of the IV Exposición Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado, and the VI Salón Nacional de Pintura y Escultura, Capitolio Nacional. Archive of the Cuban Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA) Catalogue boxes, years 1950, 1953

2 José Veiga mentions some of the exhibitions where Argudín Chon participated and the titles of some works (Veigas, 2004.) There is also a page in EcuRed that repeats the information given by Veigas. https://www.ecured.cu/Antonio_Argud%C3%ADn_Chon. Last accessed January 31, 2022.

3 I thank the Bromer Art Collection for their support for this research. All of Argudín Chon's images of paintings presented here are copies that the Bromer Art Collection provided me with.

4 See the Afro-Cuban press of the 1940s-1950s such as journals *Nuevos Rumbos, Amanecer,* and *Atenas*.

5 Scholars have explained how ideologies of racial harmony worked ambiguously, as they could be mobilized by different sectors of society to argue that racial equality had been achieved and thus to silence racism and to help perpetuate racial inequality. However, the ideal of racial harmony could be mobilized by African descendants and other antiracist groups to make demands on the state, denouncing racism in society that promised yet did not deliver racial equality. As scholars such as Alejandro de la Fuente, Paulina Alberto, and others have shown, these ideologies have played a key role in Afro-descendant antiracist activism across Latin America during the period of this study. See de la Fuente 2001; Alberto 2011.

His particular visual language provided the basis for many of his recreations of race-related issues. Take, for instance, his *Musician* (1951, fig. 1), where he presents a black *rumbero* playing conga drums. We can imagine the musician being at a *carnaval* or similar collective performance, as his ornamented cloths suggest that he is part of a staged show and not of a spontaneous community dance (see the adorned shirt with ruffle sleeves traditional of staged rumba performances, and the elegant high heel shoes). The musician looks attentively to his instrument, concentrating on his playing skills. His serious expression, presented through well-defined facial features, suggests that he took his job as a performer seriously. Argudín Chon gives particular attention to the drums, which were already at that time understood as central to the contributions of Afro-Cubans to the nation's culture. He situates the drums as the center of the piece, exalting them with colorful patters and circular adornments.

Fig. 1 *Musician*, 1951, oil on jute, 99 x 84 cm . Courtesy Bromer Art Collection, Switzerland

The artist appears to use the composition of the image to elevate black culture with a sense of splendor and bounty. He assembles a wide palette of bright colors to display a striking vitality both within as well as emanating from the performer and his drums. He brings his signature style, constructing the circular shapes arran-

ged this time as if they were waves of energy originating from the performer, creating an aura of colorful rainbow-like brightness radiating from him. The painting suggests black performance as a giving force that spreads out and inundates its surroundings, offering an alternative pictorial statement that brings beauty to what had been historically discriminated Afro-Cuban traditions.

While Argudín Chon's art is provocative on questions of race, the racial identification of the artist is much harder to determine. Little has been written about Argudín Chon's life – he is unknown to even some of the most prominent experts of Cuban art today –, and the archival record provides us with very little cues. Due to Argudín Chon's thematic concerns, it would be tempting to imagine that the artist was of African descent. Yet one ought not to assume black ancestry because of his interest in race and Afro-Cuban life: During his time, it was not uncommon for white Cuban artists to work on Afro-Cuban representation. Moreover, scholars have already pointed out the dangers in presuming the primacy of race as a category of analysis within back artistic production. They have argued for the need to question common expectations that certain racialized artists should produce particular kinds of art – what T. Carlis Roberts has called *body-culture determinism*.[6] In the words of contemporary Haitian artist Mildor Chevalier, "there is the limiting expectations that Afro-descendent and Caribbean artists work within certain specific themes."[7] Freedom for Afro-descendant artists should mean not having the creative process be contrived by any particular symbols or cultural codes. Hence the importance of aiming to understand artists in their own terms, without fitting them into prescribed categories of race and nation.

The case of Argudín Chon's undetermined racial identity presents a common problem in studies of Afro-Latin American art; the field often researches artists on whom there is little information, art that is hard to trace, in efforts to recover the contributions of Afro-Latin Americans to the hemisphere's art histories.[8] The question of racial identification is particularly challenging within the regional context where racial identities can be deeply uncertain, malleable, and conjunctural, as several scholars have explained.[9] In the case of Argudín Chon, his art called my attention several years ago when I was researching for my dissertation on race and the arts in Cuba during the Second Republic (1940-1959), due to his attention to the question of race. I suspected the possibility of him having African ancestry because he shared the last name with a well-known Afro-Cuban painter, Pastor Argudín, with whom Antonio worked closely for many years at the Círculo de Bellas Artes, one of Cuba's most important visual art centers during the Republican period. Captivated by his creative output and rattled by the silence on his figure within Cuban art histories, I furthered my investigation on him and his art.

My research concluded that, on the question of Argudín Chon's racial identification, I could go only as far as describing it as ambiguous (fig. 2). The few records available suggest that Argudín Chon had Asian ancestry: Chon is a very common last-name of Asian origin, which most likely reached the island during the migra-

6 T. Roberts, 2016; Kobena Mercer, 2013; Stephanie Noah, Forthcoming, 2022.
7 Mildor Chevalier in Artists Talk 5: Conversaciones Sobre el Camino de Aprendizaje de los Artistas. https://darryl-chappellfoundation.org/artists-talk/ Accessed Nov. 16, 2021.
8 For an analysis on the emergence and objectives of the field of Afro-Latin American Arts, see Alejandro de la Fuente, 2018.
9 See Joanne Rappapport, 2014; Matthew Restall, 2013; Rachel O'Toole, 2012.

tion of Chinese laborers to Cuba during the 19th century. A document with his birth information also confirms that his grandparents were born in "Asia.". Regarding his possible African ancestry, a picture available suggests that he could have been identified as a light-skin *mulato*. In fact, people who knew him or knew of him also identified him as *mulato*, "darker than Nicolás Guillén" (renowned Afro-Cuban poet, famous for his writings on race and *mestizaje*), or as *mestizo* "like a Mexican".[10] However, it seems that Argudín Chon used the malleability of race within the Cuban context to identify at times as white: A health document from the Ministry of Sanitation and Social Assistance signed by the artist describes him with a "B", from the color *blanco*. Like many non-white Latin Americans who strove to climb the social ladder of their racist societies, Argudín Chon might have downplayed – sometimes completely hid – his possible African ancestry in an effort to access the social capital associated with whiteness.

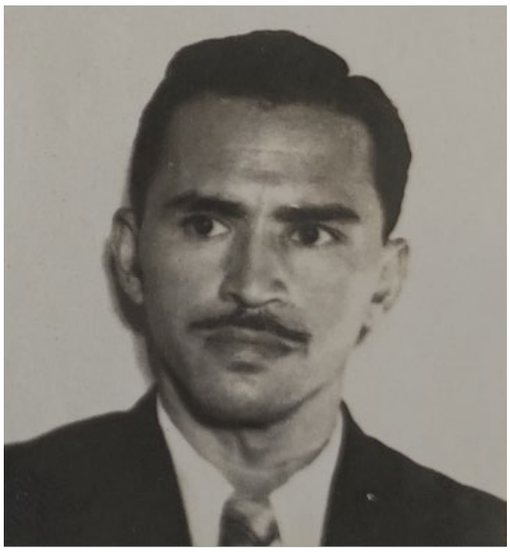

Fig. 2 Antonio Argudín Chon, photographer unknown, n.d. Photo taken from a San Alejandro Course Registration Document, 1954. Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro's Archive, Registro de Graduados de Escultura, Folder 14

However, despite the indeterminate nature of Argudín Chon's racial background, this article asserts the value of his life and output to the field of Afro-Latin American arts for several reasons. First, whether the artist embraced his possible African roots or not, he still had to deal with racial inscription as non-white - *mulato/mestizo*. Second, Argudín Chon's apparent efforts at "passing", that is, playing with a racially ambiguous identity that could be labeled as white for particular social purposes, are a common experience within the region's racial dynamics.[11] The widespread occurrence of such experience indicates the importance of its study on the specific question of its relation to artistic production. The stakes of claiming non-white racially ambiguous artists like Argudín Chon as part the field of Afro-Latin American art are high; they make the field more open and attentive to an important dimension of race in the Americas – that is, dealing with racial indeterminacy itself.

Thinking methodologically about the problem of racial indeterminacy prompts meaningful yet difficult questions. One might interrogate how the experience of a racial ambiguous identity and/or "passing" might shape the life of the artists and

10 Conversations with artist Lesbia Vent Dumois, who knew Argudín Chon (interviewed February 20, 2022), with Jorge Luis Chirino, art collector who used to own photographs of the artist.
11 Degler, 1971; Telles, 2014.

of their art; what counts a racially ambiguous art, and how can we make that determination and interpret its social dimensions, especially when so often there are little archival materials available to work with. These queries lead to other questions that are at the core of the field of Afro-Latin American art: How to deal with archival silences, who/what is Afro-Latin American/art, and what counts as antiracist activism through art in the region.

This article zooms into the life and art of Argudín Chon to explore some of these questions, identifying a productive contradiction between his identification as white, him being identified by others as non-white, and his subtly antiracist creative output.[12] This could suggest an internal conflict within the artist over the impulse to gain the social capital associated with whiteness on the one hand, and his drive to advocate for racial inclusion through art on the other. His resorting to art as his way of dealing with his own concerns about race relations and inequality – concerns that might have been triggered by his own experience of racial inscription as non-white, while masking his racial background – confirm the importance of individual artistic expression for addressing problems of race. The contradictory dynamics between Argudín Chon's engagement with race issues and his racially ambiguous identity seems to have shaped his art production. For instance, several of Argudín Chon's paintings that engage with recreations of people of color oscillate between working with and transcending white stereotypes of Afro-Cubans. Indeed, some might interpret Argudín Chon's output as an echo of the production of white "folklorist" artists of the time, who often represented Afro-Cubans in exotic ways, usually as conga or *carnaval* dancers or musicians. Like many white painters, Argudín Chon played with these widespread folklorist tropes, given his recurrent representations of Afro-Cubans dancing and drumming. Perhaps this was one of the ways in which he, consciously or not, acted "white." However, as it will be further explained, his creations went far beyond and challenged the stereotype, subtly infusing Afro-Cuban performance with power, beauty, and inherent value.

Most importantly, bringing attention to and trying to determine Argudín Chon's racial identification leads us to on one of the field's most difficult conundrums. As our scholarship inevitably participates in the making of categories of race and difference, a latent question that remains is: How to create a scholarship that is largely built on socially constructed racial distinction and the affirmation of racial differentiation without further embedding social rift; the recognition that while denying and silencing racism nurtures racial inequalities, upholding racial distinctions could maintain entrenched social division. The art of Argudín Chon addresses this tension, creating a discourse that celebrates diversity, promotes equality, and insists on our shared humanity. His art evokes the ideal – not the myth, but the ideal (to borrow from Alejandro de la Fuente) – that societies move forward on issues of race mainly through joint interracial action. His paintings celebrate interracial working-class labor, friendship, leisure, and the pursuit of freedom, while advocating for racial equality and the beauty of blackness. His art invites the viewer to imagine utopian moments of life where race is not a driver of social tension; it invites us to hold on to the ideal of social union.

12 I understand antiracism here broadly, defining it as discourses and practices that counter antiblack prejudice and that assert and disseminate principles of racial equality, in this case via visual arts.

Antonio Argudín Chon's Life and Work: What the Archives Provide

The silences in the archives make writing a history of the life and output of artists such as Argudín Chon elusive. To my knowledge, there are no collections dedicated to him in the archives of major Cuban art institutions (such as the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes), nor in foreign institutions that are dedicated to Cuban arts (such as Cernuda Arts or the Cuban Heritage Collection, both in Miami). Since little has been preserved of Argudín Chon's work, the labor of recovery becomes particularly challenging. The resources that are currently available on the artist are a series of collective exhibition catalogues, some of his paintings, and a few documents found in a small student file at the archive of the San Alejandro National Visual Arts School. This file includes course registrations, grades, a document resembling a birth certificate and two health documents required by the school registry.[13] With few personal documents, no personal writings, correspondence, or other similar sources, this article therefore reads Argudín Chon's paintings as a method for what cannot be found in such documents.

To deal with archival absences, historians have departed from traditional methodologies to fill the gaps in the archival evidence. Ximena Gómez and Kevin Coleman suggest "imagining" as a way to "restore the potentiality of the archive and the contingency of history"; imagining as a way to reveal the possible actions and strategies occurring within the confines of society's standards; actions that could have gone unperceived and unrecorded by the powers building the archives.[14] Other scholars such as Tamara Walker note the inadequacies of employing only one method or type of source, suggesting instead using the combination of different methods and materials for historical analyses of the visual.[15] I build from their suggestions, approaching these sources in an exercise of deduction to excavate information mainly from extrapolation – or what I like to call, reasoning from the silences. Within the discipline of history, I find microhistory's objective of making the silences in the sources a key part of the historical account very helpful.[16] This study therefore blends traditional art history methods such as formal and social analyses, with microhistory's goal of highlighting and integrating the doubts, hypotheses, and the difficulties in doing the research, as part of the historical narrative. It embraces the limitations of the archives as a way to deal with the uncertainties of writing the histories of racially ambiguous non-white artists like Argudín Chon.

The Catalogues

Within the boxes of catalogues from the years 1935-1967 found at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes's archive during the research performed in 2016, I found twenty-nine catalogues of collective exhibitions hosting Argudín Chon's art. (I have found no catalogues of individual exhibitions of the artist.) These sources include limited data such as the name and format of the piece, sometimes its

13 Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro's Archive, Registro de Graduados de Escultura, Folder 14.
14 Kevin Coleman, 2015: 119; Ximena. Gómez, 2019: 41.
15 Tamara Walker 2017: 5-6.
16 For recent scholarship on Afro-Latin America that uses microhistory: Scott, Rebecca and Jean Hébrard 2012.

photo. They offer no information on the racial identity of the artist. The omission of racial identifiers in institutional documentation at the time was not uncommon: In a country that was shaped by conflicting ideologies of racial harmony that were aspirational of racial transcendence – to the making of citizens that ought to be more than black, more than white, but Cuban – race was often downplayed in institutional communication, including that of art institutions.[17] Nevertheless, the catalogues, complemented with the documents found in San Alejandro, situate Argudín Chon's work among that of his contemporaries, helping understand the historical context within which the artist worked.[18]

One catalogue in particular offers a short biographical paragraph on the artist, which can be corroborated with the help of his birth certification document. Thus, we know that Antonio Tobias Cristobal Argudín Chon was born in Havana on November 2nd 1910, only eight years after Cuba had become a Republic under the shadow of US hegemony. We don't have data about the social conditions of his childhood, nor about his parents, Marco Felipe Argudín y Lombillo and Marcelina Isidora Chon y Cabarruiz. Yet we could imagine that he grew up in an environment that was appreciative of art-making and conducive to his artistic development. Argudín Chon studied visual arts at the National Visual Arts Academy San Alejandro between 1927-1931, and between 1952-1955, graduating as Professor of Drawing and Modeling in 1955. Like many of his contemporaries, he mobilized the knowledge that he gained there to explore international art currents, settling by the 1940s on a distinctive style influenced by pointillism and cubism (discussed below). Education was an important part of his professional life. He worked during the 1940s as an Elementary Education Teacher (Maestro de Instrucción Primaria) in rural schools, most likely around the province of Camaguey. There he helped build the main city's Rincón Martiano in celebration of José Martí, the nation's independence hero who forged Cuba's ideology of racial fraternity. The Cuban countryside was plagued by poverty and had the highest numbers of illiteracy in the island (McGillivray, 2009). Argudín Chon's vocation as an educator working in very humble regions seems congruent with the egalitarian ideals that his art reveals. Beside his visual art learnings, Argudín Chon might have pursued the highest level of academic achievement – by the late 1950s he was entering his name in the exhibition catalogues as Dr. Antonio Argudín Chon.[19] He could have embraced attitudes that valued education as key to the pursuit of racial equality and inclusion that were widespread within Afro-Cuban communities.

The catalogues also give us a glimpse of the career development of Argudín Chon. The first exhibition that he is known to participate was the 1933 Salón Annual of the Círculo de Bellas Artes (CBA), when he was twenty-three years old. He exhibited frequently in the CBA's Salones Anuales,[20] as well as in the government-led National

17 For instance, none of Argudín Chon's registration documents found at the San Alejandro archive include data on race. As mentioned earlier, the only document that included data on race found in the San Alejandro file was a health document.

18 Archive MNBA, Catalogue Boxes Fondo Cuba Years 1934-1968.

19 Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro's Archive, Registro de Graduados de Escultura, Folder #14. Catalogue, III Exposición Nacional de Pintura y Escultura Capitolio Nacional, Dirección de Cultura, 1946; Catalogue Exposición de Pintura Tercer Salón de Otoño, Círculo De Bellas Artes, Noviembre 1959; Catalogue 40 Salón de Bellas Artes, Círculo de Bellas Artes, 1959. Catalogue Box 1946; 1959 Archive of Cuba's MNBA. Catalogue.

20 Círculo de Bellas Artes de la Habana Salones Anuales: 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1940, 1941, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1956, 1958, 1959, 1965; Circulo de Bellas Artes de la Habana Salones de Otoño: 1957, 1959. See note 14, and Veigas 2004.

Exhibitions organized by the General Directorate on Culture (DGC).[21] Through the catalogues we can also map the wide institutional network that Argudín Chon built: His works were selected by the Instituto Cultural Cubano Español to participate in the Exposición Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte (Madrid 1951, Havana 1954, Barcelona 1956). He was also connected to nationwide visual art centers such as the Colegio Municipal de Profesores de Dibujo y Pintura y Dibujo y Modelado de Santiago de Cuba (1956), and the Patronato de las Artes Plásticas of the Gran Templo Nacional Masónico (1960). He was member of the Grupo de Afirmación y Divulgación del Arte Cubano between 1953-54. If the period from 1941-1946 seems be a low phase in the artist's production, the 1950s were his most active years, in term of quantity of works created and exhibited, and also in terms of conceptual development – it was then when he matured into what became his signature pictorial style. After the 1959 Revolution, Argudín Chon joined the Taller Experimental de la Gráfica (TEG). Formed in 1962, the TEG aimed to promote forms of art such as lithography, which had a long popular tradition and that were considered to be more democratic by cultural policymakers. His involvement in the Taller, as well as in events such as the 1968 Salón Provincial Guerrillero Heróico at Galería La Rampa in honor of Ernesto Guevara point to Argudín Chon's possible support for the Revolution. His support would align with that of the Cuban black communities: The revolutionary regime had its strongest backing among the Afro-Cuban population, which constituted a large part of the working-class sectors and benefited the most by the Revolution's egalitarian policies.[22]

While Argudín Chon was involved within different art organizations, the institution that he was closest to was the CBA. He continued exhibiting there throughout the 1960s: The latest CBA Salón Annual where he appears is that of 1965; the institution closed its doors in 1968. Argudín Chon also contributed to the CBA administrative functions, starting as a "socio en activoe" (active member) in 1947. By 1950, he was part of the CBA Board of Governance as vice-librarian, and between 1951-1953 as main librarian. The CBA community held his work in high regard: Not only he was awarded Honorary Mentions in the Salones Anuales of 1946 and 1947, but his pieces were also often selected to be part of the catalogues' imagery that represented the best of the CBA exhibitions.[23]

Argudín Chon's dynamic association with the CBA is peculiar, however. Even though some vanguardist artists exhibited with the institution particularly before the mid-1940s, the CBA was viewed as the foremost conservative stronghold, aligned with the Academy and its 19th Century European realist or impressionistic aesthetics. Thus, Argudín Chon's pictorial style, which was closer to 20th century vanguardist currents, appears as out of place among the displays of the CBA catalogues. It is not clear why the artist gravitated to the academic environment instead of that of the vanguardist circles. It is also intriguing that the artist never joined the abstractionist turn that took over the Cuban avant-gardes during the 1950s. While we don't know how Argudín Chon identified racially or was racially identified by others within the space of the CBA, we do know that the so-called conservative

21 National Exhibitions organized by the Ministry of Education General Directorate on Culture: 1935, 1946, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1956. Ibid.

22 By 1962, 70 % of workers supported the revolution; 80% of black workers supported it (de la Fuente, 2001: 276, note 18).

23 The CBA catalogues include photos of Argudín Chon's pieces in the Salones Anuales of 1940, 1941, 1947, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1956. See note 18.

CBA was a multiracial site that housed the majority of the Afro-Cuban artists of the period. Most of them, like Argudín Chon, remained working within a strong figurative tradition that might have been perceived as dated at the time.[24] Afro-Cuban Academicists such as Ramón Loy, Florencio Gelabert, Emilio Rivero Merlín, Pastor Argudín, and Nicasio Aguirre had their institutional home at the CBA. The center was also the institutional base of Afro-Cuban artist Teodoro Ramos Blanco, who was often associated with the Vanguardia. So was Uver Solís, who was supported by the CBA in the 1950s. Therefore, it is possible that Argudín Chon's close alliance with the CBA might have been in part related to the somewhat multiracially inclusive environment of the institution.

Beside some personal, professional, and institutional information, the catalogues offer limited evidence on the political worldviews of the artist. Nevertheless, one can find hints in the titles of the pieces recorded. While several titles appear to be descriptive, such as *A la luz de la luna* (c. 1935), *Marina* (óleo, c. 1947), *Paisaje Camagüeyano* (acuarela, c. 1952), other titles suggest Argudín Chon's engagement with social issues of class: *Trabajo* (óleo c. 1947), E*l fundamento social* (oleo c. 1951); issues of race and nation-making: *Los inmortales del machete* (óleo 1951), *Euritmia Cubensis* (oleo 1948); and an interest in Afro-Cuban cultural expression: *Rumbeando* (oleo c. 1951), *Carnaval* (c. 1957). These socio-political concerns cut through the pictorial content of the imagery available, to which the next section is dedicated.

The Paintings

Unlike other visual artists of his time, such as Afro-Cubans Teodoro Ramos Blanco and Ramón Loy, Argudín Chon was not outspoken about his art. To our knowledge, he did not write for contemporary publications about the meanings of his paintings and how they fit within the hemisphere's artistic production and Cuban society at large. Consequently, it is difficult to grasp with certainty the motivations behind Argudín Chon's creativity. His remaining artworks are the most illuminating sources available to access the possible worldviews that drove his output as he contributed to his community. Currently, I have found images of twenty-eight of Argudín Chon's pieces (twenty-five paintings and three sculptures). Given the predominance of paintings over the sculptures available, the analysis here focuses only on the paintings. These are mostly oil paintings, for which the artist often used a blend of European-influenced pointillist and cubist styles.

As mentioned in the introduction, Argudín Chon's artworks reveal a deep concern with issues of race and nation. Many of his works could be organized in two groups: paintings that involve representations of blackness through recreations of people of color, and paintings that articulate ideals of racial harmony, particularly racial fraternity. The available works that recreate Afro-Cuban life were mainly produced prior to 1959. While it is possible that Argudín Chon might have continued to paint artworks engaged with representations of blackness after this date, it is not incongruous that he was more prolific on this theme prior to the 1959 Revolution. As

24 The main exceptions being Guido Llinás, Agustín Cárdenas, Wifredo Lam, and Roberto Diago.

scholars of race and the Cuban revolution have explained, the threats to the young revolutionary government from inside and outside the island demanded a strong sense of national unity, and from the early years, discourse on race began to be perceived as divisive. In late 1960, after the implementation of a top-down antiracism campaign that addressed structural racism, Fidel Castro prematurely declared Cuba a territory free of racism. After that, debates about racial inequality were increasingly associated with counterrevolution, and after 1962 debates about race and inequality were largely silenced. This might have disincentivized Argudín Chon to construct what could have been perceived as dangerous notions of black autonomy. (Black clubs were closed in the early 1960s and the Afro-Cuban intellectuals that demanded black power, such as Walterio Carbonell and Carlos Moore, were repressed or driven into exile.)[25]

As mentioned before, Argudín Chon's presentations of Afro-Cubans reproduce in some ways recurrent pictorial tropes of the period produced by several white artists who usually imagined Afro-Latin Americans in exoticizing ways predominantly connected to music and dance. This problematic imagery often depicts people of color as sensual, in tranced states as they danced to drums in primitivist fashion, negatively associating their cultural practices to over-sexuality, debauchery, and/or atavism.[26] To illustrate, two examples of many by two recognized painters of the time, Mario Carreño and Concha Ferrant.[27] Mario Carreño's *Cuba Libre* (1945, fig. 3) recreates a group of Afro-Cubans gathered in the woods playing drums, guitar, maracas, singing into the night. They are presented as bushmen, removed from notions of civilization. Their salvage-like appearance is fabricated through the depiction of half-naked distorted bodies covered barely by loincloths; instead of adornments their seemingly translucent bodies expose lines resembling bones and/or scars. Undefined facial features suggest the men in animalesque fashion; some howl to the moon while forming a circle around a rooster that appears in the center of the image, as if dancing with the men. There is no subtlety nor detail in their portrayal – the Picasso-influenced lines appear brusque and contorted. The nocturnal nature of the event and its seemingly isolated setting suggests its secreted nature and its inappropriateness for public 'modern' life. In turn, Concha Ferrant's *Rumba Caliente* (c. 1945, fig. 4) presents a woman of color dancing as if in trance. It was common at the time to represent African-descendant women naked or partly naked, often exposing their breast. Ferrant's image follows that trend, alluding to the availability of the dark female body. The lack of cloths, compounded with the disorderly hair and the painted face in primitivist style separates the woman from contemporary ideas of civilization and rational behavior. While exposed, the female body does not seem necessarily celebrated nor represented as beautiful: The contorted pose and the fussiness of the composition gives a sense of uncontrollability and instability to the image.

25 De la Fuente, 2001; Devyn Benson, 2016.

26 For Cuba, see Martínez, 1994: 75-90; García Yero, 2020: Chapter 3. For Latin America in general, see artworks by Enrique Grau (*Mulata Cartagenera*) in Colombia, Pedro Figari's representations of Candomble in Uruguay, Emiliano di Cavalganti's representations of Samba in Brasil, Jaime Colson's Merengue in the Dominican Republic, the work of Eduardo Abela and Jaime Walls in Cuba, among others. For more examples, for Argentina, see Alberto 2022; for Mexico, see Walker 2021; Ades 2010; de la Fuente, 2018, 381.

27 Images taken from Fernández Torna, 2012 : 154 ; Concha Ferrant, *Rumba Caliente*, Sociedad Nacional de Bellas Artes, Salón de Primavera, 1945. Arquive MNBA, box 1945.

Fig. 3 Mario Carreño, *Cuba Libre*, 1945, gouache on paper, 21 3⁄4 x 20 in. (55.2 x 50.7 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum

Fig. 4. Concha Ferrant, (c. 1945) *Rumba Caliente*. Catalogue Salón de Primavera, 1945, Sociedad Nacional de Bellas Artes, Archive MNBA, Box 1945. Author's photo.

Several of Argudín Chon's paintings, such as *Musician* (1951), described in the introduction), *Musicians* (1957), *Music Fest* (1956, fig. 5) *Dancers* (1957), among others, echo white folklorist patterns of recreating black people involved in music and dancing. Yet while Argudín Chon enters in conversation with these forms of representations, he does it in subtly different ways, creating alternative visions

to the widespread stereotype of the black hedonist exotic drummer/dancer. As the description of *Musician* (1951) shows in the introduction, his subjects are elegantly dressed and in control, as opposed to naked or dressed in rags. Their poses express assertiveness, not atavistic and irrational behavior. His signature wave effect and his colorful patterns infuse grandeur and force to Afro-Cuban cultural practices. Presented as beautiful and valuable, instead of as savage-like and dangerous, the imagery could work as pictorial statements in support of the cultural relevance of Afro-Cubans to national life.

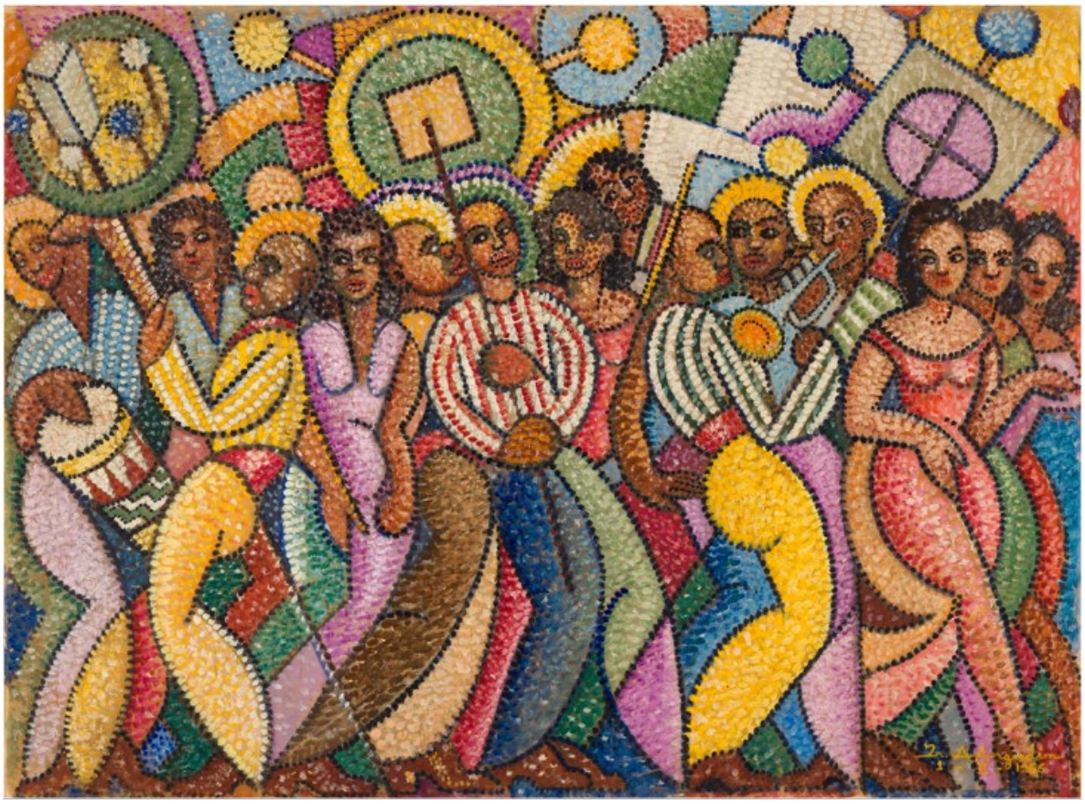

Fig. 5 *Music Fest*, 1956, oil on canvas, 74 x 102 cm. Credit: Courtesy Bromer Art Collection, Switzerland

Argudín Chon's paintings of black musical practices also express anxieties about racial otherness. Take *Music Fest* (1956), which presents Afro-Cuban life by recreating a group of African-descendants participating in what seems to be a *comparsa*, given the use of the *farolas*[28] and the attire of the group members. They dress stylishly in lively tones; the women wear beautiful dresses and have their hairs elegantly arranged. Some of the men carry the *farolas*, while others play the conga drums and the trumpet, instruments that are widely used by *comparsa* groups. Like with *Musician*, Argudín Chon presents the fashionable ensemble using a bright combination of tints: The accents of the yellows in the background and as part of the sartorial composition brings luminosity to the image. These, combined with the reds, greens, and blue that predominate, infuse the black performance with energy and a perceived sense of strength.

However, what may appear at first sight to be a joyful occasion might have underneath different connotations. *Carnaval* performances usually involved smi-

28 *Comparsa*: carnival troupe; *farolas*: carnival lanterns.

ling, laughing, singing, transmitting the festive spirit of the *comparsas*. Yet none of the participants fulfil this performative expectation. Argudín Chon creates a line of eyes where the performers look around or at each other, exchanging uncomfortable gazes as if suspicious, wary of being observed by the spectators. Instead of presenting them in trace or lost in performance, as white representations of Afro-Cubans usually did, Argudín Chon's performers seem to transmit a feeling of concern, standing closely together as if separated or disconnected from the surrounding festivity. The eyes and poses suggest a sense of alienation. During the 1940s-1950s there were intense debates published in the Afro-Cuban press about the meanings of the *comparsas* within the Afro-Cuban community. While some members thought that the *comparsas* were an important symbol of Afro-Cuban culture, others viewed them as uncivilized practices that held the community back.[29] Argudín Chon might have engaged with these debates, reflecting on the community's – and his own – concerns about being othered, their cultural practices judged, their belonging questioned. His recreations of Afro-Cuban cultural contributions are based on the tension that, while the imagery only represented African descendants, the activities that involved them usually implicated multiracial interaction in reality. *Comparsas* and Rumbas, especially during *Carnaval*, were multiracial events attended by different sectors of Cuban society. Nevertheless, the black performers are recreated in isolation, separated from the national mix-racial community that they supposedly belonged to. The art could therefore speak about larger anxieties over Afro-Cuban inclusion within Cuban society.

Argudín Chon's apparent concerns about issues of othering and discrimination of Afro-Cuban culture are also insinuated through another recurrent detail that characterized his works. In *Musician*, Music Fest, and other of his paintings Argudín Chon plays with his signature style, constructing a circular shape surrounding the black performers' heads, simulating Afro-Cubans wearing halos. The shapes could be hats, but they also create a resemblance between the performers and widespread pictorial representations of Catholic saints, giving them an aura of religious sanctity. In doing so, the art builds an association between Afro-Cuba and Catholicism at a time when the latter was considered the moral foundation and pillar of civilization in Cuban hegemonic society. Conversely, Afro-Cuban religions had been historically associated with criminality and barbarism. It is possible that Argudín Chon aimed to challenge these notions connecting Afro-Cuban practices to Catholic symbolism and thus to notions of purity and blessedness. The pieces could expose Argudín Chon's seeming tension between his inclination towards whiteness – in this case its Catholic culture – and his efforts to valorize black life via the arts.

While several of Argudín Chon's paintings recreate black musical and dance practices, his painting *Interior Scene* (1957, fig. 6) considers a moment of black domestic life, an uncommon motif in Cuban art of the time. During this period, scholars such as Juan Martínez have pointed out a shift within the Cuban visual arts community when white Vanguardia painters turned to the recreation of idealized white middle- and upper-class domestic spaces (Martínez 2000). These were usually represented through Hispanic colonial architectu-

29 Garcia Yero, 2020: Chapter 3. See also Bronfman, 2004: Chapter 7.

ral heritage, wealth, female propriety, and assumed upper-class elegance (think of René Portocarrero's series *Interiores del Cerro* (circa 1940s), or Amelia Pelaez's *Dos Hermanas* (1946), Mario Carreño's *Patio Colonial* (circa 1940s), among others (ibid). Black domestic life, by contrast, was hardly a subject of artmaking, making us wonder if Argudín Chon's *Escena Interior* was the artist's response to the recurrent attention given to the white elite domestic space by some of his contemporaries.

Fig. 6. *Interior Scene*, 1957, oil on canvas, 57 x 73,5 cm. Credit: Courtesy Bromer Art Collection, Switzerland

Argudín Chon's *interior scene* differs substantially from the period's representations of white elite domesticity, whoever. Rather than presenting upper-class living, Argudín Chon captures what seems to be a working-class black couple – perhaps lower middle-class – spending time in their home. They seem to live in the countryside rather than in the urban areas of Portocarrero's Cerro mansions, for instance, as we can tell by a window that opens to a rural scenery (even though this could also be a painting hanging on the wall). Differently from the baroque environments of the paintings by Portocarrero, Pelaez, and others, which were filled with expensive furniture and overelaborate adornment, Argudín Chon presents a simple, humble interior space, as perceived by the basic furniture, containing merely a modest dining table with chairs, a shelf, and a side table. The contrast that emerges between contemporary paintings of the white domestic space and *Interior Scene* might be Argudín Chon's subtle way to mark through the visual the intersection of race and class inequality that divided Cuban society.

Nevertheless, though humble, *Interior Scene* presents black life as pleasant and colorful. The combination of different tones arranged in the background gives the home a cheerful and warm quality. There are flowers and a candle adorning the place, and the couple sits peacefully while sharing a drink. The man is barefoot, as if comfortable in his own home, while the woman dresses simply but tastefully wearing a green dress and high heels. They face each other, the man looking down as if in agreement, extending his hand towards the woman, while she looks as if explaining something to him. There seems to be a flow of communication connecting the couple; there is a sense of unity, black intimate life countering the primitivist, animalesque portrayals of blackness that Afro-Cubans often had to endure in the contemporary media. Noticeably, Argudín Chon's presentation of the woman's manners and outfit follow traditional Western notions of femininity, playing with white expectations of propriety, expectations that he might have supported as part of his experience of "passing.". Nevertheless, in presenting black intimate familial living as thoughtful and harmonious, Argudín Chon could celebrate it while claiming its equitable place within a society that had promised to be racially inclusive.

The question of inclusion therefore appears to be a recurrent one for Argudín Chon. Several of his imagery materialize Cuba's complex ideology racial fraternity, key to Afro-Cuban mobilization at the time, to demand racial justice and to denounce the existing racism that shaped a society that was supposed to be egalitarian. His vision would differ from more recent mobilizations in the region, where activists since the last decades have questioned the values of older generations of Afro-Latin Americans and their embrace of integrationist approaches grounded on problematic and ambiguous ideologies of racial harmony. At a time when many antiracist activists are privileging political mobilization as black, instead of mobilization while black (to borrow from Tianna Paschel); when activism is more grounded on racial identity and less on mobilization against multiracial inequities, it might be easy to dismiss the art of Argudín Chon as a relic of a recent past.[30]

As part of larger processes of race-making, however, the emphasis on social union that is found in Argudín Chon's art stands as a meaningful assertion of the centrality of joint interracial collaboration for the advancement of racial equality. His paintings *Los inmortales del machete* (circa 1950, fig. 7), *En el puerto* (1965), *Escenario edificante* (c. 1956), *The Flower Seller* (1958), among others construct José Martí's vision of a racially fraternal nation where both black and white Cubans coexist as equal members of the state. His construction of racial fraternity echo those of many in the Afro-Cuban community, where fraternity is the ideal of a desired multiracial egalitarian society, not the fallacy of an achieved reality.[31] These artworks portray black and white Cubans united either in the pursue of freedom, joint labor, or enjoying leisure time together. *Los inmortales del machete*, for instance, represent the *mambises* (the independence warriors who fought Spanish colonialism) riding on horses together to free

30 As Paulina Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof note, the terms racial harmony and its incarnations of racial democracy, racial fraternity, etc have become "politically toxic" (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof, 2018: 296-7). For a concise history and historiography of black mobilization in Latin America, see Paschel 2018, and Paschel 2016.

31 See note 4.

the nation. Based on their resemblance, Argudín Chon seems to highlight three of the most important anticolonial army revolutionary leaders: Afro-Cuban Antonio Maceo and Hispanic descendants Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and Máximo Gómez, as they lead their troops and crush the rows of Spanish soldiers. Unlike other contemporary paintings of the wars of independence that present Afro-Cubans participating in the conflict as subaltern to white officers, Argudín Chon includes them as leaders and equals to their white counterparts.[32] The multiracial *mambises* are depicted in equivalent terms, fighting together as one people. Argudín Chon uses his distinctive compositional style to emphasize equality within the multiracial army. In this case, he mobilizes his recurrent wave effect to present horses and men moving in unison, as if they are extensions of each other, synchronized in strength and purpose.

Fig. 7, *Los inmortales del machete*, ca. 1950, oil on jute, 84 x 97 cm. Credit: Courtesy Bromer Art Collection, Switzerland

Yet perhaps the most interesting of Argudín Chon's recreations of the ideal of racial harmony is his Flower Seller (1958, fig. 8), where the painter visualizes two women, one blond, one of color, buying flowers from a black seller. Unlike other images representing racial fraternity that recreated mainly black and white men engaged as equals in joint enterprises of nation-making, Flower Seller focuses on the multiracial union of women. As if questioning the strong exclusionary gender dimensions of the ideology that omitted women from the

32 See for instance, Juan Emilio Hernández Giró, Máximo Gómez Cruzando la Trocha, in Exposición de Arte Moderno y Clásico, La Pintura y la Escultura Contemporánea en Cuba, 1941-2. MNBA Box 1941. See García Yero, 2020.

national imaginary, Flower Seller is about racial sorority. Here, the painter presents the two women enjoying themselves going out shopping together – notice the shopping bag carried by the *mulata* woman on the right corner of the image. The viewer knows that they should be close friends because the *mulata* woman rests her arm casually and trustingly on the shoulder of the blond woman, standing comfortably close to each other waiting to purchase flowers. They are presented as equals, both dressed fashionably, with similar hair styles and make-up. *The flower seller* bows to them deferentially as he prepares the flowers; both women deserving of the same courtesy and respect.

Fig. 8, *Flower Seller*, 1958, oil on canvas, 56 x 74 cm. Credit: Courtesy Bromer Art Collection, Switzerland

The representation of racial sorority between white and mulato women in Cuban society through popular culture at the time was a rarity. In literature and popular music such as Zarzuelas, white and mulato women were historically presented as irreconcilable rivals, clashing enemies competing for the love of white men. They were usually constructed as opposites – the former the virginal and pure wife; the latter the sensual temptress, as the lover for whom men betrayed their spouses and became corrupt. As the wives, white women had the legal and economic power of her status, whereas *mulata* women faced the vulnerabilities of their position as mistresses, judged by society as immoral and illegitimate.[33] Thus, Argudín Chon's representation of racial sorority, of a blond and a *mulata* woman bonding together as equal contested gender and sexual assumptions of the period. Flower Seller suggests the possibility that Afro-Cuban and white-Cuban women, like men, could and should build friendship and networks of support, and appreciate each other.

33 Kutzinski, 1993; Thomas, 2008.

Conclusion

This article has brought attention to the widespread problem of racial indeterminacy in Latin America and its relation to artistic production within the particularities of the field of Afro-Latin American Art. Conjunctionally, the article illuminates on the remarkable yet thus far unrecognized work of Antonio Argudín Chon. How were Argudín Chon's artworks interpreted by the viewers who attended the exhibitions that he was part of during the 1940s-1960s? Did the spectators just see a folklorist rendition of Afro-Cubans drumming, or could they read the subtle details that moved the image beyond the stereotype? Did they just see two women buying flowers or did they perceive a message of social union and a claim for equality embedded in the imagery? What other interpretations did the viewers make that differ from the analysis presented in this article? These questions are indeed puzzling and pertinent, yet close to impossible to answer. This improbability should not deter from inquiry, however. Surely, as we find meaning in art, we inevitably bring our own projections to the artworks. Nevertheless, while the approaches explored here leave us with less certain, more speculative arguments, they are surely a preferable alternative to the continued disregard for – and thus further erasure of – the contributions of marginalized non-white artists, as Ximena Gómez and Tamara Walker have so insightfully concluded.[34]

Using the tools at his disposal to move up the social ladder, Argudín Chon might have played with the malleability of race to seek inclusion "passing" as white, as the artist necessarily worked within a system of white hegemony. However, in a country where it has been historically difficult to talk about racism, Argudín Chon resorted to the subtlety of art, mobilizing his particular pictorial style to address this problem – one that likely affected him deeply. Neither 'folklorist' nor dated, his art questioned assumptions about the black domestic space, complicated the gender dimensions of the ideology of racial fraternity, opposed black stereotypation, social othering, and valorized Afro-Cuban culture through a unique pictorial imagination. His art invokes the ideal of racial equality while recognizing our shared humanity and the significance of joint interracial engagement. The case of Antonio Argudín Chon highlights the importance for the emerging field of Afro-Latin American art to be attentive to the work of artists who are difficult to label, and whose art might seem passé or easily dismissible. Their works summon our attention, broadening our perspectives on the relationship between race, identity, art, and activism.

34 Gómez 2019: 207; Walker: 2017: 10.

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Art and Acceptability: Some Problems of Visualising Caribbean Slavery through Modernism

Leon Wainwright

Introduction

In 1763, two enslaved men, Cuffy[1] and Accara, led a revolt against the Dutch owners of the Magdalenberg plantation on the Conje River in Berbice, now a county of Guyana, then a separate Dutch colony. After killing the plantation manager and torching his house, almost a year of successful resistance followed. It was the fifth reported uprising to take place in the colony over the course of thirty years, and the largest slave rebellion in the Caribbean to date. A military unit headed by Cuffy took over a long list of further plantations as well as Fort Nassau, while he attempted by several written dispatches to strike a peace accord with General Van Hoogenheim. But intransigent planters, the arrival of European troops and divisions in the ranks of the rebels led the enterprise to failure, with Cuffy's death and the brutal punishment of those who stood behind him.[2]

In the years just before and after Guyana's independence from British rule in 1966, several of the country's artists would turn to the memory of that uprising, making it the basis for some distinctive and controversial artworks. In 1960, the Guyana-born painter Aubrey Williams (1926-1990) found in the story of the rebels an allegory for present day decolonisation in the Caribbean and produced the painting *Revolt* (1960) (fig. 1). His interest in the rebellion of 1763 helped to put in place concerns that continued and developed in Guyana into the decade of the 1970s. In 1976, the Guyanese painter and sculptor, Philip Moore (1921-2012) made his great public sculpture, the *1763 Monument*, popularly known as 'the Cuffy monument' (figs. 2 and 3). A signature work among the artist's wider body of painting and sculpture, here Moore handled that same historical topic of the Berbice rebellion, presenting a colossal figure with tubular limbs, a frenetically modelled surface, and somewhat obscure motifs.

Fig. 1: Aubrey Williams, *Revolt,* 1960. Oil on canvas, 134 x 165 cm. National Gallery of Guyana. © Estate of Aubrey Williams. All rights reserved, DACS 2014.

1 The spelling of this name has been anglicised since that period, as in this article. In the contextual record it is given as Coffij.
2 See Cornelis Christiaan Goslinga, in Maria J.L. van Yperen's 1985 edited book, and Klars 2020.

Figs. 2 and 3: Philip Moore, The *1763 Monument (or the Cuffy Monument)*, 1976. Georgetown, Guyana. © The Guyana National Trust.

In some ways, these artists' various attempts to represent and remember the events of 1763 were as failed as the rebellion itself. They were not well received nor have they held lasting appeal. Yet perhaps it is because rather than despite that outcome that these two works of art are so revealing of the circumstances of decolonising and post-independence Guyana. Their artists occupied an unstable mix of party--political, religious and nationalist interests, each focusing on the topic of the 1763 rebellion. Consequently, the matter of Williams's and Moore's respective 'success' with their two works is, at root, about how to see modern art in the Caribbean, and how such art has been seen by its audiences and its artists. Bringing these works of art together for discussion can show what may emerge when artists in the Caribbean turn to the theme of the region's past of plantation slavery and the theme of anti-colonial resistance.[3] The story of Williams's and Moore's attention to slavery, indeed, shows how Guyana has looked back onto its past from a range of viewpoints. Episodes of retrospection, enacted in the making and reception of art, serve to demonstrate that visualising such a past may at the same time raise questions about creativity and the imagination at large: the power and the purpose invested in art, and the reasons why the art of remembrance may disappoint its viewers.

When art is assumed to be a way of disturbing the present through attention to the historical past, it becomes entangled in an especially complex interplay of forces. Much more is going on than commemoration when artworks are charged with the responsibility of revisiting slavery. Yet there are limits to what may be achieved through using art for public memorialisation. The tensions that have arisen through such attempts to employ artworks seem to refer to the formal aspects of material creativity itself. While individual works of art are often positioned within surrounding expectations about their political usefulness, in Guyana during the 1960s and 70s, some artists set out to visualise the past while trying to loosen them from that purpose. As they did, they would point to a particular difficulty with modern art when

3 This article builds upon my previous attempts to examine this field, including my published attention to the same key works by Williams and Moore. See Wainwright 2006; 2009; 2011; 2016; and 2018.

it takes on the burden of commemoration. When the outcomes of visualising and materialising the past are thus so contextually inadequate (to the point of seeming wholly unacceptable), it seems fitting to evaluate the demands that are placed on modern artworks and how they fare in response.

Art historical and curatorial research on 'visualising slavery' has surveyed art-making in several contexts within the African diaspora, mainly in the United States, to show how modern and contemporary artists might turn towards such histories while being bound by present circumstances (Bernier and Durkin, 2016; Copeland, 2013; Barson and Gorschlüter 2010). Caribbean-focused research on this topic has benefitted from Marcus Wood's seminal analysis (1997) of the visual phenomena that framed the processes of the abolition of plantation slavery. Wood showed that the historiography of slavery and heroism in particular have suffered with 'blind memory' (in reference to how the mainstream of abolitionist thought relied on images of black passivity and of fetishization of the body). On reflection, it is worth wondering if there is not also a correspondingly 'blind faith' in art to do the work of memory. A great deal of faith has rested in the efficacy of modern artworks for remembering the past, even when in actual practice they may more often frustrate or even subvert such an instrumental aim to revisit history. While such attitudes to art are probably not unique to processes of visualising slavery, they do assume a certain character in this commemorative arena. The matter has yet to be raised for Caribbean-focused studies of modern art, tackled en route to a consideration of modernism in its global, comparative contexts.

Training a focus on the materiality of artworks (Wainwright 2017; Fuglerud and Wainwright 2015) can enable such an analysis. It can reveal how different artistic media compare in delivering upon the historically contextual expectations of artists and their audiences. Through the process of visual commemoration, each medium is found to be doing its own work each according to its means. Looking more closely at the Caribbean can assist in understanding those historical instances when the goal of fulfilling art's ostensibly commemorative potential becomes operative in the production and reception of public visual practices. The pictorial and sculptural imagination separate from one another, and they diverge from the historical imagination too, eluding the expectations that are implicit to memorialisation. These processes may prove to be salutary for scholars of the histories of slavery, whose interest in art forms has lately grown, and for research more generally on memorialising practices during the twentieth century.

Problematising Art's Commemorative Efficacy

These highlighted artworks by Williams and Moore, although ostensibly on the same theme –focusing on the year 1763 – were made to perform quite dissimilar memorialising functions. Contingent upon the changing significance of slave rebellion before and after Guyanese independence are equally changing circumstances of production and reception for the works. It is striking that in 1960, the visibility of Williams's painting was temporarily withheld, frustrating the artist's ambition to have it shown during the final years of colonisation, and that, by contrast, in 1976 Moore's

monument on the same theme was proudly unveiled. There are also particular political, social and religious expectations underscoring those differences, which may be shown by giving particular attention to the visual medium of each artwork, and asking what actual work they were expected to do.

Executed in Britain where Williams was then domiciled, and given by him as a gift to the Guyanese people, the painting *Revolt* is now in the Guyana National Gallery in Georgetown. *Revolt* is composed around a silhouette, outlining the figure of an enslaved rebel who brandishes a weapon as he stands as victor over a maimed white body, a stripped white woman, and a helpless white man. The provocative content of the work inaugurated a series of events: an ensuing protest in the local press that drew support from the literary personality, Jan Carew (1960); and a long delay before the painting was displayed – not until after Independence, in 1970, when it was selected by a sub-committee headed by Williams for a National Museum retrospective exhibition.

I will limit my reflections for a moment to the handling of its subject matter and reception during the decade of the 1960s and two interlinked aspects. First is the artist's self-identification with the enslaved man it pictures. Cuffy's physical profile is portrayed to resemble that of Williams's own, who poses as the artist may have done when painting himself by looking in a mirror. His raised hand during the self-portrait would have held a paintbrush, which is here substituted for weapon. The second is its composition, which exploits a choreographic arrangement that places the viewer behind the enslaved man's back, so that the 'revolt' in question becomes both 1763 and 1960. In each way, the work asserts both the righteousness of the eighteenth-century rebel and the present-day anti-colonial artist-activist, above all assuming, even demanding, that its audience supports the political principle of trans-historical struggle against European domination. *Revolt* framed the promise of political freedom in British Guiana as the resolution of a long programme of national struggle, dating back at least to the Berbice rebellion. Yet, as it became loosened significantly from the didactic purpose of remembering the year 1763, it also countered the various expectations for modern art that dominated in the Caribbean and Britain around 1960. This aspect of the work's efficacy rests on its chosen medium of painting and relies on the artist's main interest being figuration. For his 1960 intervention in Guyana, Williams chose painting because it harked back to the older colonial order and offered a form of address that depended on a context of display that was understood and accessed by an elite colonial audience. By the decade of the 1960s, the medium of painting and representations of the human figure could no longer be seen as the sine qua non of modern art. That superior status for painting in the Caribbean had been superseded by the turn toward sculpture and time-based, contingent forms of spectacle – dance, theatre, carnival, steel drumming and calypso (while such performances also intersected with literary production).[4]

Artists in Britain, meanwhile, who persisted with figuration, did so in the face of a New York-led assault on depiction itself, and in view of the dominance of abstract form and the arrival of the new three-dimensional work. For a clearer sense of the critical forces that ranged against painting in the 1960s in the metropolitan north, we may note that by 1958 Allan Kaprow referred to Jackson Pollock's 'legacy' as

4 For some Guyanese examples see: Creighton 1995 and Maes-Jelinek 1989.

an imperative to use all our senses, suggesting the extension of the artist's method beyond the borders of painting into a 'new concrete art'. As he wrote: 'Here the direct application of an automatic approach to the act [of painting] makes it clear that only is this not the old craft of painting, but it is perhaps bordering on ritual itself, which happens to use paint as one of its materials. […] Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odours, touch.' In Japan, another requiem for painting would be Jiro Yoshihara's The Gutai Manifesto (1956); while by 1963 a feminist such as Carolee Schneemann was using her painted body as a sculptural material; in parallel Gunter Brus had long given up painting in favour of performance. Comparisons may be drawn with Yves Klein's The Chelsea Hotel Manifesto of 1961 ('Would not the future artist be he who expressed through an eternal silence an immense painting possessing no dimension?'), Guy Debord and the Situationist International (1957), and Kaprow's (c.1965) 'Untitled Guidelines for Happening', while a different but consequential set of theoretical coordinates issued from Robert Morris' 1966 'Notes on Sculpture' (Parts I and II).

In the Caribbean after the Second World War, the pressure on painting, although just as sustained, was of quite a different order. Here a flattening out of the field of creativity made room for public spectacle – carnival masquerade (which became known in Trinidad simply as 'mas'), steelpan bands, and so on. Guyana produced variations on this in the 1970s, with its crowd-assembled paintings that were cut into square panels and paraded during the newly-inaugurated Culture Week.[5] In the present-day Caribbean, such divisions are being systematically troubled still further, in tune with the global growth of interest in 'participatory' art practices, creative projects that require the involvement of their audiences. Visual artists have worked with carnival costume designers, presenting their work at mainstream, international spaces for contemporary art practice, such as part-Guyanese artist Hew Locke and Trinidad's Marlon Griffith, in works such as *Up Hill Down Hall: An Indoor Carnival* (Tate Modern 2014). That work is a forerunner to the static forms made by Locke for his installation *The Procession* (Tate Britain 2022). To be noted too is the range of contributors to the exhibition and cultural programme *En Mas': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean* (Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans 2015, and touring).

Since Williams practised as an artist on both continents during the 1960s, he should be considered as having strived to resist the concerted move away from painting in the decolonising Caribbean, while at the same time subverting the mid-century high modernism (centred on abstraction) that was established in metropolitan centres of the north Atlantic. The terms in which he did so are complex and specific to the cultural geography of the Caribbean and its intellectuals in the diaspora. Williams encapsulated these in his essay 'The Predicament of the Artist in the Caribbean' (1968), a meditation on the developments away from painting and the push toward abstraction. He led with the argument that 'Art is always in the foreground; it is the true *avant-garde*. The visual arts, being the simplest and most direct, should be a little ahead of literature, because with emerging peoples you have the problem of

5 It is also worth recalling, in contradistinction, that in the early years of political independence in the English-speaking Caribbean there was a persistent conservativism in this regard. In the area of arts education policy, the coming together of painting and carnival in any institutional context was resisted. For instance, M. P. Alladin's book Man is a Creator (1967), prescribed a firm division between these art forms, as its author in his capacity as Trinidad and Tobago's first Minister of Culture oversaw the directing of official funds to the standardisation of visual art through studio-based teaching.

illiteracy, and direct contact is the natural level of communication in this society'. For the Caribbean, art should be 'the technology, the philosophy, the politics and the very life of the people'. Writing as an advocate of painting who found the term 'abstract' itself somewhat unhelpful, Williams underlined at the same time that 'The arts of (our greatest) past civilisation were to a great extent non-figurative', confessing that '…I am worried about a prevalent conception that good art, working art, must speak, it must be narrative. I do not see the necessity for art to be narrative, in that in thinking about the past and man, art has never been 'narrative' to any great extent.' He summed up his position in this way:

> I am not trying to ask Caribbean intellectuals to consider abstraction as 'high art,' or the 'art of the future' or anything like that. As a matter of fact, I don't even think of my paintings as being abstract. I can't really see abstraction. Abstraction to me would be two colours on a surface, no shape, no form and no imprint of the hand of man. I do not think that painters paint abstraction, nor do I think that sculptors sculpt abstraction. I am not very sure that I understand the meaning of the word.[6]

The topic of the politicisation of Aubrey Williams's *Revolt* during the 1960s deserves the attention of a wider project of scholarship on artistic modernism that maps the movements of Caribbean art and artists, noting the choices they made in relation to artistic modernism, and taking into view their diverse locations around the Atlantic (Wainwright 2011; Hucke 2013). What may be observed here in a more focused account, is that Williams's painting practice was for the most part an interworking of naturalism and abstraction. At the time it would have seemed conservative for north Atlantic modernists and their proponents, but his approach makes much more sense now with knowledge of the way that art would develop in the later twentieth century, with painting remaining of interest. Indeed, Williams was implicated in a process of opening up the art community so that it would value works that were more contingent on local conditions of production. There was a sea-change in attitudes toward art, found outside the historical centres of modernism, which came to the fore and began to shape a more transnational cultural geography. In at least two senses then, with *Revolt*, he turned on its head the anachronism that had come to be associated with painting and figuration.

The context of production for Philip Moore's *1763 Monument* was shaped as much by Williams's influence as an artist, as by Moore's wider art practice, his deliberate search for new approaches, definitions and materials for what he felt to be an authentic expression in art, culturally and even spiritually appropriate to the wider Caribbean. As Moore told the writer Andrew Salkey in 1970 on the matter of his own development as an artist, 'I broke away from the rigid anatomy way of representing my figures, and began to express myself freely, with the encouragement of a Guyanese artist who had gone up to London, and come back. I mean Aubrey Williams.' (Salkey 1972: 87)[7] In fact, Aubrey Williams initiated and co-ordinated the

6 Williams, Aubrey (1968: 60-61). I am grateful to Claudia Hucke for sharing this insight with me in relation to her research on Williams's visits to Jamaica. In the United States, an important response to these issues during the earlier period of the 1930s shows a comparable complexity in the example of Jacob Lawrence's series, *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture*, consisting of forty-one individual tempera-on-paper compositions executed between 1936 and 1938. While the series is now widely celebrated, it tends to be overlooked that it was originally part of the attempt to make abstracted figurative forms against the backdrop of hostility to both social realism and modernism, a move that subjected Lawrence to strident criticism, see Ellen Harkins Wheat, 1986.

7 The interview is transcribed in Salkey 1972.

1763 Monument, following a competition for the commission that was won by Karl Broodhagen (b. 1909, Georgetown, Guyana, d. 2002).[8] When Broodhagen refused to make certain requested changes to his entry and then withdrew it, Philip Moore, who was not in the competition, was approached by Aubrey Williams to replace him. That agreed solution came at the behest of the artist, institution-builder and archaeologist Denis Williams (no relation) who oversaw the process of executing Guyana's first, and what has come to be its last, large-scale public monument. Eve Williams (daughter of Denis) records that,

> The artist Philip Moore was repatriated to Guyana from the United States to undertake this work. His fifteen-foot bronze statue, weighing two and a half tonnes, was cast for Guyana at Britain's famous Morris Singer foundry in Basingstoke where the work was overseen by Williams in his role as Director of Art for the History and Arts Council of Guyana. The original maquette Moore had sculpted in wood was also cast in bronze and later formed a central exhibit in Guyana's exhibition at the Jamaica Institute during Carifesta 1976 (Williams 2012: 118).

That appearance in Jamaica ten years after Independence identified the *1763 Monument* with a 'national school' of Guyanese art. The label rather oversimplifies the transnational geography associated with the movement of the monument, and the artists who collaborated on it, connecting the United States, Guyana, Jamaica and Britain. Nonetheless the monument was pressed above all into national service, during a decade of initial optimism about the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Sited at the Square of the Revolution ('to the heroes of the 1763 revolution against forced labour and the plantation system', its plaque reads), it was unveiled three days before the tenth year of independence from Britain, and the anniversary of the 1763 uprising on February 23rd was chosen as Republic Day. Here was the commemoration of a story of continuous struggle, resistance and ensuing emancipation from slavery that spoke to anticolonial Guyana's ostensible beginnings.

My own encounter with the monument was in 2005. I viewed it at ground level and there saw that a temporary altar had been put up, hidden behind the structure, which was laden with blue eggs and candles, and tended ritually by a white-clad follower of 'Spiritists' (of the Caribbean's Afro-syncretic Spiritual Baptism). It was August, the most intense month for libation ceremonies and thought to mark the historical period of a visit to that area by Cuffy and his followers when they hoped to negotiate successfully with the colonisers.[9] Such offerings and libations at the foot of the *1763 Monument* are not uncommon and they signal its dual importance for national and religious community.[10] The focusing of Afro-syncretic religious beliefs on the monument is consonant with Philip Moore's personal philosophy of 'godmanliness'. This drew from his membership of the Jordanites, and the pan-African framework that he promoted through attempts to 'represent the African man in all his spheres; by that I mean Africans living in Africa, and those who are the descendants of slaves in the Caribbean, America, Latin America, Canada and Britain, anywhere they've travelled and settled down.' (Salkey 1972: 88-89).

8 Broodhagen would go on to attract the commission from the Government of Barbados for *The Emancipation Monument*, popularly known as "the Bussa statue", unveiled 28th March 1985. The sculptor called the statue "Slave in Revolt", in reference to the largest revolt against slavery on the island of Barbados in 1816.

9 This combination of elements has been explored for its iconography in paintings by Stanley Greaves, with his references to the veiled monuments to public figures and signs of obeah.

10 See also Williams 1990.

If Williams's *Revolt* was a work of self-identification, such a practice emerged again with Philip Moore's monument, yet in a way that spoke not to an image of the individual but more to what may be called an 'elemental' self – a spiritual form of the human being with which all Guyanese may identify. This posed for the artist and his audiences quite a challenge. As he told the visiting writer Andrew Salkey in 1970, 'We're having a little debate about Cuffy's image not being too right, you know'.[11] This was in reference to the search for what may serve as a suitable national 'symbol' for Guyana, leading Moore to protest that, 'No real nationalist would revere Cuffy really less, if he is depicted, as I think he should be, as a rough, tough, unkempt man, with matted hair […]. If we have to pretty him up, we are ashamed of him, ashamed of our own, ashamed of our past.' (Salkey 1972: 98-99). Salkey reported that Moore in 1970 took out of his shirt-jack pocket 'a cameo likeness' of Cuffy that he had carved. That may well have been a prototype for the same repeating image in painted mud that Moore bequeathed to Guyana's Burrowes School of Art, based on the moulding techniques that he taught himself while working as a tutor at Princeton (fig. 4). Moore's mention of 'having a little debate' alluded to the divergence between elite and popular taste in Guyana in their attitudes to figuration. This became even clearer when the *1763 Monument* was realised six years later: opinion vocalised in the press showed disapproval of it, while Spiritists, who put themselves outside such debate, nonetheless began to embrace it, as they still do today.

Fig. 4: Philip Moore, model house (detail), (nd). Collection Burrowes School of Art.

Commentators have found it hard to sum up the meaning of Moore's artwork and have fallen into equivocating about its worth. Stanley Greaves, for instance, has written:

11 Salkey noted a newspaper editorial by Carl Blackman entitled "Is that you, Cuffy?", which asked "What manner of man was Cuffy, leader of the bloody Berbice Rebellion and now, Guyana's first hero?" Salkey 1972, 98.

> The Monument was a visionary work, characteristic of the artist and chosen to symbolize the revolutionary spirit the Government was encouraging. A nation-wide controversy arose, however, because the general population felt the image should have been more realistic. Another opinion expressed was that its atavistic 'African' quality did not allow other racial groups to accept it as a truly national symbol. The central figure symbolized the spirit of Cuffy (Kofi), who had led an extensive slave uprising against the Dutch in 1763. This presaged a similar event, identical in many details, but larger in scale, staged by Toussaint Louverture in Haiti against the French in 1791 (Greaves 2010: 180).

The Guyanese lawyer and polymath Rupert Roopnaraine has written expanding on this matter of the 'realistic':

> It is true that the popular rejection of 'Cuffy' [the monument], as he has come to be known and hated, has also to do with the fate of non-representational public art in the region as a whole. No Henry Moores and Barbara Hepworths for us. We like our monuments realistic, as recognisable as our next-door neighbours. (2012: np)

What Greaves and Roopnaraine mean by 'realistic', is less clear than what they have in mind as the 'popular' audience for art in the Caribbean. Who is this 'we' in 'we like our monuments realistic'? The lines are blurred in the Caribbean between monuments and other forms of historical remembrance including in cultural forms such as carnival or music, as well as ritual embodiment of the past. Moore's sculpture, regardless of his efforts to abandon naturalism or 'realism' in favour of a more ambiguous sort of figuration, was generally identified as African. That seems to have assisted in galvanizing two ethnicised publics – Indo- and Afro-Guyanese – in their responses to the monument. In 1976 there was resentment among East Indians about state money being channelled away from their community. Frustration about the arrested development of a monument (designed by Denis Williams) to the Enmore Martyrs – the five Indo-Guyanese labour protestors killed by police in 1948 – unveiled by Burnham on the anniversary of 16th June in 1977, was fuelled by speculation that funds set aside for the Enmore monument had been spent on the Cuffy one. In general, while trying to defend Moore's monument, Roopnaraine in his piece goes on to argue that the final product was never as Moore intended. He notes the production of another maquette for a monument that was never realised. It included a 'wheel of eternal revolution' (and reconciliation) made up of the cup, the coconut tree and sun – symbols of the main political parties at the time of Guyana's independence. Also, he reports that Moore's 'many disappointments' ran to the elevation of the *1763 Monument* on a plinth,[12] a measure taken to bombproof it in response to the current tensions.[13] Roopnaraine goes on to say: 'Philip Moore did not intend Cuffy to be in the sky […]. Bring him to earth so we can share in his power' (2012: np).

Power is the operative word. Moore's worldview was largely at odds with the social circumstances surrounding the work's commission, just as much as his expectation of having the final say on how the sculpture would be presented. But the innovations that Moore made through the aesthetic scheme for his figure, and the iconographical programme that he proposed on the monument's plaques, were not entirely unappreciated. Indeed, the monument has retained a sort of agency of its own

12 The eighteen-foot high plinth was designed by Albert Rodrigues, and includes five brass plaques.
13 See also: Stanley Greaves, 'Meeting Denis – A Mind Engaged', in Williams and Williams 2010: 180.

among Spiritists. A work of modern art, delivering on the conceptual aims of modernism, did not satisfy the tastes of the 'general population', but found a home and use within a religious community, a nexus of taste and belief at the margins of the nation. That is fascinating not simply for its conjunction of aesthetic and religious values (that would present it as a curio of Caribbean or postcolonial nation-building), as for how it forms a statement about the varieties of artistic modernism. The artwork enjoyed relative detachment and added a disjunctive force to the currents that whirled around it.

We can set this alongside a further reading, which does more than add to the mix of interpretations. Commonly ascribed to the monument among audiences today (generally in a tone of affectionate amusement, and with discrete explanation of the oblique angles of viewership required), the Cuffy figure seems possessed of a determinedly onanistic purpose. Its tense body leans backward on slightly bent legs, gripping an ambiguous yet suggestively phallic object at a jaunty angle. The mouth is open, the lips extruded in a definite circle. The figure's apparent arousal and sexual potency finds a metonym in the water that flows at its feet, descending over a series of pools. An especially vivid sense of the monument as such a procreative, irreverently self-pleasuring statement may be had from the director's office of the National Gallery of Guyana, Castellani House. This room may once have served as the bedroom of President Forbes Burnham at his official residence in the capital. That such a building would be later repurposed to house the nation's art collection seems to position visual representation at the centre of national political life. But the sculpted figure that he unveiled in 1976, may have masturbated most visibly from the physical standpoint had by Burnham. As it is very hard to see that this was an intended aspect of the monument's commission, this reading characterises art's refusal to conform entirely to a political leader's propagandist ambitions. It bears not at all on delivering the sort of grand historicism suggested in Greaves's parallel to the vaunted success of black revolution in Haiti. That no single point of view can be claimed to dominate for the sculpture, being at the centre of countless viewing angles, has probably helped the artwork to avoid the injunction of public indecency.

Conflict and Visualisation

In this Guyanese context for remembering histories of slavery, to the conflicts and trauma of the colonial past are accreted the frictions and disagreements that arose through a visualising practice. Moore's approaches through the *1763 Monument* to the matter of Cuffy's 'likeness', and the language of his bodily comportment, allowed the artist to take a stance that was directed simultaneously against colonial oppression (plantation slavery), privileged aesthetic taste, and postcolonial bureaucratic and party-political power. That Moore's rendering of Cuffy was three-dimensional rendering, is the fundamental to his attempt to hold these multiple viewpoints together, in an environment of dissent about how to see the past in the present. It became an occasion for testing modernism in special circumstances that it has seldom encountered in the northern metropole.

The discourse around commemoration of slavery and resistance in Guyana has condensed on the uprising of 1763 time and again, thrusting processes of visualisa-

tion to the fore. When the painting *Revolt* was finally shown in public in 1970, a political opportunity opened up for Cheddi Jagan, leader in opposition of the People's Progressive Party. A report in *The Sunday Chronicle* (Sunday 15th February, 1970) told how 'Dr [Cheddi] Jagan said that it was the PPP Government in office (but not in power) which insisted on the Aubrey Williams painting, '*Revolt*', being exhibited, and being found a resting place in the Public Free Library eventually; as it was the PPP which, during the early years of the annual History and Culture Week, drew Cuffy from his unknown resting place into the proud pages of Guyanese history …' (in Salkey 1972: 95).[14] With such continuing political importance put onto the figure of Cuffy and the role of art in stimulating public debate, it becomes easier to see what led to the commission of Moore's sculpture. Sculptural meaning in the urban space of Georgetown in the 1970s had become a live issue. Jagan pronounced how the removal of the statue of Queen Victoria from the lawns of the Law Courts 'had therapeutic value for the nation and the individual.' (Salkey 1972: 95).

But while that motivation or political will may have been fairly clear – to draw the rebellion of 1763 into the 'proud pages of Guyanese history' – neither work of art seemed capable of delivering on such an aim. Moore's sculpture offended a popular view of Cuffy's likeness, just as much as *Revolt* offended an elite one in its expected standards for art in Guyana. The situation was not helped by the process by which painting came into competition with sculpture. The search was well underway for appropriate modes of three-dimensional figuration that could displace the statuary of the colonisers, since the medium of painting itself became stigmatised for its connotations of European hegemonic taste. The Guyanese artist and educator Stanley Greaves recalled recently of a time when he and a small group of contemporaries (Emerson Samuels and Michael Leila) were granted permission to see *Revolt*,

> It seemed … more of a study than a finished painting for the following reasons. The left of the painting was occupied by a large silhouetted figure of a slave with broken chains on his wrists and holding a bloodied blade in a most obviously *improbable* manner. The silhouette itself *contradicted* the modelling in the pants dispelling visual unity. *Inaccuracies* in figure drawing were evident in the rendering of the small group, including the wounded and dead, to the right underneath the upraised knife arm of the slave. *Problems* of scale were evident in the relationship between the group and the dominant figure. These were compounded by a flattening of the pictorial space and *distorted* perspective not consonant with figure painting in a naturalistic genre.[15] (My emphasis)

Such open disparagement of the formal qualities of the painting would have aided the bureaucratic refusal to exhibit it publicly, emboldening the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society that became custodian of the work in 1960. Evidently the spirit of rebellion that galvanised Cuffy and his followers – in their desperate violence and mobilised armed struggle – had entirely dissolved under the normative aesthetic appraisal meted out by the educated Guyanese who viewed the painting. Greaves recommends that compositions of painted figures ought to convey 'visual unity', should avoid contradiction, demonstrate accuracy with regard to scale, perspective, and so on. Above all he decries the 'unfi-

14 The article is quoted at length in Salkey 1972.
15 Communication by Stanley Greaves, read aloud in his absence at "Aubrey Williams: Now and Coming Time", a conference held at the University of Cambridge to celebrate the artist's life and work (April 26, 2014).

nished' quality of *Revolt*. That approach offers a clue about how the justification for the refusal was made on the basis of aesthetic value, masking the Society's ideological opposition to the painting's stirring anti-colonial message. Greaves offers a window onto that historical episode, intoning on artistic standards and his lasting reservations about the painting; a throwback to those dominant aesthetic values that prized illusionism and naturalism.

Caribbean-focused writing on art such as that of Greaves has tended to prioritise aesthetic production conducted within art's institutions. Preoccupied with the biographies and accomplishments of named artistic personalities and the 'appropriate' way to render the past, it frequently bemoans the state of the Caribbean's art-institutional infrastructure. Although I see an absorbing debate here about how well Williams's work of art qualifies to be a work of art – about how well he has performed in this instance in bearing witness to a historical scene – that would distract from the aim of understanding slavery and resistance in relation to visualisation and materialisation practices more broadly. We need to go a farther distance, indeed, beyond trying to judge the extent to which an object may come to count as 'art' (if at all). It is imperative to put into proper perspective the modern visual commemoration of slavery as having become an overwhelmingly but not exclusively institutional and monumental affair. What come to be overlooked are the wider everyday processes of material mediation: an entire sphere of culture that includes the practices of showing and signifying through the manipulation of physical form.

How did Cuffy and his followers materially articulate their aims and experiences? How may we recover the emotions that they embodied by aesthetic or performative means, their ephemeral acts of signification within the realm of visual perception? The fact is that the material record which may assist such a mode of inquiry is not much in evidence. But, asking new questions about the aesthetic means that were employed by enslaved people themselves could offer the seeds for a critique of the available historical record of rebellions, such as that of 1763. There seem to be no accompanying images or attributable artefacts surviving from that time, and so countering the authority of that absent record involves trying to address its very absence – whether that be textual, visual or material – while grappling with the significant lack of remains. A good starting point would be to admit that colonial power may continue to be served in a turn toward the study of works of art alone, without taking into view the wider material field. Fine art discourse, its traditions and institutions of production, its domains of reflection and reception, all these are nested within relations to visual and material practices at large. That has gone lamentably unaccounted for by the existing treatment of the controversies that surround artworks which commemorate resistance to slavery.

The destruction of plantation property may be considered just such an example of a primary visualising practice that issues from the hands of the enslaved. As well as an effective means to cease or set back sugar production, for rebels to make certain that 'the hill of fire glows red'[16] – as it does in *Revolt* – has signalled their serious intent and degree of organisation. 1763 became a scene of such incendiary signi-

16 Reference to Martin Carter's poem The Hill of Fire Glows Red [1951], see Carter 1997. See also Robinson 2004.

fication (much as had happened the previous year on Laurens Kunckler's plantation Goed Fortuyn, in the upper part of the colony of Berbice), when on February 28th every building at five plantations along the Berbice River burned except those in which the rebels established their headquarters. Second, there is the self-styling of 'Coffy, Governor of the Negroes of Berbice, and Captain Accara', to quote the opening words of a letter of negotiation to the Dutch that the illiterate Cuffy dictated to a young mulatto boy. It is a title that might suggest that he and the other rebel leaders signified their rank through their dress styles, regardless that the enslaved community was deprived of all but the simplest clothing – just as they were destitute of all arms except for rusting swords, fragments of iron and agricultural implements, and a few guns and pistols.

Regardless of whether they donned military or ceremonial dress, or even appropriated the uniform of the colonisers, it is known that Cuffy identified his rank just as clearly as he did his ethnicity. Of the two main ethnic groupings among the rebels, his background stood out from that of his officers, Accara, Atta, Fortuyn and Prins. Such ethnic differences among the rebels may have widened into a tragic division, with Cuffy's officers turning against him – a final challenge to his authority that led to his suicide. The suicide has the status only of an allegation, however, in Guyanese popular memory of the *revolt*, where it has been deemed beyond countenance (and a cruel fabrication within the colonial record). Certainly, a shameful end in self-sacrifice would conflict with 21st century (Christian) morality in the Caribbean. What may be surmised, however, is that the differences of ethnicity among the rebels could be marked by requisitely visual and material practices of personal presentation – hair, body decoration or marking – or personal possessions, as much as by language, kinship or religious affiliation.

Whatever form the material significations of difference took among the rebels, the bitter end to Cuffy's struggle is still today met with disbelief in Guyana, where even the slightest hint that his uprising met with failure is overwritten with Cuffy's patriotic, triumphalist commemoration. There is another contextually inappropriate chapter in the same narrative. The colonial memory of 1763, which gives prominence to injured and mutilated white bodies, lies beyond the accepted bounds of Guyanese national memory. It has been buried, little noticed outside the archive[17] except in the iconography of Williams's *Revolt*. According to a Dutch observer, the stockades of Cuffy's first stronghold carried the heads of white victims from a massacre at Peereboom. Such a display carried tactical advantages, aiding the rebels' cause by adding to the fatalistic mood felt by Van Hoogenheim who in turn called a special meeting of the colonial Raad on March 6th to address the colonisers' course of action. At the same time, two petitions were received from Cuffy begging the Dutch to leave Fort Nassau, before the whites' reluctant preparations to retreat were quickened on March 8th by another letter sent by Cuffy that warned, simply, 'Leave the colony'. Finally, that second message was underscored with portent by yet another startling visual index of rebel power: the racial designation of the bearer of the message and her state of presentation – Cuffy's white 'mistress', raped, dishevelled and in rags.

17 See also: Kars 2020.

Art as an Unreliable Medium

The artistic contributions of Williams and Moore are testament to two related controversies over attempts among artists to draw parallels between 18th century resistance to the system of slavery and conditions of the more recent past. Their most basic significance is that they show how circumstances for visualisation in the 1960s were distinct from those of the decade that followed. *Revolt* issued from a painter based in London who turned to the history of slavery in order to galvanise anti-colonial feeling in British Guiana, and was effective in provoking a proprietorial response among the colonial authorities in their attempt to decide what sort of art was appropriate for public display. Moore's *1763 Monument* belonged by contrast to a locus of political celebration in post-colonial Guyana that invested energetically in public gestures of nation-building.

In that later work, no longer is the armed rebel confronting the slavers and planters, nor does the rendering of its subject repeat Williams's interpellation to elite culture and the genre of European history painting. For Moore puts himself entirely outside the dilemma over whether to show shackles or manacles that are broken or unfastened, and he neatly sheathes the weapon of armed struggle. The formal codes of this uprising are more obscure: an elaborate system of body markings that resemble futuristic armour; the animals are held confidently in the hands; a silent mouth, yet shaped to suggest speech. Such is Moore's attempt to normalise a mode of figuration grounded in a private language of motifs and figural proportions that had nothing to do with naturalism or academicism. Gone is the antagonism toward colonial rule and the didactic appeal for independence that issued from the painting *Revolt*, and so too any supporting information such as sticks of sugarcane or colonials.

The visual impact of the *1763 Monument* much depended on the artist's embrace of the medium-specificity of sculpture itself, which does not presuppose the single viewpoint of painting – contra to the piece by Williams – thereby bringing out what the art historian Alex Potts has called the 'instabilities' of our perceptual encounter with works of modern sculpture (2000, 8). Returning to the matter of fire, while the illusionism of painting, as in *Revolt*, may readily convey the immateriality of the fire, such illusionism is far from an obvious quality for sculpture, and so it is missing from Moore's sculptural composition – where the standard iconography of uprisings and destruction, the burning house and cane fields, are all physically out of the question. More practically speaking, it was easier for Moore to add a pool and channel of actual water than to model flames or even to keep a fire alight. On this ultimate, crucially material point, the two works of art pull apart, suggesting the need to locate each respectively in a debate about the aesthetics of historicising slavery.

The recalcitrance of artworks, identified here by their incapacity to play a reliable role in historical remembrance, is quite hard to handle for all those involved – intellectually, emotionally, politically. With the visualisation of slavery there is always the potential for unexpected consequences and errant significations, but these may be taken as positive attributes once seen through the lens of modernism. Within modernism, artworks assert a degree of sovereignty through their materials,

an assertion that was palpable in Williams's and Moore's works where, in a basic sense, the various media available to these artists for conveying a common historical message have lent themselves to different outcomes. Accepting this open--endedness, it should then be possible to accept that the operations of artworks vis-à-vis memories of the past, may take place both at a fraught site of controversy and yet at the same time within a dynamic aesthetic locus, one that repays serious attention since it outlasts the artwork's contingent circumstances of production and its original historical reception.

Becoming attuned to that complexity surrounding the status of artworks can also deliver a keener sense of how art may actively position those people in whose lives it is implicated. Aubrey Williams was occupied with painting in the face of the rise of more public and also temporary sorts of creativity, such as sculptural production on the one hand, theatrical performance on the other. His attempt to recuperate the value of painting – when that was becoming an outmoded artistic medium in Guyana – took place in parallel with the diminishing status of painting in the northern Atlantic metropole. (In the words of Michael Fried (1967), painting had come to be 'at war' with theatre and theatricality in the search for a more authentic modernism.) While Williams's painted in London, the sending of *Revolt* to Guyana was evidence of that war having a long front that extended to the Caribbean. It had evidently mixed results for Williams. Moore sought to find his own measure of artistic authenticity, aside even from those that there were normative in Guyana (the European representationalism that he shunned). Such a desire subjected him and his monument to public imputations of failure.

Conclusion

In the field of visualising slavery, artists' negotiations with the sensitive subject matter of a traumatic past have emerged simultaneously with the wider experimentation and exploration of art's materiality. Artworks from Guyana that were key contributions to the politics of anti-colonialism (especially its uses of the past through commemoration of an uprising during slavery) are helping to understand why visual art in the twentieth century came under pressure, and was changed, through such a practice of commemoration. The events of 1763 in Berbice, called to remembrance in the twentieth century, were in no small part a pretext for trying to understand the creative possibilities as well as the limitations of art and figuration. The result was an uneasy impact on the relationship between memory, painting and sculpture, in a political climate of unquestioning faith in art as a means to intervene decisively in history. The matter of what counts as an 'acceptable' art for responding to an unacceptable past is evidently a sensitive preoccupation in the modern Caribbean. Thus, deciding what comes to constitute as 'success' or 'failure' in this domain has to be radically problematized. We must take into account works of art that commemorate episodes of resistance to slavery, as well as how historical episodes of resistance themselves are evaluated. It is notable that the viewpoint which sees the uprising of 1763 as a triumph has been borne out through the condemnation of examples of artistic remembrance of that historical episode.

The imperative to revisit histories of enslavement and resistance is at its most fascinating in those cases when artists have engaged with the intersecting breadth of challenges that visualisation may bring, from the ideological to the material. The process of confronting slavery as an affective theme, put into the hands of artists and put before their audiences, may be caught in a maelstrom of controversies over aesthetic value and the appropriate modes of representation. In short, it reveals the limits of artistic agency. I have shown how this agency is relative to the acute material differences that pertain between one sort of art and another – between painting as compared to sculpture – when they are used for the disclosure and elaboration of historical memory. Above all, these material contestations about the past take an unfinished form and substance, in what is nonetheless an abidingly discursive and emotional field.

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Racial Specificity in Brazil: from 19th Century Racialist Understandings to the Myth of Racial Democracy

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Unlike in the United States, being Black in Brazil does not equate to being "non-white". Instead, Brazil employs a broad continuum of chromatic terms to describe skin color. However, the fact that this chromatic variation is particularly advocated by those closer to the "white" end of the classification spectrum reveals the underlying rejection of black skin color by the majority of the Brazilian population. For a long time, this widespread lack of identification with black skin has hindered the expansion of any sort of movement centered on the idea of a "Black identity".

The Black movement has struggled to constitute itself as a corporate body and attract sufficient members to its ethnic activism. The dominant ideology in Brazil is based on the long-standing globalizing discourse of "Brazilianness" that has seamlessly absorbed Blackness and Indianness whilst also aspiring to a universal "whitening" of the population. This ideology is the outcome of a lengthy intellectual trajectory surrounding the concept of "national identity". In the wake of Brazil's independence in 1822, the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the fall of Empire and proclamation of the Republic in 1889, Brazilian intellectuals have been trying to construct an ideological "Brazilian nation". Brazilians were keen to define their national identity, doubtless influenced by events in Europe such as the nationalist revolutions in Greece and what would later become Germany, which were fighting for independence from the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire respectively, and by the struggles for independence of other Latin American countries seeking liberation from the Spanish crown.

Keeping in with the ideological developments of the times, notably those of 19th century liberalism, this aspiration to determine the nation's conceptual content had a major impact on Brazil around the time of its proclamation as a Republic, and this has continued to this day with little change since World War II. Brazil views itself as a nation of the future, attaching little significance to the past and a great deal of importance to defining itself in the present, which explains the influence of different racial and social theories. The future plays a predominant role in the political vision of the elites while the rest of the population lives largely under the influence of the present.

In order to cast light on the construction of racism in Brazilian society throughout history, we will focus on the ideological framework behind racial democracy in Brazil; from the social Darwinism of the 19th century to the democratic ideal that emerged after World War II. Occasionally we will shift away from a purely historical approach

to consider how we can formulate the specific nature of interracial relations in Brazil. The historical scope of this essay will extend as far as 2001 and the Durban World Conference against Racism in South Africa, which was a milestone for Brazil's Black movement since it resulted in the long-awaited adoption of government policies favouring Afro-Brazilians. These policies were then discontinued in 2016 after the deposition of Dilma Roussef and the dissolution of the Ministry of Racial Equality.

Brazil was heavily influenced by 19th century deterministic theories which affirmed racial hierarchy and condemned racial mixing. These doctrines doomed the Brazilian nation, which was fundamentally mixed at the time, to failure. Faced with such a condemnation, Brazilian scientists adopted the hygienism trends that were in vogue at the time and identified the "whitening" of the population as a viable "path to redemption". In response to this denial of a genuinely mixed Brazil, Gilberto Freyre turned this ideology on its head and declared the birth of a new "race": the Brazilian race, a product of the biological and, above all, cultural mixing of the three founding components of the Brazilian nation: White, Black and Indian. This idealized vision of how interracial relations functioned during Portuguese colonialism gave rise to the founding myth of Brazilian identity: racial democracy. This essay will pay particular attention to the narratives that have emerged in relation to this concept. Situating racial democracy as a key objective in the construction of a national identity, these narratives question how realistic such an ideal is in the context of Brazil's deeply paternalistic, hierarchical society.

The Influence of Biological Determinism: From the "Degeneration" of Racial Mixing to Whitening

The racist theories proposed by European theorists such as Arthur de Gobineau, Henry Thomas Buckle and Friedrich Ratzel in the second half of the 19th century appear to have "scientifically" legitimized the perpetuation of power structures dating back to the Portuguese colony (1500-1822) and the subsequent Empire (1822-1889) and have thereby justified the continuing domination of their associated elites.

Some ideologies have the power to spread and multiply throughout every social class and space, reducing the distance between erudite or scientific theories and the shared values adopted within the society (Da Matta 1993: 59). The racist theories developed in the 19th century had a significant impact on Brazilian society as a whole and played a central role in shaping the narrative that surrounds the country's national identity. Prior to these theories, interpersonal relations were influenced more by the power and domination of master/slave-type relationships than by the simple question of skin color (Mattos 2013).

Gobineau was the French ambassador to Brazil between April 1869 and May 1870. Whilst he did try to immerse himself in Brazilian society to develop some of his theories, he also had a major influence on the country's elites.[1] According to Gobineau, different racial groups in Brazil could be differentiated in terms of

1 On the topic of Gobineau's time in Brazil, see Raeders Georges (1997). The play staged by Onisajé in 2019, *Traga-me a cabeça de Lima Barreto* (Bring me the head of Lima Barreto), with the Companhia dos Comuns in Rio de Janeiro, which recounts the influence of his theories on the writer's life.

their intellectual and psychological development, their propensity to animality and their moral aptitude. The black race represented the negative extreme of all these attributes, the white race the positive extreme; with the yellow race falling somewhere in the middle. Any mixing between these three could only lead to the degeneration of humankind.[2] On these grounds, the situation in Brazil was deemed catastrophic since racial mixing was one of the principal defining characteristics of the Brazilian population.[3] As Gilberto Freyre explains, the Portuguese crown encouraged relationships between colonizer and colonized throughout the colonial period, especially in the beginning. Those involved in conquering new regions tended to be single and their union with Amerindians in particular would allow them to populate the country.[4] Subsequently, union between masters and slaves, albeit forced, led to the birth of numerous mixed-race children.[5]

In the late 19th century the elites were thus faced with a real obstacle to define positively the Brazilian national identity, since the nation was seemingly "in a state of perdition". As Lilia Schwarcz explains, racist theories had a major influence on Brazilian intellectual circles, influencing medical schools (especially Bahia under Nina Rodrigues), law faculties and ethnographic museums. Mixed race people were believed to have a greater propensity to insanity, violence and criminality as a result of their natural degeneration. Eugenics were in fashion and proposals were made to draw up different criminal codes for Blacks and whites[6] and to sterilize mixed race people as a means to "purify the race",[7] along many other such policies.

In response to this stalemate between European racist theories and the reality of Brazilian society, Brazilian scientists identified the concept of whitening the population as a potential "solution". Schwarcz cites the example of João Batista Lacerda from the Museo Nacional de Rio de Janeiro in 1911, who used statistics to predict that the Brazilian population would be entirely white by 2011 (Schwarcz 1996: 17). According to Oliveira Vianna, this whitening would be brought about by higher birth rates among healthy white men and higher mortality rates among degenerate black and mixed-race people, who experienced

2 Da Matta 1993: 72, and Schwarcz 1995.

3 Following the 1870 census, which showed that the majority of the Brazilian population was mixed race, the question relating to skin color was removed. This points to the influence of racialist theories on the lives of mixed-race individuals at that time. See Schwarcz 1996: 174.

4 Schwarcz (1996: 154) cites the case of the Marquis of Pombal in the 18th century, who encouraged marriage with Amerindians as hisk main population policy. Gilberto Freyre attributed great importance to this stance from the Portuguese crown. In his view, the establishment of this type of rural family laid the foundation for the colonisation of the Brazilian territories. In Freyre (1992: 8).

5 Freyre considered Portuguese colonists to be very different from Scandinavian colonists. The Portuguese had a completely different understanding of race to other Europeans due to the "bi-continentality" that existed between Africa and Europe (1992: 6). Indeed, following the Moorish invasion during the early Middle Ages, the Portuguese population was intrinsically mixed rather than "pure". The myth of the enchanted Moorish woman (*A Moura Encantada*) had taken hold in Portugal and Portuguese colonists found a similar figure in Indian women, prompting racial mixing. According to Roberto Da Matta (1993: 67), this is an idealised image as the Portuguese population in Portugal discriminated actively against Jewish and Arab minorities, especially after the Inquisition. This proximity to Moorish culture alone cannot, therefore, account for the level of mixing between Portuguese colonists and Amerindian women. Moreover, Gilberto Freyre notes that the union of masters and slaves occurred when the masters were adolescents and had their first sexual experiences with young slaves. This reinforced "white sadism" and the "'innate' masochism of Black women" (1992: 50). Many scholars have condemned how the masters' abused their power over their slaves, especially in this kind of sexual relationship. Freyre does not deny the use of force; he simply implies that Black women valued these unions.

6 On this topic, see Nina Rodrigues (1957, first edition 1894). On the topic of eugenics, see Jurandir Freire Costa (1976).

7 In the United States, during the same period, a campaign to sterilize "the poor", who were most often Black, was launched on the grounds that they were "mentally handicapped". This policy remained in force until the 1950s.

hardship after abolition due to the increase in European immigration and strict political and ideological control over racial mixing (Munanga Kabengele 1996: 182). This long-term vision of the whitening of the population reassured the elites and justified any inequalities between the races. By "naturalizing" social differences on racial grounds, it became possible to scientifically justify social and political injustice (Schwarcz, op. cit.: 162).

This "whitening" ideology was introduced by the Brazilian elites towards the end of the 19th century. Among other clearly expressed aims, the objective was to trigger economic "development" in the country, which was thought to have been delayed by the presence of Black and mixed-race inhabitants. Between 1870 and 1930, immigration from Europe rose to more than three million.[8] The principle of eugenics was written into the Constitution of the Republic in 1934 (Larkin-Nascimento 2000: 206). This ideology of whitening the nation was widespread throughout Latin America. It led to "policies to encourage and subsidize European immigration and legislation to ban immigration by Africans and Asians."[9] According to Peter Wade, "miscegenation", which is a set of social practices rather than an ideology, must be differentiated from whitening, which is a hierarchical, discriminatory version of racial mixing. Miscegenation points to homogeneity and inclusion, differing from the norms of purity in force in other racial systems. It would, however, be a step on the way to the expected end result of whitening.[10] Yet could miscegenation not be understood the other way around? Challenging the dominant readings, some of the Black activists in the 1940s interpreted the idea of racial mixing as blackening of the population instead of its whitening. Some Black activists in the 1940s interpreted the idea of racial mixing in this way.

The Myth of Racial Democracy: Rationale, Reality and Challenges

The Brazilian notion of racial democracy is deeply ambiguous; it embodies both a progressive ideal of democratic equality, regardless of ethnic origin, between every member of a nation and an immensely conservative society that seeks to impose homogeneity upon the population as part of a single culture that is based on a hierarchy of individuals defined by their skin color. Therefore, it is not incompatible with an authoritarian regime. Yet how can the principle of racial democracy be made viable in a country where any individual's right to citizenship is highly relative? How can it be considered a democracy then? As Michel Agier explains, in Brazil "nobody is assumed to be a citizen until they prove otherwise" (Agier 1992: 55).

8 Rufino dos Santos, Joel (1988, p. 44). Rufino dos Santos shows that the image of Black men as "lazy" and "poor workers" applied to mixed race people in the 19th century rather than to Blacks, who were considered inventive, creative and good professionals. Former slaves who had bought back their freedom were numerous and had mostly become expert artisans. This negative image of Black people represents an ideological construction that emerged at the time of abolition and was reinforced over the long term.

9 Carlos Hasenbalg (1997: 29) adds: "The failure to conduct censuses in most countries on the continent is in itself revealing. Either the racial composition of these countries is considered socially unimportant (due to the publicity surrounding racial democracy) or the aim is to reinforce the invisibility of Black and mixed race members of the population."

10 Wade 1993: 19, 4. Peter Wade is an expert on racial relations in Colombia, especially the Chocó region, which is home to a large Black population.

The Myth and its Limitations

This section will explore the roots of the myth of "racial democracy". According to Renato Ortiz, the 1930 Revolution, which sought new political and social ways forward for Brazil, no longer met the requirements of 19th century racialist theories prompting Gilberto Freyre to join the debate in an attempt to provide a "response" to this new demand (Ortiz 1994: 40-41). Freyre, who was influenced by Franz Boas in particular, brought about a considerable paradigm shift in the understanding of interracial relations in Brazil, moving from the concept of "race" to that of "culture".[11] Although Freyre continued to classify the three races hierarchically based on their biological characteristics and with the white people driving "Civilization" forward culturally. This paradigm shift enabled a new approach to mixed-race people; far from being viewed as degenerates, they came to represent the Brazilian nation as the product of the unique characteristics of Portuguese colonization. Freyre argued that the difficulties faced by Brazil were not so much due to racial mixing but to other "colonial" problems such as syphilis, poor nutrition among colonists and slaves, wild nature, poor crop yields, and other such factors.[12]

Brazil was not only a place of biological mixing between the three races from the start of the Portuguese colonial era but also, and more importantly so, of cultural mixing. This perspective was extremely bold for the time as it proposed the recognition, albeit relative, of many elements of African and Indian cultures. This dual biological and cultural mixing represented the origin of what would become the myth of "racial democracy": from the start of the colonial era, a genuine harmony based on cordiality and amiability (the main foundations of the myth) could be observed between the "three founding races" and, as a result, between every social class. Mixed race people in Brazil would thus constitute a new "race", a global model of the tropical specificity of Brazil's nature and culture, and become the legitimate representatives of the nation. There would be a single Brazilian culture and none of the "three races" would have any legitimacy in advocating their specific culture, which implicitly meant that Afro and Indian cultures would be overlooked.

The myth of racial democracy penetrated every layer of the Brazilian population and, as Roberto Da Matta notes, it may be considered as the dominant ideology right up to the early 2000s and it retains a significant presence to this day. Although the majority of Brazilians are aware of the serious shortcomings of the paradigm in practice, they view it as an objective for the future and as an ideal for the nation. Although "the ideology of syncretism describes a universe free from contradiction, which transcends real discrepancies" (Ortiz 1994: 95) and thus evades conflict, the fact remains that the myth is present in everyone's minds, even those of certain members of the Black movement whose aim is to make this ideal a reality. The myth of the three races, which is synonymous with that of "racial democracy", allows individuals from different social classes and skin color groups to interpret racial relations within a given framework and to recognize each other as nationals (Ortiz 1994: 44).

11 Freyre takes an interest in everyday life rather than "major events", adopting an approach that would later be referred to as the 'History of mentalities'.

12 Freyre (1992) shows that slaves of African origin ate a far richer and more balanced diet than Europeans, who subsequently modified their cuisine. His book was highly controversial and daring for its time and following its publication his home was searched by police under Vargas's Estado Novo for "inciting racial hatred" among the Black population. It is well-known, however, that Vargas later adopted many of Freyre's ideas.

Detail from a poster for the MNU (Movimento Negro Unificado/ Unified Black Movement) in Salvador in 1978, featuring the following slogan on one of the banners: "For a genuine racial democracy".

The most striking limitation to the concept of racial democracy is its single-minded relation to the concept of what is "national". The cultural manifestations of people of color became "Brazilian" and have lost their specificity. For instance, Samba, a style of music with African roots became "national". Getulio Vargas and the Estado Novo made this vision their official ideology. Nevertheless, the recognition of mixed-race people was far from completely eliminating racial determinism. The ideology of whitening often overlapped with that of racial democracy, "concealing" the hierarchy with a supposedly homogeneous national culture whose components were all equal to one another. Stripped of the right to proclaim their uniqueness, non-white communities no longer had any credibility when calling for genuine integration and civic rights. Ethnic claims became obsolete and demands, especially those made by the Black movement, were rejected because they were deemed unrelated to "reality".

The concept of racial democracy was ambiguous from its very creation. By dismissing the historical context and the numerous situations of conflict that arose as the colony developed, such as recurring slave revolts, Freyre overlooked the asymmetry present in power relations, confusing "racial mixing" with "absence of stratification". Far from being permissive, the Portuguese monarchy introduced an extremely hierarchical society in which there was no place for individuals and the whole (monarchy and Catholic Church) was always greater than the sum of its parts (Da Matta 1993: 75). This pyramid structure, subtly subdivided into countless levels within each category, positioned slaves in terms of the value accorded to their activity and masters according to their powers, forming the basis of a deeply unequal society which was dominated by favoritism.

According to Da Matta, "everyone knew their place" in Brazil so it was not necessary to impose official segregation, as in the United States or South Africa. The system of social and racial relations was fundamentally unequal, thwarting any campaign for change.[13] Indeed, individualistic liberal ideology made very little headway in Brazil:

13 The author views North American segregation as a response to liberal ideology, which considers all individuals to be equal in the eyes of the law. How could whites retain power, especially in the southern United States, which had recently been conquered by troops from the north during the American Civil War, if not by legally establishing apartheid? The reality in Brazil was quite different.

the colony's independence came into effect when the monarchy was transferred from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro and the proclamation of the Republic occurred as a continuation of the Empire.

The concept of racial democracy provided ideological justification for the continuation of a system of domination. By highlighting ongoing mediation by mixed race people, occupying the middle-ground of the hierarchy, it avoided conflict and ensured that any attempt to bring social change could be suppressed, according to Da Matta. As Florestan Fernandes observed in 1955, it ensured the perpetuation of the traditional elites.[14] Apart from members of the Black movement such as Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, Abdias Nascimento and José Correia Leite, Floresan Fernandes was the first sociologist to systematically question the reality of racial democracy and condemn the absence of genuine civic rights for Black populations in post-abolition society:

> The historical and social circumstances have allowed the myth of 'racial democracy' to emerge and be manipulated as an intermediary in the exercise of the societal mechanisms that defend the attitudes, behaviours and 'aristocratic' ideals of the 'dominant race'. For the reverse to occur, the myth would have to have come into the hands of Blacks and mixed-race people and they would have to possess equivalent autonomy to exploit it in the opposite direction in view of their own interests and as a factor for democratizing wealth, culture and power.[15]

Applying a structuralist approach tinged with Marxism, Fernandes reconsidered the slave order's persistence within society at the time. In his view, Brazilian society was not divided into classes, as Donald Pierson had argued, but into prestige and status groups inherited from the colonial era: Whites (former masters), Blacks and mixed-race people (former slaves). Class barriers also existed, of course, but were juxtaposed with race barriers limiting the social mobility of Blacks and mixed-race people within the new post-abolition social order. Fernandes believed that discrimination would gradually disappear as society became modernized, allowing post-colonial structures to fall away. Michel Agier considers that Florestan Fernandes actually believed in an evolutionist paradigm: "the transition from a status society (inherited from the past) to a contract or class society (in the making), brought about by industrialization and urbanization" (1992: 53).

Fernandes believed that the white elites viewed the arrival of Black and mixed-race people on the labor market as a potentially destructive influence on the established patriarchal order. Their demands for genuine competition, in the sense of the liberal capitalist ideology which was supposed to guarantee "equal opportunities" and "social success through work", represented a threat to the white elites: this equality challenged the very foundations of the dominant system of clientelism controlled by former colonial elites, who were mostly white.[16] While this fear goes some way to explaining the persistence of racial discrimination, it may also be viewed as the result of the internalization of 19th century racial theories by the dominant population and, rather unfortunately, by Black and mixed race people. Discriminatory behavior is thus considered "natural" by white people, as is the granting of the numerous privileges that they consider their "due".

14 In his first publication from 1955; he went on to specialise in this topic (Fernandes 1965).
15 Fernandes cited by Guimaraes (1999: 93).
16 This echoes the reaction from the elites in 2018 when they brought Bolsonaro to power in response to public policies, notably involving quotas for university education and rights granted to domestic employees.

Hardly any Brazilian sees themselves as a racist and it is considered uncouth to openly express prejudice against specific skin color groups in public. In private or interpersonal relations, the topic continues to be relatively taboo. In 1972, Fernandes explained that the powerful myth of "racial democracy" had made Brazilians "prejudiced about not being prejudiced" (1972: 23). According to Agier, "the myth of racial democracy gradually emerged as a political imposition: a social, or even institutional, prohibition on discussing racism and racial prejudice" (Agier 1992: 61). This lasted until 2001 and the Durban conference in South Africa. The Brazilian delegation returned from the conference with a genuine desire for change thereby allowing government policies to be introduced to fight discrimination both in universities, through the implementation of quotas, and in the justice system, etc.

In 1988, Lilia Schwarcz conducted a study for the University of São Paulo that provided evidence of this ambiguity. The results of the questionnaire showed that 97% of respondents claimed not to hold prejudices, yet 98% of the same sample said that they knew somebody who was prejudiced, which could even include friends or family. The author concluded that "every Brazilian feels like an island of racial democracy surrounded by racists on all sides" (Schwarcz 1996: 155). There is real impunity when it comes to breaches of anti-racism laws. Despite the fact that Law 7.716, which came into force in January 1989, criminalizes racism, the police continue to treat racist comments as "jokes." Carlos Moura, executive secretary of the Inter-ministerial Working Group for the Recognition of the Black Population, stated in 1998: "It is not a shortcoming of the law. From the filing of the complaint to the police investigation and the judge's ruling, there is prejudice against Black people. At all three levels, there is absolutely no recognition of racism against the Black population" (*Folha de São Paulo*, 23.08.98, caderno 3: 1).

The UNESCO Project and the Unexpected "Revelation" of Brazilian Racism

It was a UNESCO project that prompted Florestan Fernandes's critique of the racial system in Brazil. The project led to substantial changes in the approach taken to the race issue in Brazilian society. Following the horrors of World War II, it aimed to show the success of Brazil's racial system, producing a mixed-race nation and serving as a model of racial democracy.[17] This large-scale survey was conducted between 1951 and 1952 and covered four Brazilian states: Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Only the team responsible for conducting the study in São Paulo (Roger Bastide, Florestan Fernandes and Oracy Nogueira) revealed the social inequality that was present between white, Black and mixed-race people and highlighted the inaccuracy of an assimilationist and integrationist understanding of Brazilian society. Their sociological study was the first to identify the existence of a cruel racial inequality in terms of access to work, education, health and leisure in Brazil.

With the exception of the study on Bahia and several articles by Bastide, the final report was not published as it did not meet UNESCO's expectations and Brazil con-

17 As part of the project, Claude Lévi-Strauss was asked to write an essay on the importance of respecting cultural differences, which would form the basis for numerous subsequent reflections. For more information about the UNESCO project in Brazil, see Chor Maio (1997). The details presented here on this topic are taken from this source.

tinued to be "exported" globally as a "model" of interracial harmony.[18] As Chor Maio explains, the study was highly useful as it provided evidence of the differences between the situations of Afro-descendant populations in north-east and south-east Brazil in particular, which remains a necessary distinction. It also led to the practical disappearance of the deterministic theories that were still in vogue and to an understanding of the race issue based on the sociological framework of interracial relations including Black and mixed-race populations as part of society, and therefore moving beyond the approaches that saw Afro-Brazilian culture simply as a "side-show" that were common to such research in the 1930s.[19] Indeed, the members of the various *Congressos Afro-Brasileiros* organised in Recife by Gilberto Freyre (1934) and later in Salvador by Nina Rodrigues (1937) took a very limited, often deterministic approach to research on Black subjects, focusing solely on the characteristic elements of "African" culture and often considering Afro-Brazilians as strangers to the national culture because they were "African", without seeking to understand their degree of integration within Brazilian society.[20]

The São Paulo team, which subsequently became known as the *Escola Paulista*, completely changed the approach to the race issue raised at the start of the century. The *Escola Paulista* often based their reflections on the Marxist paradigm, combining the concepts of race, class and social mobility. In their view, Freyre's thinking evoked an "archaic", rural north-eastern Brazil rather than a "modern" Brazil experiencing the urban, industrial reality of a class-based society. Like Florestan Fernandes or Oracy Nogueira, however, Roger Bastide never dismissed one of the central elements of Gilberto Freyre's thought: the warmth and cordiality of interpersonal relations in Brazil. They all shared the opinion that this eminently Brazilian characteristic could not be overlooked when developing a new interracial model. Bastide drew attention to the Brazilian dilemma: Brazilians were at once aware of the fact that cordiality underpins the preferential relationships involved in Brazilian paternalism but were also proud of the affectionate and fraternal relationships that existed between the different ethnic groups.[21] Nevertheless, Fernandes and Nogueira believed that only the civic and democratic education of the Brazilian people in combination with this cordiality would allow a Brazilian "model" of interracial relations based on true racial democracy, rather than paternalism, to become a long-term reality.[22]

The members of the *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (TEN), including Abdias Nascimento in the 1940s and Guerreiro Ramos (one of the founders of TEN), raised these kinds of questions and reached similar conclusions: education was required not only for the white population but also for Black and mixed-race people in order to reduce the social differences arising from the unequal treatment of ethnic groups and achieve

18 Chor Maio notes that only the study conducted in Bahia and directed by Wagley was published. According to Alfred Metraux, who was responsible for overseeing the project on behalf of UNESCO, the study provided a simple, didactic overview of the racial situation in Brazil and met the institution's expectations. The study in Rio de Janeiro, directed by Costa Pinto, reached similar conclusions to the São Paulo study and was not published. The author does not clearly explain why the Recife study, led by René Ribeiro, was not published either (Chor Maio 1997: 307, 309, 312).

19 The UNESCO study influenced sociological and anthropological research throughout the democratisation process (1946-1964). This research was interrupted by the military coup d'état in 1964. Fernandes' research, in particular, provided a starting point for reflection by many activists in the Black movement. However, these studies rarely reached society as a whole and never managed to trigger the emergence of a new "dominant ideology", to use Roberto da Matta's term.

20 The participants in the congresses were mostly doctors, usually psychiatrists, and viewed Black people as mentally retarded in line with the principles set out by Gobineau.

21 Bastide (1957: 512), cited by Chor Maio 1997: 318.

22 Fernandes, (1960: XVI.) and Oracy Nogueira, 1955: 423-424 (cited by Chor Maio: 316-317.)

true racial democracy. Abdias Nascimento and Guerreiro Ramos also sought to influence UNESCO's research and put pressure on the Brazilian government to organize an International Conference on Race Relations from UNESCO. In their view, the proposals made by the TEN could be used as a starting point to analyze what could actually obstruct genuine racial integration.[23] But was UNESCO really keen on learning about the dysfunction present in the system or was it merely seeking to promote a "model" of interracial relations? Although the TEN's proposals were not taken up by UNESCO, Costa Pinto,[24] director of the survey in the state of Rio de Janeiro, and the São Paulo team, including Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes in particular, were familiar with the history of TEN and are sure to have been inspired by the organization in their analyses.

"Brazilian-style" Racism: Skin Color as a Factor in Racial and Social Hierarchy

Brazilian racism is truly unique. It can neither be understood as a model of racial democracy, nor as a copy of North American or South African racism. Instead, it is the product of successive phases in the development of specifically Brazilian racial practices and narratives.

In order to understand how discrimination became naturalised in Brazilian society, Michel Wieviorka's typology of the different dynamics coexisting within the practice of racism is an excellent source of wisdom. The author establishes two main dynamics: firstly, the targeted group is made inferior, and secondly, it is made different (Wiewiorka 1993: 10-12). The first variant is deeply unequal: the group can have a place within society, as long as discriminated individuals adopt a position of inferiority that corresponds to them as a result of their "nature". The second reserves no space in society for the ostracized group. The discriminated community is viewed as a threat to the dominant culture due to its "intractable" cultural characteristics. This second dynamic results in rejection, exclusion and, in the worst case, expulsion or even the destruction of the group. The aim is to prevent any kind of social interaction with the group which evidently leads to segregation.

Brazilian racism is more closely linked to the first variant, while the second is more relevant to the United States and South Africa. In Brazil, Black and mixed-race populations are not excluded from society and their culture is not viewed as a threat. However, they remain "inferior" and their function tends to be limited (in the collec-

23 This shows how attentive members of the TEN were to all kinds of initiatives to fight racism, both artistic and political. See Chor Maio 1997: 261.

24 According to Elizabeth Larkin Nascimento, Costa Pinto drew inspiration from the information and conclusions presented at the conference organised in Rio by the TEN in 1950 (Primeiro Congresso do Negro Brasileiro/First Conference for Black Brazilians), especially with regard to the status of Black people as mere objects of study rather than full members of Brazilian society. Costa Pinto does not name the organisers of the conference in his work. In his book *O negro no Rio de Janeiro*, the product of the survey conducted for UNESCO, he criticises all the initiatives launched by the Black movement, especially the TEN. He views it as a movement of "intellectualised, pigmented petty bourgeois", with no connection to the "Black masses". From Costa Pinto's radical Marxist perspective, any claim to a Black identity was a "false consciousness" that cut the Black "masses" off from the rest of the population and jeopardised the potential for raising awareness among the "people". In his response to criticism of his study from the TEN, Costa Pinto opted to speak in biological terms: "*I doubt that there is any biologist who, after studying a microbe, let's say, has seen that microbe appear in public and write sentences on the study in which it participated as laboratory material*". He also claimed that it was a racist movement comprising of only Black people. However, numerous white people participated in the TEN. In Larkin-Nascimento, (2000: 237, 238, 301); Costa Pinto 1998.

tive imagination, at least) to that of driver, cleaner or bricklayer, or, "at best", musician or footballer, as shown by the roles played by Black characters in most television series or theatre plays on the commercial circuit. To return to Da Matta, Black and mixed-race people in Brazil "know their place" and are "requested" to make do.[25] Therefore, Brazilian racism falls under the first dynamic identified by Wieviorka.

Wieviorka emphasizes that the two dynamics are distinct in theory but have never been entirely separate in practice. Not long ago, the ideal of whitening echoed the second dynamic, as it sought, rather absurdly, to "eliminate" Black blood through racial mixing.[26] This ideal is no longer advocated officially but it continues to influence interpersonal relations and has even been internalized by the discriminated groups themselves.[27]

Ultimately, the outcome of this dynamic is a deeply unequal society that continues to operate social classifications based on skin color and other physical markers such as hair type, nose shape and lip shape (*preconceito de marca*) rather than ancestry or blood (*preconceito de origem*) as in the United States or South Africa, as Oracy Nogueira brilliantly explains.[28] Only the Brazilian Black movements, with their pugnacity and determination, have managed to change the situation in Brazil since 2001. They received support from the Lula government in 2003 and their abrupt slowdown in 2016, exacerbated in 2019 and still continuing to this day can only highlight how effective their actions have been. As they brought the Afro and Amerindian populations out of the shadows and into the spotlight, they sowed panic among the country's white elites, now represented by the current president. The government has since shut down the Ministry of Racial Equality and appointed an individual who rejects all aspects of African ancestral culture (such as Candomblé and Umbanda) as the director of the Fundação Palmares, the institute responsible for developing Afro-Brazilian culture.[29] Since 2019, their places of worship, *terreiros*, have been subjected to unprecedented numbers of attacks. In August 2020, the magazine Veja recorded 1,335 crimes linked to religious intolerance in the first eight months of the year.[30] Many *terreiros* have been closed as the result of the actions of the unlikely 'Soldiers of Jesus' movement, which forbids playing drums or dressing in white and drives practitioners out of their places of worship, often ancient and loca-

25 Agier clearly summarises the situation in Brazil with reference to the specific case of Bahia: [Contemporary racism is a] "system comprising the simultaneous existence of a wide range of racial stereotypes, the established belief that Black people prefer to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy and out of power, a discipline of interpersonal relations based on evading conflict, and finally, an acceptance that it is inappropriate to speak of racism in the land where everyone is mixed (...) Bahian racism is not exclusion/segregation, but rather a diffuse, unspoken form of integration and domination" (1992: 61-62).

26 This was a "long-term" vision of whitening, with no "ethnic cleansing" implemented. It is important to question what it means to be "white" in a country with high levels of racial mixing. Although the Brazilian authorities and elites advocate a "whitening" of the Brazilian population over time, would this not actually be a "blackening"? Are all "white" Brazilians not already mixed? (See Piault 1997: 14).

27 Rufino dos Santos (1980: 73). He cites the case of a husband who attempted to "whiten" his wife in 1971 by bathing her in acid. Rufino recounts that it was common in the 1940s to see women rub their faces with bleach to whiten them. Many continue to straighten their hair even in contemporary times. Frantz Fanon describes the same ideology of whitening among Caribbean populations, who sought to "whiten" the "race" by marrying people with lighter skin. "In the end, the race must be whitened; this is what all Martinique women know, say and repeat. Whitening the race, saving the race, and not in the sense that one might expect: not to preserve 'the originality of the part of the world where they grew up' but to guarantee its whiteness." (Fanon 1971: 38). His broader work reveals the difficulties encountered by Caribbean men of color in detaching themselves from a system of thought that they are taught from childhood, in which white people represent Good and Black people represent Evil.

28 South Africa and the United States do not allow for gradations of skin color: the "mixed race" category is non-existent and mixed-race people are classified as "Black" based on the classic definition of the "one-drop rule" (in Nogueira Oracy 1955).

29 Sergio Camargo is President of the Palmares Cultural Foundation.

30 *Veja,* August 18 2021.

ted in disadvantaged neighborhoods (*favelas*). There is some degree of resistance but the situation remains difficult, as the racism described here is compounded by a religious factor, with this mass involvement of congregations from evangelical churches that demonize African or Amerindian cultural and religious practices.

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Constraints and Adaptations of the Afro-Brazilian Museum at the Federal University of Bahia: Reflections on its Initial Project and Inaugural Exhibition[1]

Marcelo da Cunha

The Afro-Brazilian Museum of the Federal University of Bahia (MAFRO) was created from an agreement involving the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Education and Culture, the Government of the State of Bahia and the City Hall of Salvador, as part of a Cultural Cooperation Program between Brazil and African Countries. Among the planned activities were the organizing courses and seminars, publications, scholarships for African students, and the recruitment of teachers for educational and cultural missions in Africa. In sum, the Museum would be "composed of ethnological and artistic collections on African cultures and the main sectors of African influence in the life and culture of Brazil" (UFBA, Term, 1974: 2).

The collaboration between the various official bodies that founded the Museum provided for it through material and technical contributions, including the restoration of the building for the installation of the museum, subsidies for its activities, acquisition of the collection, etc., and it was established that the CEAO - Center for Afro-Oriental Studies[2] of UFBA, would be the Museum's managing body. In a letter to the Governor of the State of Bahia, in 1973, an ambassador from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) declared an interest in the preparations for the Museum:

> ... I return, with redoubled enthusiasm, to a project of common interest for Bahia and for Itamaraty: he Afro-Brazilian Museum [...] the Afro-Brazilian Museum is an enterprise to which I attribute the highest importance and that I would like to see implemented during the current government's term (Barboza 1973: 1).

In a document from this period, prepared by the UFBA, definitions of the concept and exhibitions are presented for the Museum, based on the proposal prepared by the photographer and ethnographer Pierre Verger:

> ... it will describe the African contribution to Brazilian cultural formation and [...] explain the various acculturative processes that have taken place in the different regions of the country, according to the ethnic predominance of its populations of African origin. It will present the ethnographic description of the various African peoples who came to Brazil, as well as [...] national syntheses derived from the contact of these peoples with others [...] including the artistic-ethnographic collections and the scientific activities of the Afro-Brazilian Museum, the anthropo-

1 This text was adapted from a chapter in my dissertation entitled The Afro-Brazilian Museum at the Federal University of Bahia - MAFRO: A Case Study in the Musealization of Afro-Brazilian Culture, 1999..

2 Created in 1959, by the Portuguese humanist Agostinho Silva, it is an organ linked to the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences at the Federal University of Bahia, dedicated to study, research, and community action in the area of Afro-Brazilian studies and affirmative action in favor of Afro-Brazilian populations, as well as studies of African and Asian languages and civilizations.

> logical description of African peoples not directly involved in the Brazilian cultural formation process [...] The collections to be exhibited should also cover the part of Africa above the Sahara, the so-called Arab Africa (UFBA, Guidelines, n.d., n.p.).

The same document indicated the types of materials and themes of its collection:

a) Work tools, furniture, clothing and fabrics, musical instruments, adornments and jewelry, paintings, scarifications and body tattoos, etc.

b) Creative expressions: production techniques, music, dance, sculpture, painting, etc.

c) Social life manifestations: political organization of the nation, ethnic group, etc., religion, family and group organization (birth, marriage, death, etc.), social behavior of members of each ethnic group, etc.

Two divisions are indicated for the museum, as far as its exhibits are concerned:

Static Museum - Permanent exhibition rooms, addressing the following themes: Ethnic groups (geographic distribution); techniques (agriculture, fishing, boats, sculpture, basketry, weaving, pottery, foundry, etc.) showing technical movements, examples of tools, raw material, manufacturing phases, etc. Also the organization of man (memorial, social and political values); organization of the environment and cosmovision (religious, educational, aesthetic, economic, syncretic, writing values); dance and music: audio-visual elements (costumes, ornaments, photographs, painted fabrics); everyday life: community, religious, domestic and habitat life.

Dynamic Museum - A space dedicated to temporary exhibits and multimedia activities, for exhibitions and artistic activities such as theater, for example.

The proposal for the museum was bold, daring, and modern, as in the case of the storage space open to visitors, with capacity to store 50,000 objects. Besides providing specialized deposits and maintenance areas, ateliers for assembling, carpentry and others, and laboratories (Central Laboratory, specialized in restoration and conservation; Technology Laboratory, specialized on weaving, pottery, carpentry, foundry; Ethnomusicology Laboratory, connected to the organology reserve (dance and music) with a small seminar room for 12 to 15 students, and associated with the sound archives and Linguistics Laboratory (University Phonetics Laboratory).

There were also proposed "scientific services" such as researchers' offices (15), cartography/conductor's library, photographic/filmographic library, sound archives or phonographic library (associated with the Museum's ethnomusicology laboratory and the University's phonetics laboratory), documentation center, magazine room, housing for researchers (5 to 6), conference room with an auditorium seating 200 people. There should also be a place "suitable for presenting, on an open-air theater stage, folk performances when circumstances allow: dance, music, the art of storytelling (including *literatura de cordel*), etc." Complementing this structure there would be a restaurant and cafeteria. Reading this document indicates that the project was characterized by its progressive, with a proposal to use cultural heritage for

learning. Its team would be formed by two curators (one ethnologist and one not defined), with no mention of a museologist, in addition to specialized personnel for the various sectors planned, and technical and support staff.

Regarding the effective participation of the partners involved in the Museum's creation, an analysis of the documentation found indicates the non-fulfillment of commitments. Correspondence from December 1975, from the Director of the CEAO, Guilherme Castro, addressed to the President of its Deliberative Council, reveals that the partners of the Agreement did not fulfill their obligations for the installation of the Museum, hindering its conclusion.

As for the creation and opening of the Museum, news appeared in the press from the very beginning of some problems that were encountered:

> An 'Afro-Brazilian' museum will soon appear in Salvador, depending only on the signing of an agreement ... during the meeting there was evidence that a climate of tension and dispute will surround the creation of the museum, since there are many candidates for the position of director and few who are in a position to exercise it. Another issue under discussion before beginning the selection of the material that will cover all the areas of Black influence in the formation of Brazilian culture is the location of the museum. It was decided that the museum could be in three previously selected locations – Solar do Ferrão, Quinta dos Lázaros and a third location kept secret, so as not to cause controversy ("Disputa...", 1973: 8).

This comment revealed future problems relating to MAFRO being housed within the School of Medicine building on the Terreiro,[3] the "secret location" mentioned in the note. Once the location was revealed, the possible profile of the future director was also considered: "only a scholar of African culture in Brazil could hold the position ("Medicina abriga Afro-Brasileiro", 1973: 5).

There were suggestions that its collection was the result of loans of pieces from other museums, by transfer or acquisition.

> The museum collection will be made up mainly of pieces that exist scattered around various museums across the country, which are related to African culture in Brazil and that, because they do not fit very well with the collection of those museums, are quite out of place. [...] The museum will also have private collections that exist in great number in Brazil and that may be donated. Finally, pieces may be obtained through the Brazilian embassies in African countries ("Onde vai ser o Museu", 1973: 6).

Several strategies were thought out to build the collection, as is revealed in the following note:

> Some pieces from the collection of the Estácio de Lima Museum will be incorporated into the museum[4] [...] Other donations will be made by African countries

3 Terreiro: *Terreiro de Jesus* square, in Salvador's Historic Center, generically called Pelourinho.

4 About the Estácio de Lima Museum, see Marcelo da Cunha 2019, vol. 2: 107-145. https://www.ipleiria.pt/esecs/wpcontent/uploads/sites/15/2020/01/museologiapatrimonio_volume2.pdf..

> through the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by universities, institutions and museums of African studies, not only from Africa, but also from Europe and the United States [...]. Finally, noted the director of CEAO, the representative collection of Afro-Brazilian culture will be obtained through agreements with the various states of the Federation ("Museu Afro-Brasileiro ficará", 1974: 7).

To put together the Afro-Brazilian collection, a campaign was conducted among the Bahian community, with significant collaboration from the *povo-de-santo*,[5] *capoeira* groups and Afro-Brazilian *blocos*.[6]

Still on the choice of the location for the museum, soon after the announcement, there were reactions from the medical community, like the following:

> The president of the Bahia Institute of Medical History (*Instituto Bahiano de História da Medicina*, in Portuguese), Mr. Raimundo de Almeida, telegraphed Minister Jarbas Passarinho, of the Ministry of Education and Culture as soon as he learned that the building that housed the first medical school in Brazil would be transformed into the Afro-Brazilian Museum, saying he was surprised by the news and making an appeal for the installation of a Museum of Medicine, transferring the Afro-Brazilian Museum, according to his suggestion, to a building to be chosen in Cruzeiro de São Francisco or in Pelourinho. [...] [He] made a point of declaring that the effort to bring the Museum to Bahia deserves only praise and applause. However, he added, "the choice of building does not seem right to me" ("Onde ficar o Museu", 1974: 5).

In the same note, the CEAO director states that

> [...] since the building of the first School of Medicine is the property of the Federal University of Bahia, the latter shall put it to the use that best suits the University's interests ("Onde ficar o Museu", 1974: 5).

With this note, a dispute was started that probably became the major and main factor responsible for the non-completion of the projects for the Museum in full and according to the original plan.

Regarding the installation of the Memorial of Medicine in the building, in counterpoint to the installation of the Afro Museum, we found a note from Professor José Silveira, Director of the Brazilian Institute of Thoracic Research, with the following considerations:

> Long before any understanding had been made public, to the effect of installing the Afro-Brazilian Museum there, we launched the idea of using the facilities of the 1st School of Medicine of Brazil for related activities, with the establishment of all the medical associations of Bahia, as well as a museum, archive, library and everything else [...]. Opinions differ a bit regarding what should be done with the building: some want a museum, others something more complex. But no one

5 Persons belonging to a religious community of African origin.

6 On the formation of the Afro-Brazilian Collection, see my dissertation entitled *O Museu Afro-Brasileiro da Universidade Federal da Bahia e sua coleção de cultura material religiosa afro-brasileira*, authored by Juipurema Sandes, written for the Multidisciplinary Postgraduate Program in Ethnic and African Studies (PÓS-AFRO/UFBA). Link: https://repositorio.ufba.br/ri/handle/ri/23895.

> admits what seems to have been specifically agreed: The Afro-Brazilian Museum at the *Terreiro de Jesus* College ("Museu Afro-Brasileiro provoca", 1974: 8).

What is taking shape in the comments in the press is ignorance allied to prejudice in the treatment of the issue. A situation that is revealed when one considers, for example, that the Museum should be installed in "a house in Pelourinho", as can be seen in the following excerpt:

> The president of the institute [...] made a new appeal to the MEC, asking for the structure of the building not to be modified, and for the *Museu do Negro* to be installed in an old and historic colonial *sobrado (a house of two or more stories)* or *paço*, where the black slaves lived and suffered, which would make the institution more authentic ("Contra entidades médicas", 1974: 5).

We identify in this discourse, and in other texts, the idea that the Afro theme would not fit with the grandiosity of the eclectic architecture of the Medicine building and should be located in the colonial baroque architecture of other buildings in the Historic Center. In the midst of this climate of resistance it is possible to find dissenting and favorable voices, as in this note from 1974, in which the issue of the Museum gained prominence, dissenting from the unified chorus of the medical community:

> [...] they decided to reserve the noble part of the old school [...] for the Museum of Medicine, assigning the rest of the school for the installation of the *Museu do Negro* or of Afro-Brazilian culture. It would be difficult to have a better communion, considering that in the old school of *Terreiro de Jesus* the studies of legal medicine, anthropology, ethnography, Africanism began with Nina Rodrigues [...] And this solution is above all praiseworthy because it is in line with a better use of the large areas occupied by the old school, since the "noble part" referred to is sufficient to install and carry out, as we said [...] everything that, in the end, will constitute the oldest Cultural Center of National Medicine ("Vitoriosa a classe médica", 1974: 6).

In early 1976, the Museum had not yet been inaugurated, while the press announced the arrival of pieces for its collection from the African continent. Between September and October 1976, in order to exhibit the pieces already acquired, the CEAO decided to organize an exhibition, together with the Cultural Foundation of the State of Bahia, at the Solar do Unhão. The exhibition was widely publicized in the press, as a way to draw the city's attention to the museum and the need to inaugurate it soon, and to try to reduce pressures that were already rising from the fact that the collection had been boxed up and stored. The following year began with the news of the "return" of the Terreiro building to the medical community, generating speculation about backtracking on the decision to install the museum there.

> The initiative of Dean Augusto Mascarenhas, who is a professor at the School of Medicine, pleased the entire medical class [...] With the use to which the building of the School of Medicine at *Terreiro de Jesus* will be put, that which we published a few days ago about the *Museu do Negro* is confirmed, meaning that it will no longer be installed in that building ("Prédio histórico do Terreiro", 1977: 5).

The Foundation of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the State, manifested about the paralysis of the works, informing that "We suspended the works [...] in order to determine whether the building will be occupied by the Afro-Brazilian Museum, since we need this definition in order to adapt the restoration work to the objectives that the building will serve ("Patrimônio espera definição", 1977: 5).

In June 1977, during a visit to the building, Governor Roberto Santos declared his interest in continuing the work. On this occasion, Dean Augusto Mascarenhas declared that

> It has long been an ambition of the University to restore the building, but now it is being reconsidered and discussed. This way, the work, the plans, everything will be redone within a re-evaluation of the use of the space and only after all this is done will there be a definition of how it will be used ("Governo quer retomar", 1977: 5).

In August, there were already notes in the press about the threat to the Afro-Brazilian Museum, and it was also stated that the collection kept arriving from various places, with pieces in storage for some years. Among other things, a new justification for not having the Afro Museum in the building emerged:

> This project was later abandoned because the area of 11,000 square meters is too large for a museum. A Cultural Center will probably be installed there, but this is still subject to studies by a commission created for this purpose by UFBA ("Indefinição sobre Museu", 1977: 6).

At that time, ironically, the Museum was in danger of losing the Terreiro building's space due to an alleged excess of space. It is evident in the note above that the problem faced for the installation of the Museum, besides being political and ideological, was also conceptual, for if the issue was the installation of a Cultural Center in the ample space available, why was it impossible to house an Afro Museum inside the Center? What were the elements that would compose this Center? Instead of considering the suitability of the Museum's design for the existing space, some people preferred to think about not installing the museum in the building. It seems to us that the question was not related to the size of the space or its planning, but rather who would occupy the space and how they would occupy it.

The impasse over the *Museu Afro* had repercussions in Brazil, with notes on the subject appearing in national newspapers, criticizing the actions against the Museum.

> The problem that arose in Bahia with the Afro-Brazilian Museum and the Center for Afro-Oriental Studies and Research had been foreseen since 1974/75, due to the inexistence of agreements between the federal and Bahia governments to preserve and defend Afro-Asian institutions from colonialist, racist and fascist groups. For at least 20 years, black groups and scholars have been making efforts to organize this museum. When everything seems ready and a heritage has been gathered, having a building available - the former School of Medicine, in Salvador - Hitlers and Salazars appear from all sides to hinder its installation and operation. As the *cordel* literature said: "After all, who would have thought it?

> / Hitler became a saint / and died in Bahia! Did he really die? Or is he loose on the slopes of Salvador, leading the campaign against the *Museu do Negro*?" (Sardella 1977: 10)

Finally, in March 1978, comes the definition published in the city's newspapers, like the one below.

> After four years of marching and countermarching the CEAO - Center for Afro--Oriental Studies will see the installation of the Afro-Brazilian Museum. Not on the scale and with the spaces envisaged in the original design but sharing the building of the old School of Medicine, with the complex of cultural units of the State. ("Museu Afro-Brasileiro vai ser...", 1978: 5).

Despite the publication of the solution, almost a year later, at the beginning of 1979, we find news such as the following:

> More than a thousand pieces reserved for the installation of the Afro-Brazilian museum are deteriorating. Accumulated in a ridiculous warehouse at the Center for Afro Oriental Studies, the precariousness of the material - mostly fabric, wood or plaster - makes corrosion pervasive. [...] at the moment no mention of the future location - or if at least there will be a location - is made by those responsible. It is only known that the building of the former School of Medicine in *Terreiro de Jesus*, where the museum was to be installed, will no longer serve this purpose. [...] The Director of the CEAO, Guilherme de Castro, responsible for the execution of the program, received a memorandum from the Historical Heritage Foundation, informing him that the old college will serve as a non-formal education center, with an exhibit room for African pieces. The room, however, does not have space to receive the fourth part of the Collection that has already been amassed. [...] Guilherme Castro added that the disregard for the installation of the museum is due to projects considered more important by the State and the municipality ("Acervo afro-brasileiro, 1979: 5).

In June 1979, the new Director of the CEAO, Nelson Araújo, announced the imminent opening, stating that "there will be more pieces than space when it starts working" ("Museu Afro-Brasileiro será ...", 1979: 5). A problem that occurred not exactly because the museum had amassed too many pieces in its collection, but because of the small space allotted to it when it finally opened in 1982.

In 1980, in a ceremony attended by the School of Medicine and the Dean, recovered areas were returned to the School, to be used for Seminars, Conferences, etc., as well as the Frederico Edelweiss Library, with the rest of the area (part of what was intended for the Afro) under occupation study. He also confirmed that the project would be fulfilled according to that which had been established, with changes that are normal in any project.

At this time there had been a change of Dean at the Federal University of Bahia, with Professor Luiz Fernando Macedo Costa taking over the Dean's chair and guaranteeing that the museum would be in the building in Terreiro, but even though it was expected to open throughout 1980, the wait extended into 1981. It was sche-

duled to open in August, which would be anticipated with a special exhibition of Pierre Verger's photographs and Carybé's engravings. The inauguration would form part of the celebrations for UFBA's 35th anniversary. Finally, on December 30, 1981, the installations of the *Museu Afro-Brasileiro* were presented to the press by Professor Yeda Pessoa e Castro, Director of CEAO, with January 7, 1982, being announced for its inauguration, with a collection of about 800 pieces. Regarding the inauguration, the CEAO's director stated:

> The truth is that things were moving very slowly, until Dean Macedo Costa took office. He sped up the work. He released the necessary funds, chose competent technicians, gave his full support and now the museum will be re-inaugurated. ("Museu Afro foi apresentado", 1981: 5).

There was a surprising full-page article by journalist José Augusto Berbert de Castro, physician, participant of the group against the installation of the Museum in the *Terreiro de Jesus* building, which stated that

> Just the sight of what it will be makes us change our minds completely about the use of the old building, where I studied, and I have no doubt that it will mark the administration of the President Luiz Fernando Macedo Costa, even if he accomplished nothing else [...]. It excites by its beauty, by the positioning of the pieces, by the material that will be exhibited and by the good taste of everything that is there. It will be a dynamic museum, with permanently exhibited pieces and temporary exhibits [...]. The day we were there, there were a little more than 800 objects of Afro-Brazilian culture being assembled, but by the official opening, there will be at least double that number (Berbert, 1981: 5).

Amidst the news favorable to the inauguration of MAFRO, an outstanding one stands out, at the beginning of 1982:

> A question that needs to be asked: why a "museum of the black man?" I remember visiting the 'Museum of Man' in Paris, without distinction of race. Is there not a bit of racism, even if unintentional, in this attitude? It is true that our anti-racist laws have given us exactly a "prejudiced anti-racism". From this has come the current tendency to assume one's own race, and blacks begin to be proud of being black, as whites are proud of being white. We then move to a "respectful racism", that is, the races aggregating, but respecting each other, each assuming its origins and cultural values. It is desirable that, by this means, one arrives at "respectful anti-racism", by which racial segregation is eliminated. In this thing of each one assuming their own race, the one who suffers is the mulatto, who is neither black nor white, or rather, is both, because they have European and African origins and cultures in their blood. This is because the prejudice hits them together with the black man, and they identify with the latter, as if they did not have their share of European chromosomes. In this way, it is as if the mulattos who, forced to assume a race, opt for the Black race, when, scientifically, they are equally white, have been amputated. Since Bahia is a land of blacks and whites and since the 'Black Museum' is being set up here, the 'White Museum' is obviously missing. Until this is done, it will look like Bahia is a community of whites, in which a museum has been built to preserve black culture, because it is

> recognized as being under threat of extinction. We all know that this is not true, it suffices to look around to recognize the black presence in our customs, from clothing to cooking. Then a difficulty arises. If what is in the museum is found in society, why have a museum? If culture is not under threat of extinction, but in development, what is the museum for? For the anthropological study, it can be answered. In Santa Catarina, it would be a good answer. In Bahia, this study can be done in any corner, in any *Terreiro*, in the Mercado Modelo or at an *afoxé* rehearsal. And for this, all you have to do is take a bus for sixteen cruzeiros a ticket ("O Museu do Branco...", 1982: 5).

The note is rich in prejudiced references and misinformation, structured by someone who reveals ignorance as to what racial democracy is, even affirming a category: "respectful racism," in a succession of errors, of absurdities, being redundant to comment on some issues, but it is worth highlighting some of them. When complaining about the need for a 'White Museum,' the author forgot that, in principle, all the other museums in the city of Salvador were basically white museums, which talked about and preserved heritage referring to dominant memories and cultures, notably white ones. And even when dealing with minority issues, they were structured from the white viewpoint. And minimizing the importance of the existence of these museums, but our intention is to highlight that the heritage preserved in Brazil is that of the elites, and here, elite is synonymous with whiteness.

Finally, after a process that lasted eight years, since the signing of the Cooperation Agreement, the inauguration took place in a festive atmosphere, with various authorities - from the ambassadors of African countries, dressed in their typical costumes - and representatives of various segments of the Afro community and the wider population, such as the *"mães-de-santo"* of some *terreiros* that provided a moment of reunion with their African roots ("Museu Afro, uma volta...", 1982: 5).

After its inauguration, the board of the CEAO sought to stimulate its activities, organizing courses, exhibitions, book launches, shows, and the implementation of its Museum-School Integration Program, coordinated by Professor Graziela Amorim. The Museum became a mandatory stop-off point on official visits to Salvador, for instance, for ministers and heads of state, and in July 1982, it had already reached the mark of more than 500 students formally assisted. When it completed one year of existence, in January 1983, it reported 12,632 recorded visitors, and this number was surely higher due to those visitors who did not register their visit. Inaugurated.

However, the opening of the Museum did not mean that the medical bodies were willing to accept it remaining in the building. They continued to issue notes on the "problem", such as the one below. Once again, the tireless doctors, in the name of tradition and the long-standing cause of defending "their building", dared to make comments about Anthropology, Museology and other subjects, on which they were not qualified to issue an opinion. What, after all, would a sophisticated and stylized exhibition on African and Afro-Brazilian cultures be? In what sense did the newly opened museum's exhibits misrepresent the reality of those cultures? Was it the "nobility" of the materials used? Was it the careful museographic syste-

matization? What did medical staff understand a "Black Museum" to be? Another issue that was recurrent in the discussions was the idea that the Museum should occupy a loft in Pelourinho. Why this fixation? In what respect were such buildings more fitting for an Afro Museum than the monumental building of the Terreiro?

Museographic Project for the Initial Module

In its initial proposal, the Afro-Brazilian Museum was to occupy a large part of the total area of the Terreiro building (more than 11,000 square meters of floor space). However, the final area occupied by the inaugurated Museum amounted to less than 1,000 square meters. The inaugurated space was presented as an Initial Module, with the expectation that it would be expanded by being transferred to a new location in the near future, or would expand its occupation of the Terreiro building.

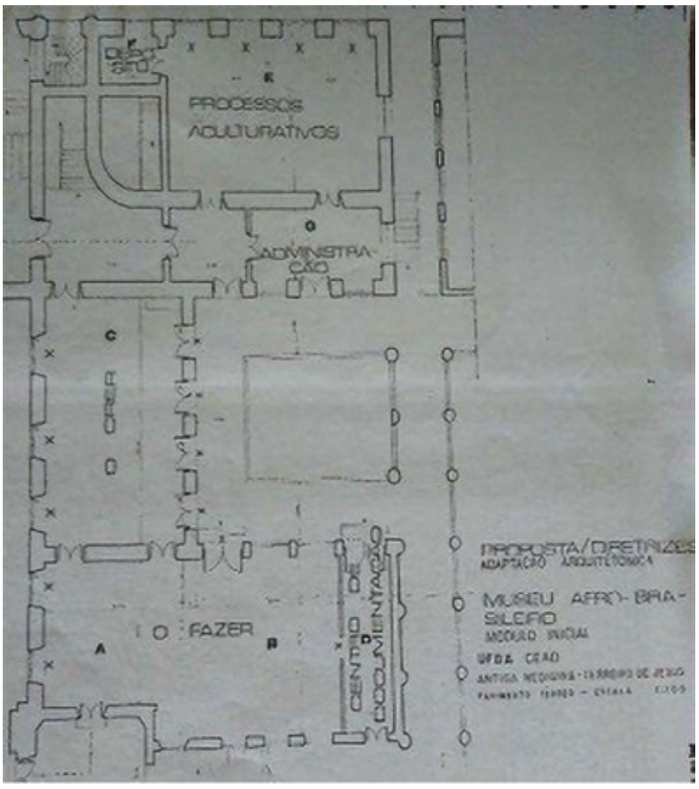

Fig. 1: Plan. Source: MAFRO. Blueprint of the initial proposal for the planning of the Museum space. With a need for adaptation, the Documentation Center gave way to the administration, the Administration Sector gave way to the Temporary Exhibition Room, and the Cultural Processes Sector gave way to the room for Carybé's panels.

In a document dated April 23, 1981, months before the official opening, Guilherme Souza Castro, CEAO's director, stated that

> [...] the use agreed upon by the University for the spaces currently available in the *Terreiro de Jesus* building does not allow us to be certain about the desirable and necessary future expansion of the Museum there. On the other hand, it seems right to us to see in the current arrangements for the installation of this 'module' in such a place and in the current conditions, a solution of circumstance intended to symbolically emphasize the interest of the UFBA in the project born from the agreement it signed [...] These conditions allow us to conclude that the definitive installation of the Afro-Brazilian Museum, properly speaking, in its own exclusive place, should be considered. [...] Due

> to the breadth of its scope, the Afro-Brazilian Museum, in its specific area of interest, forms part, at the same time, of a line of renovation and preservation of traditional Brazilian heritage, and in the field of effective action in search of knowledge of the Brazilian and African socio-cultural reality of the past and the present (Castro, G. 1981: n.p.).

A detailed plan on how to set up the museum, by an unknown author, reveals strategies for reconciling space, collections, and the original conceptual proposal, which was adapted. This proposal and the development of the adapted proposal were headed by ethnolinguist Yeda Pessoa de Castro and Museologist Jacyra Oswald.

> 1 - Guidelines and criteria adopted
>
> The assembly of the Initial Module of the MAB required attention to a specific, special problem: the spirit of transitoriness: The solution to this problem should have economy of means according to the spatial characteristics of the area demanded by the UFBA. It should also correspond to current needs, with respect to the constitution of its collections. [The current collection, despite consisting of pieces of real value, does not correspond to the stated expectations, due to its few exhibits, therefore rendering impossible the geographic illustration of the African cultures here, as well as having few documents representing the processes of acculturation and its consequences, as developed here. The solution to the problem will be comparative thematic division with the presentation of analogies of cultural manifestations [...] the elements of assembly should have the necessary flexibility so that they can, at any time, be reformulated, with the addition of one or more objects, to complement the theme in question. The distribution of themes/areas will take into consideration the location - aiming at independence of use, with easy access - and dimensions of the existing physical spaces (Museu Afro, Plano, 1982: n.p.).
>
> 2 - Architectural adaptation
>
> The group of interconnected rooms - A, B, C - which are accessed through the main door of the building ... are dedicated to Practices and Beliefs. With 232, 35 m^2 [...] the small contiguous area - room D - with 46,50 m^2 for deployment of the Documentation Center. The set of rooms - E, F and G - with autonomous access... through the entrance situated next to the Metropolitan Cathedral, will be used to present: Aculturative Processes (E – 105,78m^2), to house the warehouse (F – 9,50 m^2) and to constitute the administration (room G – 29,52 m^2), place for the operation of the office services of the entity. Room E measures 105,78 m^2 [...] room F (storeroom) measures 9,50m^2 (Museu Afro, Plano, 1982: n.p.).

In an article by Berbert de Castro, issues related to exhibition planning are presented:

> Of its five rooms, the museum has the following spatial distribution: Rooms 1, 2, and 3, for permanent exhibitions; Rooms 4 and 5. Reserved for temporary exhibitions.

The permanent exhibits are distributed according to three distinct types of concern:

DOING - presenting the material aspects of African civilizations and of similar aspects of these cultures in Brazilian civilization, consisting of objects made through the transformation of various materials by applying different techniques; BELIEVING - showing the spiritual aspects in the above contexts through objects for ritual, utilitarian, or decorative use with ideological reference both in African cultures and in the sectors of Brazilian culture influenced by them; MEMORY - exhibiting objects and documentation that today attest to the historical continuity of the African influence in the cultural formation of Brazil.

The temporary exhibits seek to highlight the reciprocal influences occurring in various sectors of Brazilian and African cultures, displaying all sorts of pertinent documentation, photographs, musical instruments, written documents, popular or erudite works of art, etc., of African inspiration in Brazil and of Brazilian inspiration in Africa (Berbert 1981:).

Figs. 2 and 3: Partial view of the Doing Room and the Memory Room. Source: MAFRO

A special room, dedicated to an exhibition of a set of twenty-seven wooden boards representing *orixás*, by the artist Carybé, was also planned, at the request of Dean Luiz Fernando Macêdo Costa, when the initial project had already been defined, justifying its inclusion as "the need to exhibit the set as a piece of great artistic and documental value, with dignity" (Oswald 1981: n.p.).

Fig. 4: Partial view of the room of Carybé's panels. Source: MAFRO

About the exhibition project, Silva comments that

> Jacyra found the solution, due to the quantity and quality of objects, to adopt an entirely new criterion, as she saw that she did not have enough material to illustrate Africa and Bahia (Brazil), including pieces that were valid in relation to the geographical criterion, as many of these areas of Africa were missing. Hence his best contribution: to adopt a separation into three levels of information: Doing (utilitarian realization of objects), Believing (religious, constituted of entities, cult of the Dead, of ancestors, of the living, of lands, of searches) and the processes and acculturative processes, or Africa in Brazil and Brazil in Africa. Also, what facilitated an assembly definition for Jacira was the physical space. There is an area with an entrance independent from the first levels, where the pieces that were permanent assets will be kept, and another area called temporary, which has another access through the Cathedral. This means that it can be opened at special times, with one part remaining closed while the other is open. Since the theme of the Afro-Brazilian Museum is "Orixás do Candomblé" (Orishas of Candomblé), the designer made a subdivision of themes. In the doing part, she separated musical instruments, weaving technique and painting processes of the farm and in the believing part, she formed places, as if they were orixás' houses, each one in its own environment, with its own color and shape. At the entrance of the museum, the opening is made by Exu messenger of the orixás, having red and black as symbol colors, and so on (Silva 1981: 10).

Fig 5: Partial view of the set of display cases dedicated to deities in the Room dedicated to Believing. Source: MAFRO

Jacyra Oswald gives further details about the museographic conception of the new museum:

> To move away from the horrible static mannequin figures that give the impression of layered dead bodies, I created some transparent forms in fiberglass material, where the props are placed. This location of the props (bracelets, swords, etc.) where they would be on the human figure helps the viewer to understand their function: that there is a chest piece, a fan [...] without seeing a figure with them. With this, the imagination works, you can see the orixá, but he is not there (Oswald, 1981: n.p.).

About the "acculturative processes" sector, she states that

> It gained a larger scale in an unexpected way, because the community reacted very well to the implementation of the museum when they started to donate wonderful things: then a room became a Memory. For me, it has a lot of emotional historical value. Our memory is there to be enlarged, and, in the acculturative processes, this first show that we are giving of the African influence happens with the carnival costumes (Oswald, 1981: n.p.).

Asked about the contrast between the materials in the collection and those that were used in the composition of the museum collection, she replies:

> These window screens, which absorb heat and noise and let light through, have moving parts for air renewal when necessary. There is the clash of materials, since I also used blindex for security; all the handcrafted pieces are in showcases - thirty-four pieces over two meters long (Oswald, 1981: n.p.).

Besides the materials, another element that caught the eye were the colors and textures:

> Another innovation that she introduced, since this is a new kind of museum, was the color of the earth, to also give an idea of the evocations. Each "saint" has its own color or colors that symbolize the orixás and their forms. The textures of the showcases are irregular to evoke the plaster of African houses. Cement, clay, and sand achieved that feat. The lighting is indirect but abundant (Berbert 1981: 5).

In November 1982, interventions were carried out in the museum's exhibition space, with the expansion and adaptation of the spaces for the inclusion of new pieces and modification of the modules.

> This work concerns the fulfillment of the request from the CEAO's board of directors - to put a greater number of items on display. It consists in the removal of large objects that do not have small removable parts from the showcases; the resulting free space would be filled with new pieces and with the effective relocation of pieces. For this, a larger number of elements should be used (fixed suspended displays, adaptations of existing bases, as well as the expansion of the number of shelves/glasses, aiming at a new spatial distribution of the material, inside the showcases) (Ampliação da montagem, 1982: 6).

These space rearrangement issues were related to a problem that is not addressed in any of the documents we found: the lack of a Technical Reserve, a space designed for the systematic storage of the collections not on display. This fact meant that practically the entire collection was in the exhibition rooms.

One officially opened, the Museum followed its course, without the implementation of several proposals and plans contained in its 1974 plan, and without the propagated future expansion, by relocation or in the Terreiro building itself. Everything that was accomplished there, despite the effective operating conditions, was mainly due to the efforts of CEAO's successive administrations and the few staff of the Museum, as well as the support of the community.

In 1995, initiatives began aimed at restructuring the Afro-Brazilian Museum. The restructuring movement supported by the Dean's office and supported by external resources aroused the same speeches against it remaining in the building by representatives of Medicine, from inside and outside the university itself. This situation once again interfered with the schedule and deadline for reopening, which only occurred on November 18, 1999. Once again, despite the announcement and the expectation created around a new building for the Afro-Brazilian Museum, all attempts failed and the Museum never left the building of the School of Medicine at *Terreiro de Jesus*, where it remains to this day, completing 40 years open to the public this year, in 2022, and 48 years since its creation.

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The Georges Liautaud Community Museum in Noailles Art Village

Barbara Prézeau

The Georges Liautaud Community Museum opened on Sunday 25 January 2009 in Noailles art village in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets, Haiti. It was launched with funding from UNESCO in Haiti as part of an initiative from the AfricAmericA Foundation, in partnership with the Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC). The project is the culmination of their dream of creating a collective, independent venue to exhibit and conserve contemporary visual art from Haiti.

Since then, the museum has been managed by a team of volunteers. Entry is free, as are most of the activities. Events are organised at the museum with support from private patrons and international cooperation programmes, many of which are European Union initiatives.

For the last 22 years, the AfricAmericA Foundation has made a key contribution to promoting innovation in Haitian contemporary art on a national, regional and international level. The foundation has also been supporting the development of Noailles art village for the last 16 years. The initiative has led to a significant number of exhibitions, workshops and cultural exchanges within the Caribbean and with other countries around the world.

As the owner of the venue, the AfricAmericA Foundation chose to name the museum after the legendary Haitian artist, sculptor and blacksmith, Georges Liautaud, who was born in Croix-des-Bouquets on 26 January 1899 and spent his whole life there until he died in August 1992.[1]

From its first opening and up to 2020, the Georges Liautaud Community Museum has organised a number of exhibitions:

- January 2009, inaugural exhibition, curated by visual artist and film director Maksaens Denis. Twenty sculptors were invited to pay tribute to Liautaud with an exhibition including works by renowned masters such as Serge Jolimeau, Jose Delpé, Falaise Péralte and Eddy Jean Rémy, along with works by less well-known artists including Charnel, Wilbert, Rony, Jean Baptiste, Jacques, Georges and Baptiste, all from Noailles in Croix-des-Bouquets. They were joined by a number of guest artists including Mario Benjamin, Karim Bléus, Casséus, Céleur, Philippe Dodard, Eugène, Gyodo, Maksaens Denis, Barbara Prézeau and Zaka, who also exhibited sculptures as well as paintings, engravings and drawings. The exhibition was completed with a special 'Georges Liautaud' room featuring a painting of the artist by Luce Turnier, family photos and objects from private collections.

- October 2009, exhibition of sculptures by Jacques Eugène, mixed techniques on paper by Barbara Prézeau and sculptures by David Boyer.

1 Georges Liautaud: http://www.oas.org/artsoftheamericas/georges-liautaud

- Exhibition held as part of the Noailles arts and crafts fair organised by the ADA-AC and the AfricAmericA Foundation.
- October 2012, exhibition of Jean-Baptiste Bienaimé's Voodoo flags and beaded, sequined objects.
- October 2013, retrospective exhibition of Serge Jolimeau's work.
- November 2013, group exhibition of the work of the village's master artists, organised for the delegation to the Grand Palais exhibition in 2014.
- July 2014, group exhibition on the occasion of a visit from the President of the European Council.
- April 2015, assemblages by Etzer Pierre and cut iron sculptures by Gabriel Bien--Aimé as part of the 7th Transcultural Forum of Contemporary Art.[2]
- May 2016, Fuji Mukuna, a Belgian-Congolese artist.
- May 2016, closing exhibition for Europe Week in Haiti.
- December 2017, exhibition by village artists to mark a visit by European members of parliament.
- December 2020, 'Nway Kanpe!' (Rise up, Noailles!). This major exhibition of works from the Georges Liautaud Community Museum collection presented 20 artists covering several generations, ranging from the great cut iron masters (Serge Jolimeau and Gabriel Bien-Aimé) to the young winners of the Georges Liautaud Art Award, the youngest of these being Wood-Kerley Derat, who had only just turned 18.

From 2017 to 2020, the museum programme was suspended for security reasons. Since then, the community in Noailles has been living in the shadow of armed groups controlling the Cul-de-Sac Plain and the main roads leading to the border with the Dominican Republic. Amid this situation, visits to the village have ceased, the community has become isolated and the artists have experienced a loss of income. In order to cope with this, a strategy based around a series of complementing, one-off events designed to reinvigorate the museum programme has been implemented with support from partners including the Prince Claus Fund from the Netherlands, the Open Society – via the Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty (FOKAL) – and the European Union.

From 2019, the serious multidimensional crisis that brought insecurity, inflation, poor governance and mass migration of under-35s to Haiti turned attentions towards finding a more appropriate response to fight the impoverishment of the Noailles art village community. With this in mind, the creation of the contemporary art collection at the Noailles Community Museum was supplemented by a programme designed to encourage training, creation and dissemination. The project to upgrade the museum and village by establishing a contemporary art collection and related awareness-raising activities was the starting point for a campaign to protect the village and its Vodou cultural heritage. Equally, the creation of the museum's contemporary art collection may be viewed as a lasting measure that will facilitate the showcasing of works from the main Noailles village workshops.

2 Organisation of the Transcultural Forum of Contemporary Art: https://www.africamerica.org/Forum-Transcultu-rel-d-Art-Contemporain-7e-edition-2-au-12-avril-2015_a285.html

Despite the difficulties facing the museum, the programme was relaunched with a focus on three key themes:

- Training: cultural mediation, welcoming visitors, protecting and storing artworks, organising up exhibitions. Visual and digital art workshops: photography, digital, design, multimedia creation.

- Support for artistic creation: expansion of the community museum contemporary art collection and conservation activities, such as organising the storeroom, protecting artworks and completing an inventory; acquisition of works by master artists, especially works by women; creation of the Georges Liautaud Award,[3] which has been awarded to ten sculptors aged under 25, whose artworks have consequently been purchased for the museum.

- Dissemination: organisation of a series of exhibitions at the Georges Liautaud Community Museum; updating of the workshop survey; organisation of open weekends; guided tours of the studios, the traditional forge and the Vodou sanctuaries.

The Georges Liautaud Community Museum collection features artworks from the latest generation of sculptors, including Falaise Péralte, Jean Eddy Rémy, Jose Delpé and Anderson Bellony.

Fig. 1 Gabriel Bien-Aimé, *Bull and Bird*, cut-out iron, 2005. 34 x17 inches. Georges Liautaud Community Museum collection. Photo Josué Azor.

3 The first activity on the programme to upgrade the Georges Liautaud Community Museum and Noailles art village – the Georges Liautaud Art Award – was a great success. From the first week in September, there was an information campaign aimed at village residents. The selection committee was made up of the following: Serge Jolimeau, Vice-President of the ADAAC and President of the committee; Gabriel Bien-Aimé, master sculptor, member of the committee; Lorraine Mangones, Director of FOKAL, member of the committee; Professor Sterlin Ulysses, Dean of IERAH/ISERSS, member of the committee; Jean Mathiot, Director of the art centre, member of the committee

Falaise Péralte was born in Noailles on 20 November 1965. For six consecutive years, he worked under the watchful eye of master sculptor Gabriel Bien-Aimé. He began to create his own artworks at the age of 21. Falaise Péralte developed a unique style as he desperately sought to develop his own personal language that would differentiate his work from the thousands of, sometimes mass-produced, pieces around. At first glance, his angular, highlighted anthropomorphic forms stand out physically with their broken, contrasting contours, bringing to mind the engraved decorations on Mesoamerican stone monuments.

Jean Eddy Rémy was born in Noailles in 1976. As a self-taught artist, he developed his own increasingly personal graphic language. Drawing on his contact with the Togolese master sculptor and designer Kossi Assou[4] (Transcultural Forum 2006, 2011, 2015, Haiti; Ewolé 2008, Togo), Rémy began to challenge traditional cut iron techniques. His liberated style side-steps the outline stage to focus on enhancing recycled sheet metal in its raw state.

Jose Delpé was born in Croix-des-Bouquets in 1976 and died in 2014. After being introduced to the cut metal technique at a very young age by two uncles on his mother's side, he abandoned his studies in Classics after the second year and began to manufacture traditional Croix-des-Bouquets style objects to provide for himself and contribute to household expenses. Following in the footsteps of the master Gabriel Bien-Aimé, Jose Delpé's sculptures are phantasmagorical constructions on feet, representing a rupture that is both spatial and historical. Jose Delpé has also taken his quest further still, pioneering exploration of the possibilities of assemblages.

Jean Anderson Bellony was born in 13 March 1970 and grew up in Noailles. At the age of 15, he was introduced to sculpture by Michel Brutus. Bellony inherited a Vodou sanctuary that was restored in 2009 by the AfricAmericA Foundation as part of the Prince Claus Fund's Cultural Emergency Response Programme (CER). He has worked more with assemblages than cut iron, salvaging items used from everyday life – toilet bowls, basins, chamber pots and cutlery – and combining them with cut iron and natural elements, such as bones and wood. His work is characterised by the use of abandoned enamelled objects, which he restores with a certain sense of humour.

The Village of Noailles: an Open-Air Museum

Noailles is unique in the Caribbean context. The village community plays an active role in preserving its own distinctive cultural heritage. In 2008, the community founded the Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC) to work towards the village's sustainable development. The art of hand-cut iron is Noailles's main economic resource and attracts large numbers of visitors. The community is proud of this heritage, to which it attributes a great deal value and significance.

The Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC) has 60 members, including a committee of women from Noailles. The association works to encourage social

4 https://ina-contemporary.art/fr/art/contemporary-art/kossi-assou-pioneer-of-african-design/?amp

and economic development in the village, as well as representing the artisans in Haiti and overseas. From 2008 onwards, a number of initiatives have been launched in Noailles, including 'Kore Atis ak Atizan',[5] which aims to promote the village as a cultural tourism destination. Until 2017, the village welcomed visitors and buyers on a daily basis.

A pilot committee has been set up, as part of the project to improve the village. In addition to the Croix-des-Bouquets Artists and Artisans Association (ADAAC), the committee also includes village leaders, oungan,[6] pastors, youth associations and local authorities. The ADAAC and the pilot committee work together on activities promoting Noailles art village and its hand-cut iron artwork. It also takes care of procedures such as registration on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List (ICH).

Fig. 2. Georges Liautaud Community Museum. Photo Maksaens Denis

Hand-cut iron is closely linked to the magical and religious world of Vodou and brings together original techniques, know-how, methods and procedures that have been developed in Noailles. This has led to it being included on the National Land Use Plan (SNAT). The document states:

> The village of Noailles, located to the east of Port-au-Prince in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets, is a true 'cluster' of small and medium-sized enterprises working in the hand-cut iron arts and crafts sector and developing unique techniques for producing iron objects, it is recognised as the birthplace of the art of cut iron. Noailles has produced almost eight generations of artists and artisans known as 'blacksmith-sculptors' and is currently home to around 75 artists' and artisans' studios. This unique skill has given rise to numerous other activities and associated small workshops, including ironware workshops (small factories making beds, gates, furniture, etc.), carpentry workshops, sewing workshops and workshops belonging to 'beaders' who make the Vodou flags that are now known around the world. (SNAT 2015: 115).[7]

5 Translation from Haitian Creole: support for artists and artisans.
6 Haitian Vodou priest.
7 Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation of the Republic of Haiti (2015). National Land Use Plan.

The art of cut iron in Noailles is also part of Haiti's intangible cultural heritage, appearing on the Inventory of Intangible Heritage of Haiti (IPIMH) produced as part of an ad hoc partnership between the Haitian government and Laval University in Quebec.[8] In addition, it is featured on the list of 60 traditional products drawn up by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Fig. 3 Jose Delpe, *Tree*, 2005, sculpture recycled metal, 79 x 42 x 42 inches, detail. Georges Liautaud Community Museum Collection. Photo Josué Azor.

Launched in 2020, the Noailles Art Village and Georges Liautaud Community Enhancement Project falls under the Haitian government's cultural policy and is based on a public-private partnership between the Ministry of Culture, the artist and artisan community in Noailles and the AfricAmericA Foundation.

The 80 workshops in Noailles produce works that are generally monochrome, made from carefully buffed and varnished metal. The scenes and motifs used are drawn from a fantastical iconography, where plants, people and mythical animals metamorphose into each other, echoing a rich oral tradition made up of beliefs, stories, songs and proverbs. In this way, the system of representation employed in this type of art reflects this rural community's entire worldview, philosophy and relationship with the sacred and their environment. Noailles is an important site for Vodou, a practice inherited from the Atlantic slave trade. The origin of cut iron artwork dates back to the 18th century when the first sugarcane plantation was founded in Noailles in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets; blacksmiths played an essential role in the plantation's operations. Until the mid-20th century, they produced funeral decorations and crosses with motifs made from wrought and cut iron. From the 1950s onwards, the master sculptors in Noailles developed a unique style and artistic language, which shaped both the form and content of their work. Some artists won international

8 http://www.ipimh.org//fiche-fer-decoupe-villagenoailles-croix-des-34.html

renown and their work is featured in prestigious museum collections. The first internationally recognised sculptor, Georges Liautaud, was a product of this tradition which is at once historical, utilitarian and decorative. Carried by his momentum, the three Louisjuste brothers and the sculptor Murat Brierre helped open new workshops and create a third generation of artists, including Serge Jolimeau and Gabriel Bien-Aimé. Liautaud and Bien-Aimé participated in the exhibition Magicians of the Earth at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989. The number of workshops continued to grow and new talents emerged. Their artistic language has given rise to a genuine folk art.

Fig. 4 Workshop Serge Jolimeau. Photo Maksaens Denis

Fig. 5 Workshop Ajoupa. Photo Maksaens Denis

The tradition continues to be passed down through a system of apprenticeships; in recent years young people from different regions of the country have been able to learn the technique. The absence of mechanical processes and industrial power tools makes every cut iron object produced in Noailles unique. The rudimentary technique provides a guarantee against mass production and a criterion for judging

the quality of its execution. It is closely intertwined with the blacksmith profession, which not only gave rise to the technique but also supplies the tools used by the sculptors. The Maîtres Bruno use their forge to make the agricultural tools and instruments prized by cut iron sculptors. According to the family's oral tradition, this valuable cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, has belonged to them since 1802. It stands as a witness to a unique past, the only forge in the village of Noailles in Croix-des-Bouquets is among the last of its kind still operating in the Caribbean.

Fig. 6 Artisans working. Photo Maksaens Denis

Fig. 7 Artisans at work. Photo Maksaens Denis

The Bruno brothers learned their trade from their father, Providence Bruno. With its anvil, ancient tools, tongs and hammers, the forge symbolically unites the West African blacksmith guilds with the 'machorquet'[9] workshops of the Cul-de-Sac Plain

9 On the role of the machorquet: Cauna, Jacques de (1987). Au temps des Isles à Sucre, Paris, Karthala.

sugar plantations and thence present-day Haiti. The blacksmith profession and the physical presence of the forge are associated with the Haitian Vodou god Ogou Feray, who is also linked to warlike exploits. Ricoeur Bruno is also a sculptor, following in the footsteps of Georges Liautaud to transform iron into mythical or anthropomorphic creatures or animals.

Present and Future Challenges

Cut iron sculptors in Noailles have been savvy enough to diversify and adapt to different markets. Their work can be classified on a wide spectrum ranging from unique art object with incalculable intrinsic value to utilitarian craftsmanship, with arts and crafts somewhere in the middle.[10] It combines a series of art and craft practices, from design to iron cutting and painting. Iron is not an abundant resource in Haiti, so the artisans in Noailles have developed an original technique for recycling the barrels used to transport flammable oil products by sea. There is a small but significant risk that the raw material will become still rarer in the future. Meanwhile, the fame and success of cut ironwork from Noailles make it a target for counterfeit production. Creations designed in Noailles are copied elsewhere in Haiti, as well as in Southeast Asia. In order to address the issue, the Haitian government and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in particular are putting the finishing touches to a plan to list 'Noailles art village' as a Controlled Designation of Origin (AOC).

Moreover, growing demand for mass-produced crafts meeting the standards of American department stores, such as the Macy's chain, pose a risk to the originality of the creations in favour of more decorative, less distinctive products.

Since 2004 the workshops of Noailles have been inventoried, classified and mapped in the Inventory of Art and Craft Projects (RPAA) established by the AfricAmericA Foundation on behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Three successive surveys conducted in 2008, 2011 and 2016 have updated the data. An additional survey is currently underway (2022) with support from the Prince Claus Fund, but a lack of interest from the government in obtaining sectoral statistics is hindering analytical considerations. Despite this, in 2011, the Haitian government's Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation approved the project to develop and enhance the village. A 4.5-million dollar investment by the Haitian government covered works to install basic infrastructure and provide social support for residents.

While the measures currently in place help safeguard the cut iron technique, it is its potential in terms of job creation and economic development that mobilises the local and national authorities, who have been alerted to the situation by the crisis raging in the region. The village's heritage value merits enhancement and improved promotion. The dialogue between the public authorities and members of the ADAAC and the community in Noailles must move up a notch, with more frequent

10 Arts and crafts differ from utilitarian craftsmanship, producing objects intended for decorative purposes. See 'Diagnostic stratégique des filières entrepreneuriales à fort potentiel de croissance', a study by SSSF Artisanat d'Art. Final report by Danielle SAINT-LOT, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, January 2007.

meetings where the purpose, challenges and consequences of registering the village on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List are clearly explained. Registration on the list is feasible, as long as the Haitian government provides the necessary resources to reinforce this action at different levels:

- Firstly, security in the region and a return to normal life must be guaranteed. Since 2019, the threat level has soared. The community has become a target for violence by armed groups;[11]

- The village's heritage value should be enhanced;

- Dialogue between the public authorities responsible for the village's registration on the list and the ADAAC beneficiaries and Noailles community must be strengthened;

- The risk of overbidding on the price of raw materials must be minimised;

- 'Noailles art village' should be registered as a Controlled Designation of Origin (AOC) by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Finally, the National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO must provide effective coordination with a strengthened mandate and additional resources, especially material resources.

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Call for Solidarity

The Association of Artists and Artisans of Croix-des-Bouquets (ADAAC), the Odette Roy Fombrun Foundation (FORF), Kay Atizan and the AfricAmerica Foundation denounce once again the acts of atrocities suffered by the inhabitants and artisans of the Noailles Village of Croix-des-Bouquets because of the gang war.

The invasion of the Torcel gang led by Vitelhomme Innocent in order to confront his rival "400 mawozo", caused at least 15 deaths in the artistic village of Noailles, located in Croix-des-Bouquets, in the western department of Haiti. In addition, a dozen houses were burned by the invading gang, causing the flight of a hundred families from the said Village. Loss of life and material damage were revealed by the organizations Africamérica and ADAAC, flying to the aid of the survivors (*Le Facteur Haïti,* 20/10/2022).

https://laquestionnews.com/plus-dune-douzaine-de-personnes-tuees-par-des-gangs-armes-a-noailles/

The last news was that the village elder, Serge Jolimeau, was hospitalized. His home was visited by two different gangs who held them for ransom and looted them. He barely escaped and was not kidnapped. Three vodou shrines were also damaged.

The Bel-Air neighborhood and the Village of Noailles in Haiti are important places of Haitian art. Their disappearance would have disastrous human and economic consequences. Help them repair and rebuild by making a donation. Any amount will make a difference. Thank you in advance for your solidarity.

We are launching an emergency appeal for donations to accompany these families who have been victims since October 12, 2022. Your help in cash or in kind is essential: bank transfer, tools for the artists victims, food support to the families, rent or repair of housing or the funeral of the victims.

We count on your solidarity, generosity and benevolence.

https://www.gofundme.com/f/solidarity-with-belair-noailles-artists-haiti?utm_campaign=p_cf+share-flow-1&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer

The Anchor of the Santa María: Itinerary of a Museum Object

Fritz-Gérald Louis

Introduction[1]

The aim of this essay is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the Santa María anchor, nor to analyse the media attention triggered by news of the discovery of what is presumed to be Christopher Columbus's shipwrecked flagship in 2003.[2] Instead, it presents an account of the anchor's social life, mapping the different value regimes that it has been subjected to over time and space. In other words, it is a biography of the artefact, beginning in the Great North of Haiti and ending in the anchor's current home at the Haitian National Pantheon Museum (MUPANAH) in Port-au-Prince. The article draws on the conceptual framework proposed by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things:* an object is the product of a lengthy process of changing value regimes within a given spatiotemporal context. Beyond their primary functions, according to Appadurai, objects pass through different environments and acquire different statuses by interacting with either eco-facts or artefacts.[3] In this essay, my aim is not only to reveal the anchor's history prior to its incorporation into Haiti's national collection, but also to reveal its existence within the collection.

The Anchor

The Santa María anchor, which was recovered off Caracol Baytowards at the end of the 18th century, is four metres high.[4] Today, it is exhibited in front of a series of engravings depicting the social life of the Taíno people and the genocide they suffered, along with a selection of Iberian military items. It is considered one of the flagship pieces[5] on display at the MUPANAH, evoking an expansionist worldview and offering an emotional encounter with the Late European Middle Ages.

More than 500 years ago, in August 1492, three ships raised anchor in Spanish waters before arriving by mistake at an unknown destination: the Pinta, the Niña and the Santa María, the latter being the largest and carrying admiral Christopher Columbus (1451-1506). It never returned to Spain. The Santa María was classed as a carrack because of its size; it belonged to cartographer and ship captain Juan de la Cosa (circa 1460-1510) and was used for trade. The exact location where it was built

1 would first like to thank Carlo Célius for his suggestions, comments and his revision of the text. Secondly, I would like to thank Gérald Alexis for having granted me an interview and finally, Jocelyne Désir for her emotional support during the writing process.
2 See the preliminary report of the mission to Cap-Haitien prepared in September 2014 by experts from UNESCO, the Ministry of Culture, and the National Bureau of Ethnology.
3 An ecofact is defined as a museum object of natural origin.
4 Caracol Baytowards is a commune located in Haiti's North-East department.
5 A neologism coined by museologist Yves Bergeron (2016).

remains unknown; however, multiple sources suggest that it was constructed either in the region of Galicia or the city of Santander in Cantabria. These two regions on Spain's Atlantic coast were renowned for building this type of vessel.

Carracks and caravels could be distinguished from one another by the premise underpinning their construction. Carracks were slower, heavier and less manoeuvrable than caravels. On the other hand, they were also larger, more robust and drew more water. Their larger size meant that they were used to bring large shipments of resources back to Spain.

The Anchor Leaves Spain

On 12 October 1492, two months after the vessel had left the port of Palos, Columbus dropped anchor to explore the Bahamas archipelago. Several days later, he ordered the anchor to be raised before dropping it again off what is now Cuba on the 28th of October. Columbus and his crew returned to sea and continued their explorations, coming across the island of Ayiti[6] on 5 December. He spent the days after their arrival exploring the island's coasts and interacting with the Taínos. On Christmas Day, at around 11 pm, the Santa María was wrecked on a coral reef, bringing an end to its seafaring adventures.

Christopher Columbus's logbook shows how he ordered a fort named 'La Navidad'[7] to be built with permission from Cacique Guacanagaric[8] to honour the birth of Jesus Christ. The small fort was built from the remains of the flagship near the site of the shipwreck. It remains unclear whether the anchor was salvaged and taken back to land by the Spanish sailors. Subsequently, the anchor would experience a new social life as an exhibition object.

The Anchor Enters a New Regime

Despite its fame, the anchor's trajectory before arriving at the MUPANAH has attracted little attention from researchers. Questions remain as to its origin, its movements and the ways in which it has been displayed. The aim of this essay is to explore the anchor's biography and inclusion in Haiti's national collection.

The anchor was discovered in 1781 on the Fournier-Bellevue plantation in the commune of Caracol by some French people who were living there at the time. It was found during dredging work to prevent alluvial deposits that could form swamps. In *La Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Ouest de l'Isle de Saint-Domingue* (1798), Moreau de Saint Méry describes the exact position of the anchor and analyses the object's physical form once it had been exhumed. Samuel Morrison, meanwhile, corroborates the information on the exact location and date of the discovery in his book *Route of Columbus Along the North Coast of Haiti* (1940).

6 In the language of the Taíno people, who were the island's original inhabitants, the term means high mountains.
7 The fort of La Navidad was the first European settlement in the New World.
8 This cacique of Marian was considered a xenophile and a peaceable, mild man.

In an 1894 study by Baron Émile Nau, we begin to see the emergence of the anchor's new life. Under President Florvil Hyppolite (1828-1896), the Minister of the Interior, Saint-Martin Dupuy, ordered the transportation of the famous 15th-century anchor to the National Palace in Port-au-Prince by in September 1892 (Nau 1894: 361). For the first time, the anchor had entered a different value regime, to use Appadurai's term. This change of location enabled the government's (?) inclusion of the anchor in the 12 October celebrations marking Columbus's intrusion into the Caribbean.[9] These celebrations enabled the government to situate Haiti on a global time-scale. In our view, they had a twofold purpose: they addressed a past that no longer existed and at the same time allowed that past to be shared.

The Museum Itinerary

A year later, in 1893, Haiti was invited by the United States government to participate in the Chicago World's Fair, which theme was 'The 400th anniversary of explorer Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World'. The Haitian government sent a collection of literary works and precious artefacts, including the anchor, for the Republic of Haiti pavilion (Dugué 1893: 84). In an article about the Chicago World's Fair, Charles Forsdick identified two main reasons for Haiti's participation (Forsdick 2014: 271). Firstly, the government was attempting to counter the country's negative reputation to attract foreign visitors. Secondly, the aim was to display the only tangible evidence of Christopher Columbus's arrival in America to supplement the exhibition of reconstructed ships. The presence of the artefact pointed to Haiti's central role in the history of the discovery of the Americas, as well as reaffirming its sovereignty in a context of American expansionism. The anchor was displayed vertically at a slant on a rectangular plinth. Other artefacts exhibited alongside it included Haitian newspapers published under Florvil Hyppolite, books by Haitian authors, agricultural specimens, and food products (fig. 1).[10] The literary works on display near the anchor, the artefacts belonging to the heroes of independence and other Haitian objects constituted what could be described as a museography of 'contradiction'. On the one hand, the collection was intended as material evidence of the start of colonialism, genocide, and slavery, and on the other, of Haiti's legitimately acquired sovereignty.

According to Forsdick, the rich wealth of artefacts exhibited and the numerous declarations made at the event, including Frederick Douglass's famous speech at the exhibition opening in January 1893[11], presented Haiti in its best light. As a fervent admirer of Haiti, Douglass had been appointed resident minister and United States consul in Haiti from 1889 to 1891. His time in the country led him to be appointed commissioner of the Haitian pavilion. He began his speech by praising the Republic:

> My subject is Haiti, the Black Republic; the only self-made Black Republic in the world. I am to speak to you of her character, her history, her importance and her struggle from slavery to freedom and to statehood. I am to speak to you of her progress in the line of civilisation; of her relation with the United States; of her

9 According to Célius, 2019, p. 4, the day was dedicated to Columbus.
10 For more information about the items displayed inside the Haitian pavilion at the exhibition, see Robert Gentil & Henri Chauvet (1893) *Haïti à l'Exposition Colombienne de Chicago*.
11 This self-taught African American man was born in 1818 and died in 1895. He served as special advisor to President Abraham Lincoln and was renowned for his talents as an orator and writer.

> past and present; of her probable destiny; and of the bearing of her example as a free and independent Republic, upon what may be the destiny of the African race in our own country and elsewhere.[12]

Despite his flattering speech about Haiti, what prompted Douglass to be selected as commissioner? Why did Hyppolite's government choose him? Was being an abolitionist or an admirer of Haiti sufficient to be appointed exhibition commissioner? These questions will be explored further in my PhD research.

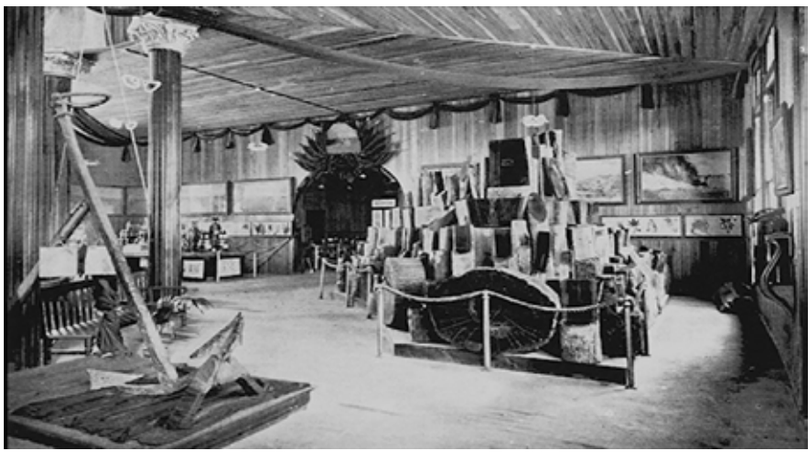

Fig. 1: The Santa María anchor on display in Chicago

After the end of the exhibition, the anchor was returned to the National Palace in Haiti. The anchor received special treatment due in part to the visibility that it had obtained at the Chicago World's Fair, making it a "flagship artefact" during political and diplomatic visits. It was now a part of Haiti's national heritage.

In the early 20th century, the anchor was transported to a new destination. It was taken from the National Palace to the country's first state museum, the Centennial Palace (fig. 2).[13]

Fig. 2: The Centennial Palace

12 Frederick Douglass's speech in Chicago, http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti/history/1844- 1915/douglass.htm, accessed on 20 May 2022.

13 As its name indicates, the Centennial Palace was founded by President Pierre Nord Alexis (1820-1910) to mark the 100th anniversary of Haiti's independence. It opened on January 1, 1904, not in the capital but in Gonaïves, a city located 140 km to the north of Port-au-Prince.

On 8 August 1912, the National Palace was destroyed by an explosion. Many artistic and historic items were lost. Historian Georges Corvington recounts the sad event in his seminal work *Port-au-Prince au Cours des Ans*. He notes that the busts of Dessalines and Toussaint Louverture, as well as the Santa María anchor were damaged (Corvington, 1977: 263). Once it had been repaired by Émile Amédée, an artist and craftsman, the anchor was moved from the Haitian capital to be exhibited in Gonaïves. In its new location, the anchor was presented as part of the first museum display done on Haitian territory. (Corvington 1977: 262).

In 1939, following the demolition of the Centennial Palace, the anchor was transferred from Gonaïves to Port-au-Prince. Several authors, including Pierre Massoni, report that the Palace was in a dilapidated state, plagued by mould and the risk of fire. The anchor was accompanied by numerous artefacts that were all housed in the National Museum recently founded by President Sténio Vincent (1874-1959). In *Haïti, Première République Noire du Nouveau Monde Son Vrai Visage* (1968), Clovis Désinor writes that the new museum presented the anchor in a very simple manner, but that it was showcased like a figure from the history of the "Middle Ages". As in Chicago, the anchor was exhibited vertically on a metal frame. It was surrounded by three pieces: two photographs, which are difficult to discern from the images available today (fig. 3), and a bust to the left. The anchor dominated the room, but the pieces accompanying it bore no relation to Spanish colonisation. The scenography was thus rather incoherent. The anchor remained in this installation until it was transported to Italy in 1948.

Fig.3: The Santa María anchor on display at the National Museum, c. 1939- 1948

The Anchor Returns to Europe

In 1948, Italian culture reopened to the world with a series of exhibitions and biennials. Two years later, an exhibition titled *The Time of Christopher Columbus* was held in Genoa. The aim of the exhibition was to showcase the exploits of the Genoan explorer and to mark the fifth centenary of Columbus's birth (Célius 2019: 4). The Santa María anchor was one of the exhibits displayed.

Having left the continent more than four hundred years earlier, the anchor had finally returned to Europe. Following a triumphant welcome, it began its stay at the Haitian consulate in Genoa before a small audience largely comprised of Italians and the Haitian consul (fig. 4). This is the only image in which the anchor is displayed in a horizontal position, despite its unique, ephemeral historic interest.

Fig. 4: The Santa María anchor exhibited at the Haitian consulate in Genoa

The presence of this Haitian heritage object on Genoan soil appears to have functioned as an "attraction". Italians can be seen listening attentively to the explanations given by the Haitian diplomat.

The anchor was then paraded around the streets of the city. It was exhibited on its own on a float, which was surrounded by motorcyclists to protect it (fig. 5). In this parade, the anchor may be viewed as a semiophore, to adopt historian Krzysztof Pomian's term (1987). Semiophores are objects with factual specificity that enable us to understand how material evidence of the past is transformed into heritage and endowed with historicity.

Fig. 5: The Santa Maria's anchor at a parade in Genoa

The Anchor Returns to Haiti and Joins the MUPANAH Collection

After its stay in Italy, the anchor was returned to the National Museum, which was known as the Sténio Vincent Museum at the time. In 1960, it was removed from the Champ-de-Mars and housed in the former residence of President Paul-Eugène Magloire (1907-2001) at the top of Turgeau, where it remained until Jean-Claude Duvalier fell from power in 1986 (Doucet 2001: 59). Once again, the anchor was moved from one site to another. The fate of the anchor was shaped by another very important historical milestone. When François Duvalier (1907-1971) died, his son came to power and decided to create a mausoleum for his father on the request of his mother, Simone Ovide Duvalier (1913-1997). The idea of a public museum came not long after. This new national museum was to be more inclusive than the previous two versions. On 7 April 1983, the MUPANAH opened its doors. A collection had to be assembled to fill the museum. On October 20, 1982,[14] a decree was passed stipulating that the entire National Museum collection was to be transferred. At that time, the National Museum was leading a rather morose existence; lacking visitors, it found itself stripped of its collection, including the Santa María anchor (fig. 6).

Consequently, the MUPANAH may be viewed as the product of the dismantling of two public museums: the Centennial Palace and the Sténio Vincent National Museum. Carlo Célius observes that the design and content of the MUPANAH renders the progress made since the earlier two museums clearly visible (Célius 2019: 25).

Fig. 6: The Santa María anchor on display at MUPANAH

Since its arrival at the MUPANAH in 1983, the anchor has not been moved again. Its inclusion in the gallery dedicated to the Spanish period represents a new reading of the artefact. The anchor is contextualised by a Spanish armour, a portrait of Columbus, and engravings that are displayed in a linear fashion, illustrating the lives and deaths by genocide of the indigenous population. The display is in keeping with the

14 See Le Moniteur, 21/10/1982.

museography of the museum. That said, no matter what narrative format is chosen, the anchor bears witness to the intrusion of "adversity" in Haiti and across the Caribbean. Finally, the presentation of these exhibits side-by-side reinforces the anchor's status as an icon within the museum collection, or, in the words of museologist Yves Bergeron, as a "flagship object" (Bergeron 2016: 3).

It is interesting to note that there were other exhibitions in which the anchor might have featured but is totally absent. Several contextual observations must be made here. In 1992, two major exhibitions were held to mark the fifth centenary of Columbus's voyage. One was held in Seville from April 20 to October 12, 1992, titled *The Age of Discovery*. Another was organised in Genoa from May 15 to August 15, 1992 and was titled *Christopher Columbus, The Ship and The Sea*. The anchor was conspicuously absent from both exhibitions. Gérald Alexis, custodian of the MUPANAH at the time, explained in an interview conducted on December 20, 2019: "Firstly, Haiti was under international embargo. We could not run the risk of sending the anchor and not having it returned. Secondly, at that time, no insurance company would have agreed to cover its transport from Haiti".

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to retrace the history of the Santa María anchor in anthropological, material, and biographical terms. Since its transfer from Caracol to its current home at the Haitian National Pantheon Museum, the anchor has acquired so to speak an aura, as Walter Benjamin would have put it. By retracing the different phases of its social and material life, it is possible to see how the anchor's uses, values, and meanings have changed. Throughout its history, it has been involved in different international exhibitions, national relocations, and reconfigurations.

The anchor, positioned vertically on a circular base, serves both as material evidence of an ideology and as an instrument used to destroy an entire population. Over the years, the artefact has become a witness to a particularly bloody period in the history of Haiti.

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The Haitian National Pantheon Museum (MUPANAH): Between Historical Representation and the Quest for Memory

Jean Mozart Feron

Introduction

The Haitian National Pantheon Museum (MUPANAH) inherited the collections of the National Museum after its closure (Célius 2006: 171); it pays tribute to the heroes of Haitian independence who stood their ground and defeated the largest European army of the time. It is the perfect environment to encourage national pride amongst schoolchildren in the form of a "heroic nationalism" (Célius 2004: 38-48), as it is described in official history and school textbooks. The MUPANAH is known as a key venue for revitalising and transmitting collective memory through the conservation of the Haitian historical and cultural heritage in its care. Its mission appears to have remained unchanged since its creation (Paret, 2010). According to Article 3 of the Decree of 21 October 1982,

> The mission of the MUPANAH is to commemorate and promote the memory of the Fathers of the nation, to set out the overall policy for creating and managing historical, artistic, and cultural museums via Haiti's regional and local governments in accordance with the objectives identified by the public authorities, and to play a role in preserving the country's heritage and promoting its national culture" (Decree creating the MUPANAH, *Le Moniteur* 1982).

The museum's stated mission seems to commit it to ritualise the memory of the Fathers of the nation and Haiti's struggles against slavery in every sequence displayed. This ritualisation can be seen clearly in the depictions of the indigenous army's bravery, courage, and determination as they demolished the system of slavery in the colony of Saint-Domingue, which would later become Haiti.

Attempts to understand the level of interest in Haiti's history among the public visiting MUPANAH, mostly schoolchildren, have been based on two main approaches. Firstly, addressing how different memories compete (Barthélemy 2004; Michel, 2014): the indigenous army's unprecedented victory over the slave system, on one hand, and the atrocities suffered during three centuries of slavery, on the other. Secondly, evaluating the perceptions, motivations, expectations, and feelings of the young visitors as they are confronted by the museum's content.

Every museum represents a whole within which the different parts are organically linked together (the artefact, the space, and the visitor). According to the Museology and Cultural Engineering Laboratory (LAMIC),[1] a building's visual appeal is a key factor influencing visitor satisfaction. Lionel Lerebourgs, former Managing Director of the MUPANAH, describes the museum's appearance and content by emphasising its role in constructing and structuring Haitian memory. The interior and exterior architecture features concrete cones allowing natural light to filter through:

> The tomb[2] is lit by sunlight during the day and topped by a cone we see as the most prominent in relation to seven smaller ones [...]. This symbolic tomb serves as an antechamber to a first semi-circular room: the museum's historical gallery. It recounts the history of Haiti, from the Pre-Colombian period through to the 1940s, through a permanent exhibition divided into seven parts (Lerebourgs, 1999: 6).

Today, the gallery covers the period up to 1986, when the Duvalier regime came to an end. However, Lerebourgs' observation about the historical gallery remains valid: "It has always been the gallery most frequently visited by schoolchildren. It allows them to realign their notions of history; the panels, documents and artefacts provide an opportunity for them to relive certain periods of the country's turbulent history" (Lerebourgs 1999: 6).

This article aims to analyse the expectations and motivations of schoolchildren in terms of the MUPANAH's portrayal of slavery, and to explore the strategies used by the museum to convey messages through its exhibitions. I will draw on a series of press articles and archival documents, along with observations and interviews conducted in 2011, as well as comments left in the museum's guest book between 2012 and 2018, notably during the *Chimen Libète* (The Road to Freedom) exhibition, which ran from 20 September to 30 October 2012 and from May to August 2018. Around thirty people (baccalaureate students, university students and museum professionals) were interviewed in an attempt to understand how visitors perceive and assimilate the museumisation of their history, as well as their reception and treatment within the museum. These interviews formed the basis of the research that I conducted in 2012 (Féron 2013).

The museum's Education and Activities team would like the permanent exhibition on the history of Haiti to be accessible to all audiences; the guides must be able to adapt to the many different groups visiting the museum, even if the museum does primarily attract school groups. My interviews with students focused on their reason for visiting as well as their appreciation and perception of their visit. We discussed how they approached, perceived and understood the permanent exhibition and the MUPANAH in general. I also conducted interviews with professionals, especially tour guides and activity leaders, who were selected to give their impressions of the school groups and how their contributions were understood.

1 LAMIC is a research laboratory which focuses on museography, modelling, and museology at Laval University in Quebec.

2 The tomb described represents the pantheon where the symbolic remains of the heroes of Haitian independence are placed: Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe and Alexandre Pétion.

MUPANAH and the Experience of Slavery: The Temporary Exhibition From Ayiti to Haiti: Freedom Won

Fig. 1 Rotunda of the MUPANAH: the beginnings of the fight for freedom. Courtesy MUPANAH, Port-au-Prince

Carlo A. Célius ponders: "The practice of slavery has its roots far back in history, with a geographical distribution sparing no continent or civilisation. How do we go about understanding the fact that it was not until the 1990s that any clear intention to include it in the museum in a significant manner was voiced?" (Célius 1998: 249). It took a long time for the debate on the museumisation of slavery to get to Haiti. Interdisciplinary reflection was required to analyse the social stigma of slavery and conceptualise its memory (Augustin, 2012, p 205). Although the importance of making the memory of slavery available to the public in the form of a museum was acknowledged, Christine Chivallon (2005, 2012) pointed out that the matter should be handled with caution in societies which had directly experienced human-trafficking and slavery, such as Haiti. The memory of this period may be fragmented for both the descendants of the perpetrators and those of the victims, who tend to suppress their feelings of shame and lasting wounds which could "render the memory of slavery almost invisible in the public space" (Augustin 2012: 215-216). In both cases, these suppressed feelings can impede the transmission of this memory. Jean Davallon suggests numerous ways of nurturing the national collective memory:

For transmission to occur, it must be effective, or in other words, it must be articulated in verbal form or in practice. One of the best ways of expressing collective memory is through witness accounts; but it is also important to consider all the forms of oral and practical transmission of techniques, knowledge and expertise through socially defined situations, such as rituals, storytelling, perfor-

mances, interventions, debates, gatherings, learning processes, the application of techniques, etc. (Davallon 2015: 63).

> A strategy must be developed to encourage efforts to commemorate a shared past in a context in which memories have been "mishandled or stamped out by the colonial power and produced under the conditions of violent slavery (Chivallon 2006: 10).

If the MUPANAH is to function as a catalyst triggering reflection among young people about their past, the extent to which the museum can overcome the gap in memory surrounding slavery remains to be seen. Two temporary exhibitions have sought to bring the unspeakable episodes haunting Haiti's collective memory into the spotlight. Alongside the permanent exhibition, which is partially dedicated to slavery, the museum organised *From Ayiti to Haiti, Freedom Won: An Exhibition at the Haitian National Pantheon Museum* in 2004 to celebrate the bicentenary of independence. This exhibition traced the country's history from the Taínos through to national independence. It was held in the midst of a period of political upheaval, which prompted a group of Haitian intellectuals to sign a petition refusing to commemorate the bicentenary of independence under Jean Bertrand Aristide, the head of state at that time. In September 2012, the *Chimen Libète/The Road to Freedom* exhibition opened at the museum. From November 2016 to January 2017, the museum also hosted the travelling international exhibition *Liberated Memories*,[3] but this particular case will be discussed elsewhere.

Numerous studies have explored Saint-Domingue's experience of the slave trade from the perspective of shared yet conflicting memories. Gérard Barthélemy believes that "slavery currently appears to have largely disappeared from the Haitian people's living memory" (Barthélemy 2004: 128). However, the after-effects of this memory continue to shape our everyday human interactions, sometimes without us realising it (Chivallon 2010). A great deal of work to raise awareness and enhance understanding of the country's history and memory still remains to be done, and it is likely that sharing this memory through exhibitions at the MUPANAH will prompt the public to gradually re-appropriate it. A student visiting the *Chimen Libète* exhibition wrote:

> I have just experienced my historical 'pandemonium'. The outcome would usually be laudable given the path trodden by our ancestors, but it takes an indecipherable turn in the current socio-political and cultural context. Slavery is no more, but freedom is yet to arrive...

This comment reflects a broad ideological spectrum that shapes the Haitian people's aspirations. According to a Haitian saying, referring to the social plan adopted by the nation's founder Jean-Jacques Dessalines, "there is no freedom without wellbeing." In other comments, visitors viewed the exhibition as an opportunity to express their grievances and expectations with regard to the wrongs done to their compatriots. The public interprets exhibitions from the perspective of their own socio-political and cultural context. It is clear, then, that exhibitions can arouse a sense of disquiet or fury among visitors when they compare their past with the situation they are experiencing in the present.

3 https://www.icihaiti.com/article-19584-icihaiti-histoire-exposition-memoire-liberee-au-musee-du-pantheon- national.html.

Haiti's experience of the slave trade weighs so heavily that it would be impossible for the museum to present it in just one or two exhibitions. Fanon (1961) argues that national independence was the first step in reparations for the horrors perpetrated by colonial France, yet for many years it was only sporadically addressed in history textbooks and very occasionally in museum exhibitions. Discussing the experience appears to be so painful that attentions are focused instead on the indigenous army's heroic victory over Napoleon. Transmission is thus weakened. When Louis-Georges Tin reminds us that Haiti was once "the most prosperous colony in the world" (Tin, 2013: 18), Haitians view this statement as an insult rather than praise, since their ancestors paid so dearly for this prosperity. Several reflections must be made here. The first is that the use of the phrase 'Pearl of the Antilles', as Haiti was referred to by the slave-drivers, had nothing to do with beautiful landscapes or fertile soils. The pearl certainly shone, but it did so amid the mud and the blood of the damned with no regard for the cries of pain that rang out as bodies were whipped and quartered. The second is that prosperity was forged at the expense of the flesh and blood of hundreds of thousands of Black people uprooted from their lands and snatched from their families to fulfil the greedy, covetous dreams of people with whom they had nothing in common. This is what the museum must convey to a public eager for it to live up to their expectations.

From Saint-Domingue to Haiti: Freedom Won but Hard to Digest…

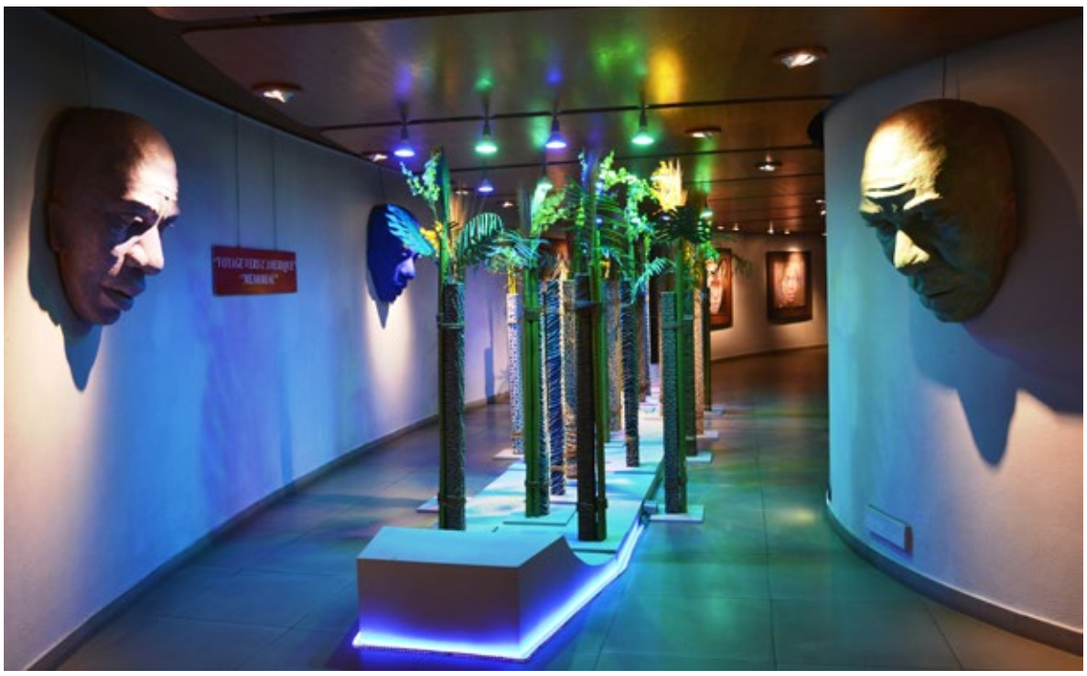

Fig. 2 *The Faces of Freedom*. Courtesy MUPANAH, Port-au-Prince

The *From Ayiti to Haiti: Freedom* Won exhibition (fig. 2) unveiled unspeakable events that had long been hidden. It cast light on the victory of the damned over the slave

drivers, now represented by the West according to Claudy Delné (2013). The slave--driving establishment's aversion to this victory owes to the fact that it was won not only on behalf of the Haitian people, but also on behalf of a world desperate for freedom. Myriam Cottias and Hebe Mattos (2016) studied the shock wave that rippled across the whole continent. Despite efforts to prevent the different peoples from coming into contact with one another, the young Haitian nation's ideals of freedom crossed borders and served as a source of inspiration for other uprisings. Cottias and Mattos (2016: 10) argue for the importance of research on the direct relationships between the Caribbean colonies and South America, from both financial and technical perspectives as well as from the perspectives of the free and the enslaved; which has been rather sporadic to date. This approach would cast further light on the influence of the Haitian Revolution on attempts at emancipation in countries still under colonial rule following the abolition of slavery, or countries that maintained the practice of slavery even after independence. On the one hand, those practicing slavery in Latin America and the rest of the Caribbean attempted to prevent access to the revolutionary and liberating ideals of the heroes of Haitian independence. On the other, they rejected the whole idea of freedom that had taken hold in the young nation. Marcel Dorigny (2019) provides a clear explanation: "Haiti was not recognised by any power at the time. By contrast, in 1815, the European powers gathered in Vienna and recognised France's claim to Saint-Domingue." Drawing on the reflections of Marlene L. Daut (2019), Casimir (2019) observes that "the country was not cast aside. The Haitian Revolution and de Vastey rejected a world where people are traded, so they themselves chose to withdraw and to cut their ties with the modern world". According to Casimir, Haiti has been fighting for modernity without slavery since the early 19th century. We can imagine the task faced by the country as it was threatened by the slave system. When we talk about the memory of slavery, we often overlook the memory of the *marrons*. This figure is important as *marrons* were runaway slaves under French colonial law (Dorigny 2019). In other words, they were slaves who had 'abandoned' the 'natural' or 'legal' setting intended for their lives: the (colonial) homestead. The *marrons* viewed themselves as free men, whereas the colonists viewed them as completely the opposite.

Reception: School Groups

Does the MUPANAH allow young Haitians (its main target audience) to explore their past as slaves and free men (taking their national pride and future prospects into consideration), or in other words, does it help them to develop a historical consciousness? To what extent do the guided tours for school groups help forge citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations? In order to answer these questions, several issues relating to the education provided by Haitian museums must be addressed. My questions apply Halbwachs' reflections on the social frameworks of memory (1925) to the memory of slavery in Haiti and its museumisation at the MUPANAH.

In many cases, interest in visiting the museum appears to come from a desire to glorify the memory of the heroes of Haitian independence, as depicted in the official historiography. It may also be related to the degree of information available about historical figures. One schoolchild confessed: "I wanted to know where President François Duvalier's remains were and I learned that the place where they are kept

has been transformed into a 'Pantheon Museum', but his remains have been replaced by those of our ancestors. I learned that it was the MUPANAH." Others are motivated by curiosity or a desire to discover history. One declared that: "Since I was a child, I've studied the history of Haiti at school and I thought it was vital to come and discover some of the artefacts that have shaped our history." Rather less enthusiastically, another pupil explained: "I was at the official exam session when a friend suggested having a look around the MUPANAH during the break, because it is quite near [...]." However, he quickly rectified: "I'm learning more about the history of my country, I now know more about my origins and who I am."

Fig. 3 Pupils around the Bell of Freedom. Courtesy MUPANAH, Port-au-Prince

Many pupils experienced their museum visit as a school trip or as a form of homework. Others wanted to familiarise themselves with the nation's history. One pupil explained that "the first visit was mostly out of curiosity and the others were more educational and to remind myself of my Haitian-ness."[4] Among the heirs of the Haitian elite, a visit to the museum was compulsory because their families demanded that they acquire full knowledge of the nation's past. In most cases, visitors expressed their desire to get to grips with the nation's history, in which most of them viewed themselves as the (co)inheritors of the heroes. This led them to question the role that the MUPANAH is supposed to play as a cultural and memorial institution compiling and transmitting knowledge about slavery and its impact on Haitian society; not in a way that reveals the inhumanity of the system but by portraying slavery as an evil conquered by the strength and bravery of our ancestors.

The aim of my survey was to evaluate perceptions of the quality of the museum visit using a scale of satisfaction (Very satisfied – Satisfied – Not satisfied). Positive impressions were in the majority. Some respondents reported being won over by the museum's architecture, while others found the visit to supplement their national history lessons.

4 By 'Haitian-ness', I assume that the pupil meant their belonging to Haiti's unique cultural and historic context – everything that makes them feel Haitian in their soul. These characteristics relate to "the question of the existence of a Haitian culture whose historical, social and aesthetic modalities and expressions differ wholly or partially from those of other peoples around the world" (Crosley 1992: 124).

Visiting the museum led many young people to reflect on their identity and existence: "What would I be like now without this version of my people's past? What would my future have been like if a different model of society had been in place?" These words are representative of the many questions posed by the young visitors. The museum can quench their thirst for knowledge, as well as contributing to their search for an identity and providing consolation in the face of modern-day adversity. The museum is, therefore, an example of an appropriate educational policy for civic education.

Satisfaction levels vary according to visitors' expectations. Some had hoped to make discoveries, as described by one student: "I was expecting to discover new things besides what is said about national history in books and in the street." Others expected to find a space for leisure, discussion, and reflection at the museum once the visit was over: "Before my first visit, I wondered if there would be a space to sit and discus with other students. But I was disappointed to find us all standing around in the courtyard. There was nowhere to sit down and exchange experience and nothing to eat besides *Papita*.[5]" Another group thought that they would find an exhibition about specific periods in history: "I've always been interested in the history of the independence battles, so I expected to see an exhibition about history focusing on the revolutionary period, as it is referred to at the museum". These opinions are representative. Many young people were keen to participate in any activity that would take them away from their daily routines.

Answering questions about the past appears to prompt reflection on the future. The young people expressed a desire to find more meaning in their visit. John H. Falk (2009) modelled the museum visitor experience according to identity-based motivations. He attempted to develop a predictive model of the visitor experience, allowing museum professionals to better respond to visitors' needs. The young people I interviewed expressed needs, expectations and satisfactions that reflected quite accurately those raised by Falk in relation to both identity and collective memory. The following diagram is not a circle but a spiral, suggesting that answers to visitors' questions encourage them to return.

Fig. 4 Spiral of visitor needs identified by the museum.

5 *Papita* is a plantain product eaten in the form of chips. It is a widely marketed by-product in Haiti

Evaluating the School Audience at MUPANAH

The approach taken by many researchers (Allard 2003; Falk 2009; Chivallon 2013) to museum audiences, especially adolescent school visitors, was useful in analysing my interviews. Michel Allard (2003) urges us to accept that pupils cannot understand, see, or learn everything in a single visit:

> There is a great temptation to have them make the most of their visit and to show them all the treasures exhibited in the display cases. More often than not, pupils get bored. They grasp only a tiny fraction of all the knowledge we would like them to acquire. (Allard 2003: 42).

There was a degree of discontent among the young people when it came to the route and duration of the visit, the explanations given by the guides, the number of artefacts exhibited and the historical events not covered by the exhibition. Other comments related to their personal visits, which I will return to later.

With regard to their reasons for visiting the MUPANAH, most of the responses revolved around the need to find out about their social and ethnic origins, inform themselves about the richness of their culture and seek their own identity. The students' responses demonstrated their awareness of the past and support for the museum's promotion of Haiti's history and culture. They also revealed the important role played by schools in their quest for identity. Their words suggest that over the course of their education, their interest in culture plays a major part in their search for meaning in their lives as they seek an awareness of where they come from, who they are, and how they should approach the future. This entails questioning the past, selecting moments of glory, and identifying with a group; the search for identity gives rise to historical consciousness. Different forms of transmission can change the way in which the museum's message(s) are received or even provoke aversion among some schoolchildren. Allard believes that this particular audience must be handled very carefully.

Criticism of the museum rarely concerned the exhibits themselves. Exhibition curators are obliged to select pieces according to their condition, while taking into account the average visitor's capacity to absorb information. The permanent exhibition takes a transversal approach to the history of Haiti, whilst still attempting to meet its young audience's expectations in terms of creating a more modern atmosphere. The respondents' satisfaction levels may be interpreted as recognition of the efforts made by the museum to please its audience. Although very few respondents stated that they did not find any part of the visit of interest, a few noteworthy criticisms were made. Firstly, the absence of a shop and the ban on photography restricts the existence of any tangible mark of the visit. This criticism should be taken into consideration: young people must be informed about the impact of their contact with the unique, fragile artefacts on display at the museum. Camera flashes can damage the artefact or even destroy it completely, but few people understand the ban on photography at the museum. Young people must be taught that

the measure will allow them to repeat the experience in the future and allow others to experience it too. They also criticised the fact that "there is no space for students to debate, discuss and exchange ideas after the visits." Meanwhile, some students wished to spend more time looking at the artefacts when the guides were evidently under pressure to finish the visits within a certain amount of time.

However, dissatisfaction among a small number of respondents does not equate to overall discontent. The interviews raised a series of points that represent a challenge for museums faced with the need to modernise and meet new public expectations, such as visitor-artefact interaction, interactive screens, cafeterias, recreational areas, etc. Baccalaureate students (older teenagers) were more critical of certain aspects of the museum. Another complaint was that "the guides pay more attention to foreign tourists than to us", although this merits further clarification as other respondents expressed their satisfaction with the guides' professionalism. There is no reason why a guide should prioritise foreign visitors, as everyone is supposed to be treated the same in a democracy.

Incompetence among the guides was also an issue raised by the respondents. Since they arrive at the museum with expectations linked either to their own research or the information they have received from a person they trust (parents, friends, teachers, etc.), any detail or answer that contradicts their expectations could prompt young people to think that the guide is incompetent. Poor performance from a guide may arise from a number of different causes. Once, I saw a guide let their group of students complete the visit unaccompanied. Allowing young people partial autonomy as they visit the museum is strongly recommended by Michel Allard: "… it is important to find a balance between total control and a completely hands-off approach" (Allard 2003: 47). In response to my neutral question, the guide replied: "...I've been working since this morning! [It was 14:45] The worst thing is that I don't know when I'll finish because there are a lot of visitors." In general, stress among guides is a source of concern for museums as it can affect visitor satisfaction.

Encounters with Young People: The Need for Sensibilisation and Shared Experience

Young people visiting the MUPANAH discover a vast and diverse heritage. The historical gallery in particular allows them to get to grips with a history that affects who they are, how they perceive themselves, and what others think of them as Haitians. Yet the interviews also point to new considerations. The public display a consistent desire to familiarise themselves with the past and to honour the heroes of Haitian independence or, at the very least, to get informed and discuss the past with others. According to the accounts, they also want to contrast the historical narrative presented by the exhibition with those taught in textbooks or in the classroom, and to memorise information they are exposed to during their visit, where they have come into contact with artefacts and images representing different periods in the country's history.

fig. 5 Partial view of the permanent collection. Courtesy MUPANAH, Port-au-Prince

The survey data shows that this school audience constructs a collective image of the past based on the museum's layout and presentation. Their interpretation of the messages conveyed by the exhibition point to a strong demand for the kinds of contemporary exhibition methods that facilitate the transmission of knowledge. These expectations also concerned the content. The use of devices enabling contact with the artefacts creates a sense of pride that is particularly desirable in the case of the slave rebellion that lead to the nation's independence. The interviews provided the means to measure the impact of the display methods used at the MUPANAH to stimulate political sensibility and thought among its young audience. They also showed the benefit of the school visits to the museum in terms of developing understanding and absorption of Haiti's past. The museum is an invaluable tool for knowledge transmission, provided that the visits are structured around a formal museum education programme. Educating citizens who will guarantee institutional durability and oversee Haiti's social, economic, political, and cultural development remains one of the main duties of the Haitian education system.

Given young people's desires to develop an identity that reflects their past, which tends to be strongest during late adolescence, the MUPANAH and the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training face a significant challenge. These institutions should work together to achieve the established objectives set for the teaching of history. A plan for institutionalising the link between the two institutions should be drawn up. In Haiti, the responsibility of the education system is not clearly defined, if it exists at all, in terms of the museum visit experience of pupils and students (verifying reception of the messages conveyed by the museum, observation and contact with artefacts and images, etc.). In the absence of any clear responsibility, schools have little control over the knowledge acquired by students at the museum. Bringing these two sources of knowledge together would allow young people to discover a viable project for building a country based on dignity and respect amidst the chaos of its past and present. By treating the two in isolation, the

museum's capacity for education is curtailed. As long as the museum visit triggers a desire to return later among young people, it will play a part in their sense of identity and prompt them to reflect on their own "responsibility in history" (Létourneau 1997).

Conclusion

I decided to undertake this study in the light of the growing number of school visits to the museum in recent years. This trend contradicts the prevailing tendency to view young people as "uprooted" or "walking amnesiacs" (Létourneau 2004: 327), although it is important not to overlook the high levels of illiteracy that can only expedite the forgetting of history. Pierre Bourdieu rightly argues that while culture is determined by individuals' social, cultural, and national characteristics, the paradox is that the first principle of culture is to reject this original link (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1969: 161-167).

I will conclude by returning to the pertinent remarks made by young people throughout the interviews. We have mentioned their criticisms with regard to the operation of the museum, so let us now consider the museum's content. The period of slavery, followed by the slave rebellion and Faustin Soulouque's imperialist era, as illustrated by his gold crown, caught their attention in particular. The preference for studying slavery and the Revolution in Haitian schools is so apparent that it prompted Marie-Lucie Vendryes to propose a project for a history of slavery museum with the aim of "preserving the memory of slavery and presenting the history of this period of dehumanisation" (Vendryes 2000: 15-19). The project is based on similar intentions to the 'Routes of Enslaved Peoples' project (UNESCO 2010, 2018), which never came to fruition despite a Haitian committee being established in 1993 for this purpose.

Against all odds, young people did not reject the exhibitions on Haiti's history. On the contrary, their presence at the museum is crucial for the acquisition of a museum-based culture and an understanding of culture in the broader sense. Their criticisms show that young people are looking for a lively, multi-sensory experience at the museum; in my opinion, they are driven by a desire to understand the history of Haiti in all of its facets and to reaffirm their identity and civic consciousness (Saillant 2012). Despite the negative aspects mentioned, I believe that the experience is a positive one on balance, not because of any particular device used to facilitate young people's experiences but because of their own motivation. As a result of their willingness to learn, young people enjoy experiencing the past through the exhibition and this contributes to the construction of their historical consciousness. One thing is clear: we must work towards reconciling Haitian society with itself and its history. We must encourage young people to reconstruct the memory of traumatic events and take ownership of them. Although the museum has the means to begin this reconstruction and cast light on the "human condition" (Postman 1989), it is important that more museums like the MUPANAH are created. In terms of historical content, a museum focusing specifically on the memory of slavery should also be opened. We must seek to build on the momentum established by the *From Ayiti to Haiti: Freedom Won* and *Chimen Libète* exhibitions.

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Binary Uses of Duvalierist Photographic Imagery in Public Space

Kesler Bien-Aimé

Throughout the history of photography, from its beginnings in 1839 right up to the present-day, one of the main factors of the medium's success has been its adaptability for multiple uses. The genre of photography analysed in this article is political photography,[1] with a specific focus on François Duvalier, the former President of the Republic of Haiti. This major political figure governed from 1957 to 1986 and has had a profound influence on the form of Haiti's recent history. In terms of post-1986 political activity,[2] both critics and admirers are responsible for somewhat controversial appropriations of his photographic portrait[s?]. Both sides of the political field[3] sustain memorial and social conflicts in the post-Duvalier era. In his article *Portrait photographique, entre identité et image*, Maresca (2015) cites both Galienne and Pierre Francastel (1969 : 12). According to them, "for a portrait to exist, it must feature two characteristics: individualised traits and the possibility of identifying the model". Wicky (2017), meanwhile, writes that "in a portrait, the photographic medium allows us to reproduce the details of the face and its exact expression in a specific moment, which is often the least natural expression. Resemblance can only be achieved (and caricature avoided) by softening the effects caused by the mechanical nature of the medium". Through careful arrangement of himself and members of his political family, Duvalier made his photographic messages seem like informative "announcements" (Deleuze 1987) that nobody could ignore.

Beyond confrontations over the control of Haiti's historicity,[4] legitimate or illegitimate as the case may be, and beyond prearrangements of the regime's photographic messages and the "for" or "against" remembrance work motivating them, how can the political suffering caused by Duvalierism be dealt with without dividing the political field still further?[5] The interviews carried out for this study reveal that social ties between supporters and critics of the Duvalier regime have gradually been forged. Once detached from the context in which they were produced, to what extent can a corpus of political photographs be credible and useful in acknowledging the victim status of the complainants and their families? How can the heirs of Duvalierism be made to admit the negative history of the regime and the consequences thereof? As long as the sociopolitical conflicts ignited between 1957 and 1986 have not been resolved, this "political death" will haunt Haitian society and politics. We

1 A photograph that forms part of the political debate
2 This period marks the fall of the Duvalier regime and attempts to shift to a democratic era.
3 This concept is operationalised by P. Bourdieu (1981) as a site of competition for power.
4 Alain Touraine refers to the capacities of societies to produce themselves as "historicity". See Lebel 2013.
5 According to E. Tassin (1992), public space should be understood as a space of diffusion because instead of fusing individuals by joining the social whole in its unifying principle, it spreads them in space, externalises them and keeps them at a distance. It also serves as a space for diffusion because it presents itself as the place and mode of transmission between those separate individuals, thereby establishing and maintaining the possibility of communication. Public space should not be apprehended as a contrast between divergence and convergence, diversion and conversion, diffusion and confusion, disunion and communion. For Habermas, public space is "the sum of contradictory positions from groups in tension or of the pooling of individual interests. It is the expression of a general interest shared by all at the end of a process of deliberation based on duly justified arguments" (Lits 2014).

must move beyond fear or adoration of Duvalier's political portrait to be able to enter a phase of mourning. For Hurbon (2016: 16), this phase is highly improbable. In his words, "the impossibility of mourning and the incitement of a policy of forgetting can only serve to exacerbate the suffering of the victims, who remain unable to move on from their suffering". Indeed, as mourning serves as a guarantee against forgetting (Fauré 2004: 27), this article seeks to provide evidence that this phase must be entered now, regardless of any state of awareness.

Photography is perhaps not the best tool for remembrance as it tends to freeze time; the articulation of individual, collective or social memory must inevitably be dynamic and contextual. As Duvalier's photographic portrait continues to divide the nation's shared foundations, we might consider why it is a target of both discord and concord. In ethical terms, photographs are merely a trace of the rays of light reflected by the subject in front of the lens. Generally speaking, any photographic visual regime, such as that of Duvalierism, will destroy the real world by reducing it to a series of images (Loehr 2007). Photography has been accused of being too realistic by the Catholic Church (Michaud 1997): "seeking to fix the fleeting images in the mirror, [...] is not only impossible, [...] but the very desire to attempt it is already an insult to God... The daguerreotype seems to be the work of a vengeful God". Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval went as far as to attribute magical powers to the invention. New theoretical avenues then opened up, that explored photography as an imprint (Perret 2016). The notion of the index, which emerged with Roland Barthes's *La Chambre Claire*, conceptualises this function. For Barthes, photography does not represent, it refers.

Concerning the different potential used of Duvalierist images, three main functions can be identified:

- perpetuating the memory of the regime's victims with a view to obtaining recognition of their victim status;
- creating a "nostalgic" image of the regime through a wealth of details (*studium* and *punctum*, Barthes 1980);
- presenting an appealing image in the media via negative depictions of post-1986 society to fuel complaints with a view to resurrecting the authoritarian regime.

How can Duvalier's portrait, as a "document",[6] provide evidence of the tyrannical nature of the Duvalier regime? Why do "memory entrepreneurs" (Gensburger 2010) and visual activists use both images of the victims and of Duvalier? In public space, photographic depictions of Duvalierism are presented as if they were documents or evidence allowing the regime's acts to be judicialised. Since it represents reality in the most positive way possible, photography, as Sterlin Ulysse (2020: 46) observes, is perceived as a way of representing the real world of industrial modernity that relies on the positivity and veracity of images. Despite this, the invention and use of photographic images also raised strong concerns and criticism.

6 Since the 1910 5th International Photographic Congress in Brussels, the term "document" has been reserved solely for images that may be used for research purposes. It was also stated that the beauty of the photographs was secondary.

With regard to public security, urban cleanliness and the construction of nationalism, supporters of the regime react to society's current ills with nostalgia: "When Duvalier was in power, we could walk the streets in peace. Under Duvalier, the streets were clean. Duvalier's rule made other nations respect Haiti", etc. A simple online search on the subject reveals that these clichés are repeated over and over again. Yet as long as there is no in-depth examination of Duvalier's rule and its consequences for politics in Haiti today, any analysis of the imagery used by the fallen regime will be insufficient. It is no antidote to Duvalierism.

Construction and [De]construction of Duvalierist Imagery

In post-1986 political activity and acts of remembrance using Duvalierist images, two main visual regimes may be identified. They contrast with magical interpretations of Duvalier's government. The first is referred to here as the "victim-memorial current", while the second is labelled the "pro-Duvalier commemorative current", which is in favour of the regime's return[7]. The victim-memorial current comprises activists and supporters of the democratic, grassroots movement, from both before and after 1986. It represents the main driving force behind research leading to the dissemination, documentation and publication of the political practices of Duvalier senior and junior. This current advocates a duty of remembrance and justice for the social and symbolic suffering endured by large sections of society throughout 29 years of uninhibited control over their lives, assets and collective imagination, both in Haiti and across the diaspora. It encompasses complainants, human rights organisations, direct victims and their families. Meanwhile, within the pro-Duvalier commemorative current, there is the dream of resurrecting the principles that underpinned the governmental regime of the dogmatic François Duvalier. These actors have reorganised and closed ranks. In this current, iconic depictions of the regime are used in an attempt to bring the figure of Duvalier into the modern-day setting. As a community of values and interests, comfortably seated in total impunity, its supporters use the most representative symbols of father and son to negotiate their presence on the new political landscape.

These two visual regimes [re]frame and [re]contextualise images from the Duvalier government within the country's contemporary memory and politics in a manner that suits their respective interests. One seeks to rehabilitate Duvalierism, while the other mobilises images of the victims with a view to obtaining public recognition and reparation. Between the fall of the regime and the coup d'état that removed President Jean Bertrand Aristide from power in September 1991, a "dominant memory" emerged (Rousso 1987: 12) banning the depiction of Duvalierism in the public space. This widespread taboo pushed for a single and unique interpretation of the past. Contradictory interpretations emerged when the neo-Duvalierist military (1991-1994) followed by neo-Jean-Claudists

7 According to Dominique Valérie Malack (2003: 8), "commemoration is a manifestation of memory. It plays a central role in the process of identity construction. […]. It is defined as a collective, public act focusing on a figure, an event or a historical episode via a fixed, permanent manifestation or marker. As a collective act, commemoration connects participants: it offers an opportunity to reaffirm their common interests and shared identity. This act is public, or in other words, it is known, open and available to all members of the community and it is organised or supported by a public institution".

(supporters of Duvalier junior) came to power. Since these events, two types of social memory of a single figure and a single place and time have been competing within the public sphere.

Duvalierism in Contemporary Politics

As a result of constant efforts to control Haitian symbols and imagination over the past 29 years, the Duvalierist *habitus* has become deeply rooted. It is now present across the whole of society. "As soon as he came to power, the first task on Duvalier's agenda was to systematically domesticate the nation's entire ideological apparatus: schools, churches, the army, the police, the justice system. Throughout the second half of the 20th century and beyond, he became the most studied political figure in Haiti's history. Due to the absence of a genuine remembrance policy – a series of interventions seeking to generate or even impose common memories upon a given group…" [this is a sentence fragment whose subject still needs to be completed with a verb] (Michel, 2013). The pernicious and very personal relationship between Duvalierism and both public and private spaces continues to exist (Tassin 1992).

Let us now move on to analyse the images used by the two currents. In fig. 1, the father presents his "son and heir", Jean-Claude Duvalier, to the nation. This presentation occurs inside the presidential office, accompanied by the two-coloured flag and with a set of encyclopaedias positioned in the foreground. The frame shows only the father, his son, the flag and the books. The prearrangements, everything that is out of frame, are ignored by the recipient. In order to understand the arrangement of the image, which is firmly anchored in the nation's collective memory, we can draw on the work of Judith Butler: looking at this photo implicitly entails signing an aesthetic or political contract and making a form of commitment (2010: 67). The perspective guides the interpretation of the image. Butler counters the viewpoint of Sontag who had stated that photography itself cannot offer an interpretation without captions. According to Sontag, the silent, singular, sporadic nature of images means that they must be accompanied by written analyses. Images can touch us, but they cannot offer us an explanation of what we are seeing.

Fig. 1 Duvalier and son. Copyright Devoir de Mémoire

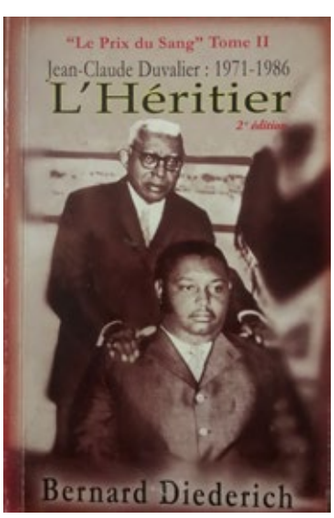

Fig. 2 Duvalier and his son, reframed. Copyright Bernard Diederich, 2011.

Can fig. 1 and the [re]framed image in fig. 2 tell us anything about the father's intention to hand power to his son? Despite the merits of fig. 1 as an index, symbol and icon, what truths does it reveal? This question echoes the ambiguity of the Duvalierist visual regime and does little to dispel our concerns. In an age where photographic images are easily reproduced, this image cannot signify good or evil in isolation. In the presence of an image such as this, spectators are faced with a frozen scene outside their time and place. In *Le spectateur émancipé* (2008: 8), Rancière issues a memorable warning:

> Being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. Firstly, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator stands before an image in a state of ignorance of the production process that resulted in this image and of the reality it conceals. Secondly, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile and passive in their seat. And so, to be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act.

In *Destin des images, Rancière* (2003: 108), states that "an image never stands alone. It forms part of a mechanism of visibility that determines the status of the bodies represented and the type of attention they merit". Indeed, the two visual regimes relating to Duvalierism draw on fixed or moving images as a way to remember or reminisce, regroup or divide. Having become commonplace, as in the case of fig. 1, they are constantly [re]framed[8] for display in exhibitions, films and historiographical or literary texts. In one way or another, these types of "stylised" image-based interventions fuel the tensions surrounding the memory of Duvalier (Foucard 1964: 19).

For the pro-Duvalierists, the main issue at stake in these images is the return of the fallen regime and/or the enhancement of representations of it, whatever the cost. Seeking links between Duvalier's portrait and the social and political order he established, Frantz Voltaire (2017) of the (CIDHICA)[9] makes several important points. He agrees with Michel Philippe Lerebours, author of *Haïti et ses peintres* (1804-1980), who identified the start of this social practice in Haiti with the coronation of Faustin Soulouque in the 1850s. Lerebours explains that other types of representation, such as engravings and lithographs from the period, may be viewed as precursors to Haitian photography. Among others, Voltaire highlights the way in which the Haitian elite associated photography with truth, although it had to be retouched in order to reflect predominant ideological values (Voltaire 2017: 305-317). According to him, portraiture in Haiti dates back to the accession of Fabre Geffrard (1860). Voltaire explains that the rising elites showed their social credentials through photographs, rehabilitating their image as a formerly colonised people or as worthy heirs of the defunct colonial system. The "manipulated realism" of photographs allowed "civilised" or visually Westernised Haitian figures to enter posterity. In our view, this insight may just as well be applied to the constructed, [re]framed images of the Duvalier regime.

The sample of five images from the Duvalierist photographic corpus, compiled between 2015 and 2021, is quite representative. André Rouillé (2005) would classify them quite simply as "true photographs" or "documents". However, caution must be exercised when it comes to photographic images, which are [re]composed,

8 See fig. 2.
9 Centre International de Documentation et d'Information Haïtienne Caribéenne et Afrocanadienne (International Centre for Haitian, Caribbean and Afro-Canadian Documentation and Information).

revealed, [re]framed and displayed. Unlike fig. 1, which shows President François Duvalier (known as *Papa Doc*) seating his underage son *Baby Doc* in the presidential chair, fig. 2 is more stylised it removes important information that could be useful in analysing the "presentism" that shaped the Duvalierist political order. The image is the product of a tight [re]framing, focusing on the figures as if the books no longer deserved to be featured. Frédéric Gérald Chery highlights this presentism:

> Speaking of Duvalierism 28 years after its fall with the aim of drawing attention to the regime's victims and revealing its methods of government to those under 30, whilst also seeking to prevent any possibility of a return of Duvalierism in Haiti, albeit in disguise, is problematic these days. This work should already have been done; the memory of Duvalierism should already have been consigned to legal records and history books. […] In other words, writing the memory of Duvalierism is dependent upon a new historical experiment that would equip Haitian society with the means to distance itself from its past and to think differently about what has happened in its past (2016 : 397).

Fig. 3 shows President Duvalier posing with a portrait of Pope Paul VI in the background to his left. Here, the political regime showcases its symbols of power and its social and religious preferences. The image evokes the emotional bond between the Duvalier regime and the representative of the Catholic Church. These highly symbolic photographs of the president, especially ones like this where the Catholic Church is directly referenced, are the foundation of the actions of these entrepreneurs dealing in pro-Duvalierist commemoration. Fig. 4 seems like some sort of initiation ceremony, *Papa Doc* with his son and heir (Diederich, 2011) accompanied by his personal guard.[10] Under their attentive gaze, the president points his gun out of the frame, leaving spectators to guess the target. Between what is said (shown) and unsaid (suggested), the photograph sends an intentionally menacing message.

Fig. 3 Duvalier in his office. Copyright Devoir de Mémoire

10 Diederich (2011) provides a historical framework to guide the interpretation of this photographic portrait. He writes that François Duvalier practised shooting in military uniform at Fort Dimanche. His M1 was equipped with an extra magazine. From left to right, Jean Claude Duvalier, Colonel Gracia Jacques, Major Claude Raymond and Captain Jean Tassy.

Fig. 4. Duvalier and his son. Copyright Devoir de Mémoire

Fig. 5 depicts the execution of Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, two young rebels believed to be "Kamoken".[11] On November 12, 1964, they were tied to posts with their backs to the northern wall of the cemetery in Port-au-Prince. At the scene of the execution, a representative of the Catholic Church can be seen. By agreeing to give the convicted men the "last sacrament", does he not become an accomplice to the spectacle of the execution of these young? How can the Catholic Church's role in this execution be interpreted?

Fig. 5. Public execution of Louis Drouin et de Marcel Numa, November 12,1964, Port-au-Prince. Copyright Devoir de mémoire

11 In *Catéchisme* ... (1964 :19), the Duvalier regime defines "Kamoken" as someone who is capable of doing harm to the country and the government.

Although the political and memorial motivations to restore dignity to the regime's victims during the post-Duvalier period are all well-meant, these actions must not obstruct an objective analysis of the photographic act. Concerning the polarisation of memory in the public space, Gustinvil (2016: 420) observes that neither the "victim" nor the "executioner" are pre-constituted "subjects" beyond the scene that places them in these roles. Moreover, Midy (2016: 62) notes: "From Dessalines to Paul Magloire, Haiti has known nothing but authoritarian political regimes". This statement could be linked to a question raised by Hurbon (2016: 17): is this dictatorship rooted in history in the sense that it is the product of history or rather, is it an unprecedented event, an eruption, a rupture in the order of our routine lives?

Regardless of the medium or device used, acts of remembrance are just as likely to bring people together as they are to divide them. They can give rise to confrontations, conflicts or "memory wars" (Dorismond 2016). In the case of visual communication, when a public space lacks the necessary critical mass to analyse the images in circulation, the production and reception of political imagery as single-minded and functional as the imagery used under Duvalier can trigger either hatred or adulation. These acts of remembrance are performed with a view to achieving a political outcome.

Claude Cosette (1983) argues that "the meaning of an image derives from the types of relationships it establishes" as a medium between agents (image creators, commissioners, broadcasters and recipients). This points to the need to analyse images in relation to the specific social contexts that lend them meaning. Lavabre (2019), echoes Halbwachs (1925), when he holds that, beyond the social context in which a memory is evoked, the individual evoking it is a pure fiction. Photographs are considered to be part of an analogy for what our relationship with the past has become (Nora 1997). They hark back to a lost world. Baudrillard (2007) viewed photography as "the ideal tool for making the world disappear. The world's dimensions are erased when a subject is printed on film: smell, weight, density, space and time. […]. Indeed, like death, photography establishes the end of reality and is reborn with a new, autonomous identity". Images of the past cannot represent the past; all they can do is comment on it. Therefore, we posit that photographic images in the form of snapshots torn from the flow of permanent movement are also a mechanism for forgetting everything that is not represented within the frame. Regardless of the status of such images in constructing or [de]constructing a visual regime, this article aims to encourage reflection on the affects of their circulation. This is particularly important as those involved in shaping the memory of Duvalierism are also involved in other political projects.

In practice, seeking recognition of one's status as a victim of a political regime exposes one to communication issues that are no less political. In this regard, there is no difference between the two visual regimes produced by Duvalierism. While obtaining recognition of victims' status remains an important objective for the victim-memorial current, in purely ethical terms, the quest for this public recognition cannot be disinterested. Equally, while mobilising photographic images has an ethical purpose, we believe that without thorough historical documentation of the photographic act (production, dissemination, reception), the emotional burden that it generates can hinder attempts to historicise and judicialise the events in question.

Our analysis of the corpus of photographs used in acts of remembrance "for" or "against" the Duvalier regime suggests that those using these images overlook the unstable, polysemic nature of this type of message. The failure to acknowledge this obstructs interpretation of the signs (symbols, icons and indices) that make up the images. Although Duvalierism refers to a specific temporality, its presence in contemporary politics owes to the summoning of its signified, or rather, to the connotations suggested by its signs. Since the historical past can never be fully grasped in the contemporary era, photographic images cannot be used as evidence. Besides the remembrance work carried out by the victims' families and human rights organisations, other phenomena have also emerged. Survivors appear in the public space and legitimately accuse their persecutors. When images of the regime's torture and memorial sites are available, they are used by survivors to present their victim status. There are competing narratives: that of the victims, that of the victims' descendants and that of the regime's nostalgic supporters.

About (2001) cites Michel Frizot (1996) to emphasise that "by giving tangible form to the facts, photography produces document, the raw material of history". At the same time, visual analysis must look elsewhere for the theoretical and methodological foundations underpinning the medium. Every photographic image deserves to be articulated. Although his theories do not pertain to photography specifically, in *Recherches sémiotiques* (2008), Baetens argues that it relates to history, cultural history, cultural studies, philosophy and the history of technology, "or even to all these disciplines at once". In order to understand the function of "evidence" attributed to this polysemic object, analytical attempts must ponder methodological and epistemological questions concerning the photographic image, and political photography in particular, ranging from the identity of the photographer and model to the subject, date and location, as well as the materials used for capturing the image and producing it. Approaching photographs as sources, About and Chénoux (2001) argue that an inventory of questions should be drawn up and certain methodological precautions, as are commonly adopted by historians, should be taken. Critical analysis also takes the context of production, dissemination and reception into consideration. Any exemption from binary uses is likely to be banal and manipulative, and to instrumentalise or withhold the information needed to appreciate the photographic act. Such an approach threatens to hinder the assimilation of the message.

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Tangible and Intangible Aspects of Individual Experiences of Monuments: The Role of the Door of No Return in Remembrance of the Slave Trade in Ouidah (Benin)

Gbègnidaho Achille Zohoun

Introduction

It took a long time for the medical world to acknowledge the role of leeches in treating vascular diseases, despite their ugliness. It has taken just as long for analyses of the slave trade to focus not only on the rupture that it caused but also on the cultural enrichment that occurred around the Atlantic world despite the tragedy. When exploring the slave trade in Danxomè in Benin, sites of intercultural dialogue begin to emerge from amid some of the darker gardens of memory. Artworks establish links between continents that played different roles in the slave trade. This article paves the way for reinterpreting and materialising memory in politics and heritage. It seeks to answer the following questions with regard to monuments marking this painful past:

- How can a public monument permanently embody the traumatic memory, while the moment when the pain was experienced is distant from the contemporary conjunctures of the descendants of the victims? How can such a monument reconcile contrasting memories?

- Can a memorial remain a symbol of National History without excessive nostalgia and without anesthetizing the collective conscience?

- Finally, how can an artist, beneficiary of a public commission, combine his aesthetic and his particular interest with the collective memory?

Drawing on these questions, this article will discuss the Benin people's reception of memorial monuments and the role of these monuments in international relations.

Memorial Monuments to the Slave Trade and Globalisation of Artistic Representations

Is there a single country in the world today without memorials or heritage sites? Of course not. Where does this tradition of honouring a deceased individual or group with a memorial, or of commemorating an event by depicting it on monuments come from? In Africa, the megaliths found in Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal and many other cultures materialise the memory of events and people. In precolonial Danxomè, the portable altars known in the Fongbé language as asen, which were

usually made from copper alloy, iron and wood, represented the memory of a deceased person, who was celebrated with libations at the foot of this symbolic object that materialised their noble name.[1]

The *asen* – sometimes referred to as *assen hotagantin* – linked the world of the living and the world of the ancestors through the deceased person's spirit. This object was intended to preserve the memory of the dead and the area housing it was considered sacred and reserved exclusively for reverence.

Fig. 1: *Asen* Danxomè Kingdom, 19th century, Benin. © Patrick Gries

Today, memorials are the product of the policies of states, which invest in artistic creations or events and create links between places and the memories they evoke. From this perspective, monuments dedicated to the slave trade represent milestones in remembrance practices. Depending on where they are erected, these monuments sometimes take on an international dimen-

1 Name adopted by a Danxomè king when he ascended the throne. Differing from the king's birth name (first names and surname), it conveyed a message of action or governance. From that point on, the king would only be called by this name, which was akin to an incantation

sion. Examples of this include the Ark of Return in New York;[2] the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, France;[3] the Cap 110 Memorial in Martinique;[4] the African American Family Monument in Savannah, Georgia, in the United States;[5] the Maroons of Freedom in Rémire-Montjoly, French Guiana;[6] the Slavery Memorial in Cape Town, South Africa;[7] the Monument to Commemorate the 1811 Slave Uprising in St Leu, Réunion;[8] the Shimoni Slave Caves in Kenya;[9] Clave in Rotterdam, the Netherlands;[10] the Stone Town Slavery Memorial in Zanzibar, Tanzania;[11] the ACTe Memorial in Guadeloupe;[12] the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington;[13] and finally, the Door of No Return in Ouidah, Benin. These monuments embody common, societal consciousness of a history of suffering. They are a public and political symbol of a painful shared heritage between descendants of the victims and profiteers of slavery.

But is capturing suffering in death not a fleeting exercise? What can we say about the outcome of these depictions in contemporary society? We must ask ourselves whether the historical, architectural, artistic and scientific context and space of a memorial is still in step with society and whether the imaginary of the slave trade conveyed by the memorial is capable of preventing or healing the wounds of racism, a product of the slave trade. Monumentalising the memory of the slave trade has not brought a permanent end to this tragic practice: despite the prominence of these monuments, modern-day slavery still exists. The unconscious legacy of the slave trade threatens social cohesion, not only in the Black Atlantic but also in Beninese society, where families from south to north still clash at marriages between different bloodlines because of the different roles played in the slave trade by the bride and groom's grandparents.

2 It was designed by Rodney Léon, an American architect of Haitian origin who was selected from 310 applicants from more than 83 different countries. The memorial to the abolition of slavery was inaugurated in March 2015

3 This site was inaugurated in March 2012. It is one of the largest heritage sites commemorating slavery in Europe, stretching 7,000m^2 along the banks of the Loire on a scale that is commensurate with the city's role in the slave trade.

4 These 15 statues were built in 1998 in the city of Diamant. Made from concrete, they are each 2.5 metres tall, weigh 4 tonnes, and are positioned facing the Gulf of Guinea. This is the site where one of the last slave ships ran aground during a storm.

5 This statue symbolises the abolition of slavery and was erected in 2002. The monument depicts a modern Black family who have broken their chains

6 This monument commemorating the abolition of slavery was inaugurated in 2008. It depicts a man breaking his chains and a woman releasing a bird. French Guiana commemorates the abolition of slavery on 10 June.

7 This memorial to slavery can be found in Church Square. This was where the slaves waited for their masters until mass ended. The monument is made up of 11 granite blocks set out in front of a building that houses a permanent exhibition on the history and abolition of slavery. Some of the blocks feature the names of slaves who were sold in the square.

8 Inaugurated in November 2011, the monument pays tribute to the slaves involved in the Saint-Leu uprising in 1811. It shows the heads of slaves sentenced to death after the uprising and a list of names of those who participated in the revolt. Réunion commemorates the abolition of slavery on December 20.

9 In the 18th century, Shimoni was one of the first ports used to transport African slaves to the Middle East. The Shimoni Slave Caves cover an area of 5 kilometres.

10 This monument commemorating the abolition of slavery in the former Dutch colonies was unveiled to the public in 2013 in Rotterdam, a former slave-trading port. Standing 9 metres high and 5 metres long, it is topped by 4 statues

11 Stone Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was the largest slave market in Zanzibar, an important port for transporting African slaves to the Middle East. The site of the former market is now occupied by a cathedral, a museum on the history and abolition of slavery and a monument depicting five slaves chained to one another

12 The ACTe Memorial or 'Caribbean Centre of Expressions and Memory of the Slave Trade and Slavery' is one of the most impressive memorials to this historical period in the world. Inaugurated in 2015, it covers 7,800m2 and explores the history of slave trading and the abolition of slavery. The memorial received more than 110,000 visitors in its first year.

13 Built on the site of a former slave market, the museum spans almost 40,000m2 across six floors and comprises 27 exhibition rooms and more than 30,000 artefacts collected over a period of 13 years. Inaugurated in September 2016, it is the largest museum of African-American history in the United States. The cost of the monument was 540 million dollars, 50% of which was provided by the federal government. The other half was donated by private individuals such as Oprah Winfrey and Bill Gates.

Fig. 2: The Door of No Return in Ouidah, Benin.

In order to fully grasp the impact of these memorials on everyday life, we must analyse the functioning of memorials as artworks materialising memory, and of memory itself, and the role played by the brain.

Creative Imagination and Intangible Memory: The Brain

Since slavery was abolished, the phenomenon has shifted from the tangible dimension to the intangible dimension of memory. Only art allows us to reconstruct it. Insofar as it is intended to make an invisible entity visible – the past but also the return of the ancestors – the Door of No Return possesses an intangible dimension that transcends its physical perception.

How can art extract tragedy from memory, reproduce shock and horror, and draw out lessons to be learned? Neuroscience casts light on the principles and mechanisms for the reproduction, dissemination, conservation and transmission of memories through artworks and monuments. According to Gbètoho Fortuné Gankpe at the Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche-Action en Santé in Benin, emotion depends on humoral and nervous mechanisms that are essential in activating neural networks (Gankpe 2021). In his view, emotion is a neural circuit that draws on the limbic system as its main morphological and anatomical foundation. The process of emotion formation and consolidation involves the brain structures comprising the Papez circuit. When the memory fails, we are unable to feel or grasp time and space. In other words, memory (what we can remember) conditions our awareness of time and space. Therefore, awareness of memory structures emotions. Without this mechanism, we experience only vague emotions and are unable to distinguish between positive and negative effects.

The mechanisms for producing emotion and memory use practically the same neural circuits. In fact, our brain is like a machine with a coding system that allows us to see and perceive the world, construct memories and form dreams and projects. In all its forms, art inhibits or activates these neural networks via the senses: smell, sight (including different colours and shapes) and hearing. Artworks trigger the innate cerebral faculties of reason and emotion that allow us to analyse, understand and feel the affective states of others. Meanwhile, the neural substrates of memory in the brain help consolidate these memories.

Based on the mechanisms that allow emotion to be reproduced, how can artistic and architectural media render, convey, transfer and sustain painful emotions and events? Are memorials or monuments able to trigger the production of memory and the emotion accompanying it? If our ability to feel the emotional and affective expressions of others is crucial to our social interactions and manners, how can we console or soothe a descendant of enslaved people standing before a memorial, reminding them of their ancestors, if we are not able to detect their frustration or shock, desire, mistrust, pride, satisfaction or anger? In Beninese society, the slave trade remains alive in the family memory and continues to influence social relations between descendants of slaves and slave traders to this day.

The reflections triggered by artistic portrayals of knowledge and memory in the form of memorial monuments are made up of two components: emotion and reason. Artworks are intended to be perceived rationally in terms of their creative potential, as well as with their full emotional charge. Jacques Cosnier notes that "from Plato, who believed that emotions disrupt reason, to Kant, for whom they were diseases of the soul; Darwin, for whom they were among the precious adaptive and evolutionary behaviours of species; Sartre, for whom they were 'a mode of existence of consciousness', and many others, the field of emotions is as messy in philosophy as it is in popular representation" (Cosnier 2015). How can creators of memorials align reason and emotion?

If, as some psychologists like Frijda (1986: 4) state, emotional phenomena are "non-operationally complete behaviours", is it reasonable to perturb sensitive people in order to "heal" them? Exposure to an event and the emotions linked to this event play an important role in the healing process. By reliving a traumatic event, individuals can detach themselves from it. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which emerged in the 1950s, sought not to cure disease but to help people make important decisions and to put painful memories into perspective, whether or not they had personally experienced them. "Exposure" here involves repeatedly bringing the source of fear into view, i.e. ongoing exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli. This lies at the heart of the artistic process. Indeed, rather like medical facts, memorials are constantly in the public eye. Adopting a symbolic form, they draw attention to collective shock or trauma, while reinterpreting it. Through introspection or extrapolation, the memorial prompts each visitor to experience their own feelings about the victims of the tragedy. The objectification caused by the memorial contrasts with the subjectivity of each visitor.

The modern construction of the memorial monument creates a dialogue between shock and symbols that transcend the physical and mental space. In the transition

from conception to visibilization and the projection of memory into the future, i.e. transmission as heritage, there is a shift from objectivity to subjectivity. Monuments are usually perceived in the collective consciousness as the materialisation of a memory. The government's plans to change the name of the Place des Martyrs [Square of the Martyrs][14] in Benin to Place du Souvenir [Square of Memory] caused quite a stir. The rejection of the new name may be attributed to the affective defence mechanism against activation of the neural circuits underlying memory and emotions when faced with a painful memory. Monuments are akin to a stage where repetitive, transformative actions contribute to recollection in circumstances similar to those commemorated. Empathy motivates individuals to protect the memory and pass it down to younger generations and this results in the image or idea of monuments withstanding time. The idea of heritage is reinforced by sharing memories and emotions visually.

A monument depicting the atrocities committed by a conqueror accentuates and perpetuates the memory of their sadism, whereas one that portrays victims as heroes modifies the meaning of memory transmission. In both cases, the memory of the slave trade or other historical events is represented.

Although pain is a common feature of our universal human heritage, race is sometimes invoked to explain why individuals have different perceptions of the past. From a neurobiological perspective, there is no universal pattern of emotional expression. Indeed, emotions adapt to the circumstances and depend on personal experiences. Yet the degree of empathy that people feel for others also depends on their cultural environment. This is why memory construction varies from culture to culture. Attempts to fix historical events in the form of a monument reveal a fundamental fact: even those who have experienced the same traumatic events do not remember them in the same way. Therein lies the complexity of the aesthetic monomialization of the memory of slavery. Meanwhile, art can be trusted to trigger mirror neurons and transform an experience into heritage. These neurons are activated when an individual is observed performing a gesture and facilitate its reproduction. This neurobiological process is important in learning and in the ability to empathise. However, research has not yet discovered the way it intervenes in memory formation. In the meantime, how can nation states address remembrance through the art of monuments?

The State, Memory Construction through Monuments, and Perceptions of the Door of No Return

According to a number of historical sources, the Door of No Return marked the slaves' point of departure, or in other words, the point of rupture or cultural and religious uprooting. The current monument reveals the intangible memory of a historical phenomenon that has become invisible. In this regard, it also marks the return of deported souls. In African folk wisdom, especially in Benin, the souls of the deceased

14 Place des Martyrs is a triangular square measuring 250m x 100m (surface area: 12,500m2) with a 82m x 15m plinth topped by a monument featuring a 15-metre high statue that lies in the Haie Vive district at the heart of Cotonou. The monument pays tribute to the seven Beninese citizens who perished during a mercenary attack led by Frenchman Bob Denard on 16 January 1977. The square was inaugurated on 16 January 1979 under the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary regime.

are venerated and treated with great respect. The souls of the slaves who died on the ships are believed to return to their point of departure during the journey through the afterlife in order to reconnect with the land of their ancestors. An invisible, intangible, imaginary door through which the spirits return, respected but also feared, is believed to channel the spirits of the slaves, who are sometimes angry with the land of their ancestors, to places where they will find peace. The Door of No Return is the physical embodiment of this idea, providing a shrine for reconciliation. This dimension of the collective memory had no physical materiality until the monument was created in 1995.

In order to capture the intangible reality of the ancestors' return, the Door of No Return project was launched as part of the festival of Vodou arts, cultures and civilisations 'Ouidah 92' held in 1993 in Benin. Following this commemoration, the Beninese government commissioned Fortuné Bandeira, a Beninese Agouda,[15] and architect Yves Ahouangnimon to produce the design, with administrative supervision by minister Désiré Vieyra and Noureini Tidjani-Serpos. The sculptures and paintings were made by Dominique Gnonnou, known as Kouass, and Yves Kpede. In 1995, the door was inaugurated by UNESCO. On a large platform, the monument features an arch positioned on two large posts, like a triumphal arch. It is decorated with bas-reliefs depicting slaves with their hands chained behind their backs, walking in single file towards the slave ships. Painted in ochre and white colours, the monument commemorates the dispersal of African culture and celebrates the return of the ancestors, who are represented by two statues of *Egun-Egun*,[16] commonly referred to as *returnees* who embody the spirits of the dead. In this regard, the memorial also evokes wisdom and a return to peace.

The reception of this monument, which materializes the threshold sealing the fate of thousands of people, is fundamental. But how can today's state, which brings together former rival kingdoms exploited by the slave trade, think that erecting a memorial monument will be effective in reconciling the intimate spheres of a society obliged to form a nation made up of descendants of slaves and of slave masters? How can it ensure that the monument is accepted politically as an awareness-raising tool that simultaneously commemorates and reconciles?

The monument is by far the most remarkable on the Slave Route[17] and it is among the most important sites commemorating the slave trade (Nol 2017). Yet it has not been without controversy. The question of style arose from the outset, with some considering an abstract approach to be more appropriate for a contemporary monument. According to local people, the gap between the final product and the invisible reality may even hinder the memorial process and it is unclear to what extent the formal language of the monument will enable future generations, faced with the vagaries of history that alter the relationship with space and place, to access the memory of slavery. For some, the monument is a source of pride; for others, it is an expression of Africa's failure and a symbol of European domination. Nevertheless, the monument has undeniably provoked interest and dynamism among the

15 Agouda: descendants of Luso-Brazilian slaves returned to Benin, Togo and Nigeria.
16 Egun-Egun embodies the spirits of the dead; it is a messenger symbolising the close link between the spirits of the dead and the living.
17 Covering 4km, the Slave Route leads from the fort to the slave ships. It passes through the square where the slaves were auctioned, the Tree of Oblivion, the Zomai House, the Memorial to Zoungbodji and the Tree of Return

people and the authorities. We must remember that the monument accentuates and perpetuates the memory of the conquerors' cruelty while simultaneously modifying the meaning of the memory transmitted by portraying the victims as heroes. The same facts produce different memories. Although the memorial has received many favourable comments, it could be argued that insufficient consultations and calls for tender were put out for the project.

On 15 January 2013, a bulldozer destroyed *Upright Men*[18] by South African artist Bruce Clarke. The project was produced during an artistic residency funded by the Zinsou Foundation and positioned near the Door with official position. The destruction ordered by the Ministry of Culture received a mixed reaction. In the wake of protests by artists and writers, spokespeople for the State institutions justified the decision. Richard Sogan, Director of Cultural Heritage, explained that "the work is located within the perimeter of a monument that forms part of the 'Slave Route' cultural asset, which Benin is preparing to register on the World Heritage List and it is also situated on the ritual route of the Agbé and Dan temples belonging to the Daagbo Hounnon" (Nicolas 2013). However, neither the monument disrupted by the proximity of Clarke's work nor the Slave Route mentioned by Sogan were heritage monuments at the time. The episode shows that art has become a political and electoral issue. At first glance, this conflict raises questions as to the values (memorial values, aesthetic values, use values and political values) mobilised by the Door of No Return and influencing its reception. However, it also triggered a certain dynamism by revealing the value of preserving heritage for tourists to the site, which is the highlight of the Slave Route in Ouidah.

Fig. 3: Act of vandalism. Photo Gbègnidaho Achille Zohoun

18 A two-dimensional monument.

For some time now, the site intended to commemorate the memory of slavery has served as a venue for popular celebrations and artistic and cultural events. Despite efforts to preserve it, the monument has been diverted from its original purpose, raising questions as to the reception of built memorials.

Jauss (1998) notes that cultural works cannot be interpreted objectively, as every viewer has their own subjective perception. This is equally true of memorial monuments: their reception is influenced by factors that go beyond political and administrative concerns. Given the significance of this dimension, it is important to question the monument's suitability for the present and the future, as well as to consider the choice of monument and its reception. Indeed, understanding of the monument must go beyond merely interpreting the forms or symbols of the slave trade. The debate is also about maintaining the value assigned to this commemoration of the slave trade and the historical circumstances that made it possible. We do not have to look far for evidence. On the website Tripadvisor (2018), the following reviews have been posted:

1 A place filled with memory... which is deteriorating year after year. We've been there many times and year after year we are struck by the degradation of the site. Something must be done to stop this magnificent monument from falling into the same state of disrepair as most of the historical sites in Benin.

2 [...] the Door of No Return [...] is of no interest in itself, but the stories told by the... [accompanying guide] convey emotion.

3 It's impossible not to go there. It's the place where tens or hundreds of thousands of slaves left. The site is unmissable despite the monument itself lacking maintenance, the overall site being rather dirty and the guides, who claim to be compulsory, being clingy."

Fig. 4: Social recovery of the monument: street vending at the foot of the Door of No Return. Photo Gbègnidaho Achille Zohoun

My own reading of the monument inevitably draws on the threefold concept developed by Jauss, the founder of reception theory: production--communication-reception. Firstly, to ensure that it was sufficiently representative of collective opinion, an invitation to tender open to all artists and architects should have been launched for the monument. In public procurement, a series of proposals that are argued and justified is needed for a quality product. Secondly, communication plays a fundamental role in the reception of the monument. Reception here refers to the perception of the monument as "memorial thought", which is the combination between the observations and sensations provoked by the memorial and the resulting discourse. The observer's horizon of expectation described by Jauss, which is made up of previous experiences and information, influences their perception of the monument. Offering the public keys to reading the monument thus makes them more receptive to the historical dimension of the site and the monument itself.

In a dialogue with memory, observers who draw on philosophy and history, especially history materialised in the monument, will be equipped to tackle the issues of memory and post-memory. According to post-memory theory, it is no longer the past that matters but rather the present. There is a risk that the monument will be at odds with the memory of unlived experiences. With this in mind, can the Door of No Return still be considered one of the assets of Ouidah's cultural capital? Does it and will it continue to play an active role in constructing and structuring memory and post-memory, as observed by Pierre Nora and Marianne Hirsch (2014)? According to Pierre Nora (1984, 1987, 1992), these sites serve to support memory and play an active role in its construction and organisation. Only by analysing the current political, cultural, artistic, memorial and tourism situation will we be able to answer these questions.

Echoing Charles Tchoba,[19] the materiality of the site and the monument constructed there reflect other concerns relating to cultural policy. Following successive renewals of political power, the prestige conferred upon the monument as a memorial is changing with the new Marina project. Since 2016, a large-scale programme to promote tourism across Benin has adopted new approaches to memorial tourism. New life is being breathed into the historical city of Ouidah with major developments, including the Marina hotel complex near the Door of No Return in Djègbadji, Ouidah. As a result of this infrastructure project, the tourist facilities in Benin and in the city of Ouidah especially are predicted to improve significantly. A complex will be built around the emblematic monument of the Door of No Return featuring a Vodou arena for local religious festivals and cultural events; "gardens of remembrance" with a historical reconstruction of a slave ship to encourage reflection; two car parks with more than 350 parking spots; a tourist esplanade with restaurants, bars and leisure facilities; a hotel area offering around 130 rooms; a craft village, named Zomachi; a tourist office and a floating promenade on the lagoon.

19 The site has a materiality that is man-made. This is how it evades both the local and the global (Tchoba 2005: 46).

Fg. 5: Screenshot from the video presenting the Marina project / URL: https://youtu.be/wozQKSPLJ8s

Fig. 6: Screenshot from the video presenting the Marina project / URL: https://youtu.be/wozQKSPLJ8s

It is unclear whether this infrastructure intended for mass tourism actually draws more attention to the monument. This upgrade of the site prompts us to reflect on the heritage, tourism, cultural and social factors affecting the monument and on its links to the memories caught up in the site. If the plan comes to pass, it will allow the gloomy episode of undesirable visits to the memorial by street vendors to be consigned to the past and discourage acts of vandalism involving removal or damage to the sculptures that form part of the monument. The monument's inclusion in the government's plans to restructure memorial tourism[20] around the Slave Route represents a key element in African urban planning and highlights the role of monuments in memory transmission.

20 The government plans for tourism development in Ouidah are based on an estimated budget of 523 million dollars or 459 million euros.

Conclusion

It is entirely possible to make the traumatic memory of an event or a place emotionally present through monuments. Art can overcome the growing distance between memory and the effects of time. Governments can ensure that memorial monuments carry the torch of history by incorporating different receptions of the creative thought behind the work, which should exclude propaganda of all kinds, into a forward-looking reflection. Finally, creative artists must focus on the artwork and its symbolism. One of the key criteria in calls for tender must be the conceptual rigour of the selected projects, as well as the completion and maintenance of these heritage sites in the future.

The formal language used in sites of remembrance can be controversial but the spirit underpinning these projects remains closely linked to the history and places of tragedy. Monuments to the slave trade are no exception. It could be said that monuments reincarnate the spirit of the places whose memory they are intended to preserve. Despite being a contemporary artwork, the Door of No Return has a soul that is shaped by human and material values. It merits attention as it breathes life into history and archives. The scars remain, although there is no longer any pain. The wound is clearly visible and monuments represent the scars that allow us to reconnect with our memories. Beyond the pain, memorials show us the way forward for our lives.

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"The New Rope is Tied to the End of the Old One": The *Récade* Museum in Benin

David Gnonhouévi and *Romuald Tchibozo*

Introduction

The Sceptre Museum [Petit Musée de la Récade] first opened on 1 December 2015 in the Lobozounkpa district near Cotonou; it is the only museum dedicated to the *récades* or sceptres that symbolised the power of the kings of the ancient Danxome kingdom. The museum is housed in a rather majestic building, with clean architectural lines and windows that allow daylight to enter and illuminate the collections, giving the museum a decidedly contemporary feel. The three steps leading up to the main entrance evoke the contours of a royal throne.

The museum and the contemporary art centre housing it (the Centre, inaugurated in February 2015) share another symbolic characteristic: they were both jointly sponsored by Robert Vallois and the Saint-Germain des Prés Antique Dealers' Collective. The idea of creating a contemporary art centre and the Sceptre Museum within a single venue came out of the encounter between Dominique Zinkpè, a visual artist from Benin well-known on the international art scene, and Robert Vallois, an antique dealer specialising in 1930s furniture who was also an African art enthusiast; in 1983, he had already opened a contemporary art gallery in Paris (with two exhibition halls at 33 and 36 Rue de Seine).

When the museum opened in 2015, Vallois and his wife returned the most splendid pieces in the collection to President Nicéphore Soglo and his son Ganiou Soglo, crown prince of Danxome; these were the ivory sceptres of Kings Béhanzin and Glélé. This highly symbolic gesture marked the beginnings of the return of Beninese heritage from Western collections to their ancestral lands. The simultaneous restitution of the sceptres and opening of the contemporary art centre enabled a dialogue between two historical periods, and this is what lies at the heart of this cultural and artistic project: on the one hand, the past, represented by cultural and artistic objects, and on the other, the contemporary era, marked by the presence of international artists.

Fig. 1. Le Petit Musée de la Récade, Installation view © Le Petit Musée de la Récade

Fig. 2. Le Petit Musée de la Récade, Installation view © Le Petit Musée de la Récade

As well as providing spaces for creation, the Centre is home to exhibition rooms where the public can discover the artworks created by resident artists and an amphitheatre for exchange and discussion between figures from the art world and the general public. These public areas are supplemented by a café, which offers a livelier, more intimate space for socialising.

Creation and International Outreach

The Centre is a venue for contemporary creation, art education and the promotion of Benin's cultural heritage. The Centre has developed rapidly with the support of the Galerie Vallois, the Saint-Germain-des-Prés Antiques Dealers' Collective and the Hospitalité et Développement (HeD) NGO. It is intended as a space for work, meetings and artistic encounters among artists from Benin, greater Africa, and the rest of the world. The Centre helps develop artistic practice in Benin and promote local and African artists on the international scene. Its role in opening up its activities to artists from around the world is essential in reducing the isolation[1] of the continent's artists who have relatively little contact with the dynamics in action in museums and exhibition venues elsewhere. This ambition of inviting artists from other cultures, especially Europe, to Africa takes the form of one-month residencies proposed to artists from Benin and beyond. These residencies are an ideal opportunity for dialogue, boosting artists' self-reflection and confidence which are the foundation of the Centre's aims.

According to Dominique Zinkpè, "African artists are proud of their ancestral artistic heritage, but they wish to move away from ethnographic perspectives and museums in order to access venues focusing on contemporary art."[2] The main objective of The Centre is to position contemporary African art on the international scene. It operates as a laboratory, offering artists from around the world a place to create and reflect. Three creative workshops, each measuring 25m^2 and located near the residences, are available to them.

The Centre has both a national and international reputation and plays a vital role in the country's cultural landscape. Despite specialising in contemporary art, it is open to all forms of artistic expression. The residencies programme has been set up to support artistic production and encourage artists in their professional career development. These offer a productive environment to meet and interact with other artists and follow the process of artistic creation first-hand. This is especially important for both emerging and local artists. This provides them with access to an excellent and fully equipped work space such that they can take on a different approach to the creation, production and distribution of their work. Le Centre organises four to five residencies each year. A committee of art critics, art historians, experienced artists and journalists selects the artists on the basis of their talent, artistic qualities and origin: one Beninese artist living and working in Benin, one artist from the African continent and another artist living and working outside Africa. Artists are free to work alone or in groups and to decide whether or not to place their work in dialogue with that of the other artists. As soon as they arrive, they get the opportunity to discover the treasures of the Sceptre Museum's collection, explore the district of Lobozounkpa, where Le Centre is located, or head into the city to plunge into its urban life. Some prefer to remain in the comfort of Le Centre and move back and forth between their accommodation, workshop, the bar-restaurant and the sculpture garden. All residents have the chance to engage in conversation with other guest artists and

1 Galerie Vallois (2015 : 21).
2 Ibid.

establish a collaborative project, with each artist contributing their own choices of media and techniques. The library is a powerful tool for artistic creation; it has an internet connection and contains a rich collection of African literature alongside a wide range of works on decoloniality, the history of the Danxome culture, art history, and contemporary art.

Each residency culminates in a three-month exhibition of the artworks produced but the cultural and artistic dialogue established between the artists and the public evidently continues beyond the Centre to extend around the world. In 2017, the Centre's main sponsor, Galerie Vallois, launched the Cotonou-Paris-Cotonou mobility programme with the aim of displaying the art works produced during these residencies in Paris and international art shows.[3] The gallery also regularly exhibits artworks by Beninese artists or other artists with close ties to Benin. They include prominent figures such as Dominique Zinkpè, Gérard Quenum, and Tchif, as well as emerging artists such as the ceramist King Houndékpinkoun, performer Prince Toffa, sculptors Marius Dansou and Benjamin Déguénon, and visual artists Makef and Didier Viodé. Non-Beninese artists who have completed residencies at the Centre also receive help to promote their work in Paris and at major art-shows.

Artistic Mediation

Le Centre places education at the heart of its activity. One of its priorities is to make contemporary art accessible to residents of the Lobozounkpa district. Guided tours of the Sceptre Museum and the temporary exhibitions, many of which reflect the realities of Beninese society and current events around the world, are proposed to local residents by cultural mediators. During these tours, visitors are encouraged to share the feelings that the artworks evoke in them. The target audiences for these tours are the primary and secondary school children who represent the next generation of Beninese society. Cultural mediators also visit schools, inviting pupils and their teachers to participate in the free guided tours of Le Centre and the Sceptre Museum to develop their artistic sensibilities. Schoolchildren, students and researchers are also allowed to use the library.

Art education is practically absent from the curriculum in Beninese schools. Le Centre aims to arouse curiosity and increase awareness of art among schoolchildren who visit the exhibitions as a result of the mediators' interventions. These visits encourage the children to take an interest in culture and may even awaken an artistic vocation in some of them. Workshops are held by artists, who share their knowledge and expertise with the local children. In one specific workshop, *Work in Progress*, the artists explain their ideas and artistic approach to the public. The activities organised by Le Centre are not limited to culture; they also raise public awareness of the fact that art has a profound relation with society and politics through its exploration of life in all its facets. The residencies, in which artists live and work amid an atmosphere

3 Between 2015 and 2017, the following artists have been invited: Rémy Samuz, Natanaël Vodouhè, Sébastien Niko, Charly d'Almeida, Théodore Dakpogan, Stéphane Pencréac'h, Christelle Yaovi, King Houndékpinkoun, who specialise in ceramics, Aston, Zanfanhouédé, Gratien Zossou Edwige Apolgan, Psycoffi, Meschac Gaba (all from Benin); Bruce Clarke (South Africa); Olga Luna (Peru); Vincent Bredif, Jean-Baptiste Janisset and Jeremy Guillon (France); Daphné Bitchatch (Belgium); A-Sun Wu and Paloma Chang (China) and Nazanin Pouyandeh (Ukraine). In 2017, Vallois participated in the Paris Art Fair and AKAA (Also Known As Africa).

of creation, exhibition and study, provide an opportunity to involve children from Lobozounkpa in the artists' projects. They can watch the artists at work after school and discover what drives them. The artists often experience even greater satisfaction than the children themselves as a result of this interaction. Many of the children attend the exhibition openings as they are proud to see the artworks that they have contributed to in some way. This can be an extraordinary experience for children living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. The exhibition opening marks the end of the residency; after a quiet introduction, the public are invited to see the artworks produced by the artist and talk with them before they leave.

The Sceptre Museum: Heritage and Contemporary Creation

Heritage

The Sceptre Museum is a space for reflection that plays an important part in the Centre's functioning and outreach work. Its presence within the Centre accentuates the importance placed on education and highlights the interconnections between history, culture, and artistic creation. The museum is home to a collection of 99 traditional sceptres and several ancient sculptures, along with around 20 contemporary sceptres. Since it opened in 2015, the collection has been arranged for viewing on two occasions; the first when the museum opened and the second in January 2020.

This viewing arrangement allows participants to discover the history of the ancient kingdom of Danxome through the traditional sceptres it used to symbolise power and authority. The kingdom's political, economic, social, religious and military organisation was rather complex and the Danxome name remains relevant to contemporary Beninese society as part of the population continues to identify with the kingdom to this day. Danxome means "inside the Dan's (chief's) belly". According to oral tradition, it was founded by Houégbadja, the first king, after he killed a local chief named Dan. Settling on the Abomey plateau, the Alladahonou people took control of the country. The country expanded under their governance. They succeeded in establishing a robust social structure and hierarchical administration in the unified kingdoms, defended by a standing army of powerful warriors known as Blu and horsewomen known as Agododjié. The kings lived in pomp and splendour in a palace covering more than 40 hectares. They sponsored a multitude of craftsmen whose sole task was to produce decorative objects to adorn the opulent court. The different crafts were carried out by specialists and passed down from father to son.

The Yêmadjè families made royal garments and appliquéd fabrics used for large parasols and loincloths worn by the king, recounting stories of the kingdom through images. The Zinflou and Hantan wove fabrics for religious ceremonies. The Djotowou were leatherworkers, making sandals and royal insignia. The Hountondji, who were master blacksmiths, worked with iron and made bronze, silver and gold jewellery, as well as *attojas* or copper bells to decorate drums. The Agbozo carved or branded large gourds, which were used to hold food and drink served to senior dignitaries or Europeans who visited the kingdom. The Allagbé attached allegoric figures to the sceptres. Similarly, the Assogbakpé created bas-reliefs, using a visual language that

remained a mystery to the ordinary people of the kingdom. The arts flourished in the kingdom and its artisans developed an unparalleled level of skill and professionality, rather as a result of the royal favours bestowed on the arts and the potential of great reward (such as strongholds, slaves, free services from healers, or ennoblement through marriage to a princess) than of fear of punishment.

Sceptres are among the many art forms found in the Danxome kingdom. Although they are not the most representative genre of Beninese art, their status as a functional profane art form makes them rare in traditional African art, the vast majority of which is generally believed to be inspired by religion. The sceptres have attracted academic interest as they present a condensed version of the Danxome kingdom's history. The imagery and symbolism used in the sceptres allow modern-day viewers to imagine what life in the court was like before the French occupation (1894-1960), as well as provide information about aspects of our ancestors' mentalities. The objects that they passed down to posterity allow us to understand life in the kingdom and its political, social, religious and military organisation prior to French colonisation. To some degree, the sceptres summarise the history of Danxome and they could thus be said to grant access to the African soul. Each of their attributes is an ideogram or an allegorical expression of an idea, a deed or an important event. They represent an original way of distilling and transmitting thoughts and feelings, as well as revealing the mottos of the kings or prominent figures that carried them.

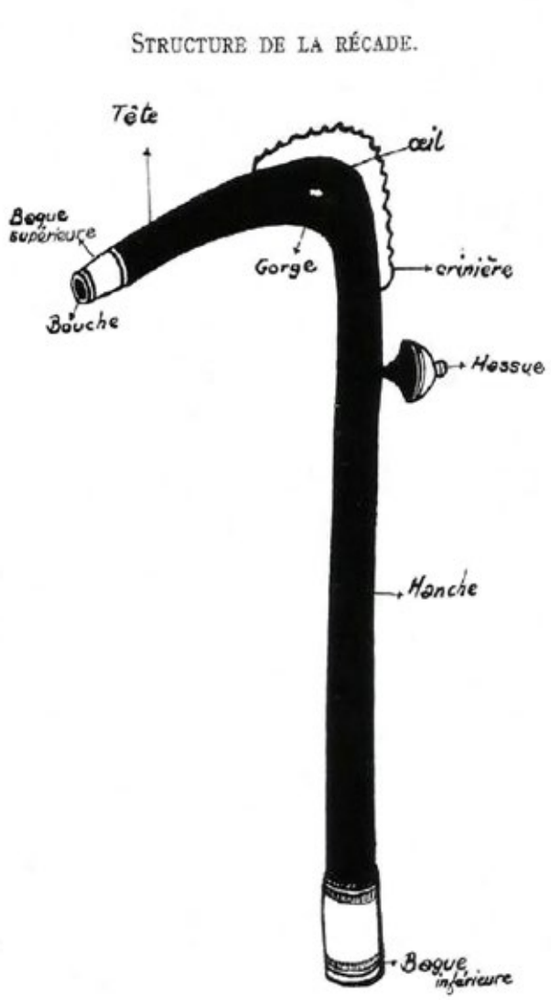

Fig. 3. Structure of a classic *Récade*: (left to right) Upper ring, head, throat, eye, mane, club, handle, lower ring.

Sceptres were first created during the reign of the first king, Ouégbadja (1650-1680).[4] They take their shape from a bent branch or primitive hoe. Oral tradition tells that farmers serving the king were caught off guard by a horde of enemies as they went about their work in the fields. To defend themselves, they removed the iron blades from their hoes and routed the invaders using the handles as makeshift weapons. After this historic victory, the tool began to be used as a weapon in the kingdom's arsenal. At a later point, artisans began to attach allegoric figures, emblems or coats of arms to staffs with a right angle at one end to commemorate the exploits of the Danxome kingdom. The local name for the sceptres, *récades*, comes from the Portuguese *recado,* which means "message."[5] They serve to identify the *récadère*, the sceptre bearer or messenger. Along with the throne, large parasol and sandals, the sceptre is a symbol of authority and command, and a royal attribute. It bears the king's insignia, which sometimes featured an animal or a rebus.

The craftsmen involved in making the sceptres were wood carvers, then blacksmiths and finally a jeweller from the Hountondji family, who added decorative motifs based on the king's personal instructions. Once the sceptres were complete, they were passed on to the dyer, Hantan Zinflou, to be carefully wrapped in appliquéd fabric bearing the king's allegories before being handed to his majesty. The royal sceptre was reserved for the king and became an object of veneration that no ordinary person was permitted to touch. Only the crown prince could inherit it. The king would usually wear it on his left shoulder, with the blade facing the ground when he appeared in public. He would hold or brandish it in his right hand during royal dances to mark the rhythm.

Fig. 4 Classic *Récade*. © Le Petit Musée de la Récade (Le Centre, Abomey-Calavi)

4 Adandé (1962: 14).
5 Ibid.

Fig. 5 Classic *Récade*. © Le Petit Musée de la Récade (Le Centre, Abomey-Calavi)

The court messenger (Huî-Sagu), who bore the sceptre as the king's representative, enjoyed full immunity and was often considered sacred. Any affront to a sceptre was viewed as a challenge to the king's authority and was punishable by death. The sceptre served to authenticate verbal messages, but it was also a passport or credential for the bearer. When the messenger arrived at his destination, he would crouch before the recipient, draw the sceptre from its fabric sheath and present it respectfully. The recipient would be able to identify the sender from the emblem on the sceptre and would crouch in deference to listen carefully to the king's message. Sceptres thus served as a communication tool and played an important role in relations between the king and his court, or between the king and rulers of neighbouring kingdoms. Another sceptre was dedicated to the king's wife, who gave birth to the heir to the throne. She carried the sceptre to draw recognition and respect. The sceptres carried by the Danxome armies, the Blu, are also noteworthy. Each battalion had its own insignia, evoking a particular exploit of warfare. When the king appeared with a sceptre bearing a battalion's insignia, that battalion would be on duty. The warriors from the battalion would all raise their weapons into the air to show that they submitted to the orders of the king as the commander in chief of the armies. Other sceptres featured the insignia of the kingdom's main deities. They were carried by priests as they paraded before the king at official ceremonies. This category includes the sceptres dedicated to Hêviosso, god of the sky, rain, thunder and lightning; Sakpata, the Earth divinity; Dan Aïdohouedo, the rainbow; and Dan, the divinity in the form of a serpent.

There were also staffs, including the Kpota, which took the form of a club. These were used by Migan, the minister of justice and the king's executioner. Corporal punishment using this weapon was reserved for those who had contravened the moral code or committed a serious crime that could bring the kingdom into disrepute. The guilty individual's home would be surrounded. Outside the entrance, a man with his back to the door would throw the Kpota over his head and into the house. The household would be alarmed by the fall of the staff -- an omen of misfortune, -- and then men would surround the house and arrest the people inside. These days, ordinary people carry a sceptre as a baton in parades. Once considered a sacred object, it has become a popular art

object that can be commissioned from craftsmen, including the descendants of sculptors and blacksmiths from the ancient Danxome kingdom. All customers need to do is choose the symbols or allegories they wish to feature on the sceptre.

The Sceptre Museum is also home to a collection of sabres, in homage to the courage of Danxome horsewomen. Some have seen action on the battlefield, while others were simply given by the king to the female army founded by Queen Tassi Hangbé. She was the only woman to lead the kingdom, ruling for three years (1708-1711) after the death of her twin brother Akaba. As a woman, she was expelled from power and her name was erased from the chronological succession of kings because the patriarchal system in place did not allow a woman to rule the Danxome. Yet Tassi Hangbé succeeded Akaba because Danxome beliefs held that twins were sacred and shared a single soul.

Two sculpted emblems belonging to King Glèlè are also displayed at the museum. One has a piece of metal embedded in its mouth, which conferred a degree of power to the king, who would touch it from time to time with his tongue.

Contemporary Sceptres

Danxome's impressive artistic heritage acts as an umbilical cord allowing contemporary Beninese society to connect with its past. With this in mind, the museum has invited artists from Benin and elsewhere to revisit the royal sceptre. The artists consequently designed a number of contemporary sceptres, which preserve and elaborate upon the traditional style originally invented by Danxome craftsmen. These contemporary sceptres are on display alongside the ancient sceptres of the original collection. They employ symbolism and explore a variety of themes.

In the work by Gérard Quenum (fig. 6.), the doll's head topped with a stack of gourds is reminiscent of the influence of royalty and the traditional authorities on Beninese society to this day. / The clay sceptre by Richard Korblah shows a chameleon carrying a key in its mouth, ridden by a man surrounded by talismans and whose head is speckled with white spots. It hints at the idea that the ability to adapt and to maintain ties with ancestors and other protective spirits is one of the keys to success. / Euloge Glèlé attaches a mobile telephone to the blade of his sceptre, taking to its paroxysm the idea of conveying a message and highlighting the role of the sceptre as a means of communication. / The work by Aston is inlaid with bunches of keys and coins; it draws its strength from the buffalo and from the protection of a bocio fitted with fuses. It symbolises the thriving reign of King Guézo, one of the most famous kings of Danxome, who worked to unite the kingdom and whose symbol is the leaking jar. Oral tradition tells that Guézo proved his strength by using his bare hands to kill a raging buffalo that was crossing the kingdom. / The curved part of the sculpted wooden sceptre by Julien Vignikin is made from a trumpet mute. Symbolising muffled speech, this accessory for one of the most emblematic jazz instruments hints at the transatlantic slave trade and the struggle to defend the cultural expressions developed by the slaves. / Niko's sharp-beaked sceptre stands like a sheepdog watching over its flock and is reminiscent

of a king looking out for his sons. / Marius Dansou intertwines metal wire, bolts and other mechanical parts to create a piece that is slender and elegant despite the hard materials used. This duality highlights the range of purposes for which the object served. / Remy Samuz presents a wooden sceptre studded with pieces of metal and topped by a roaring lion. The blade, which takes the form of a sphere made from woven iron wires, resembles the nest of the golden-feathered weaverbird. The piece pays tribute to King Glèlé, who defended the kingdom against repeated assaults by European imperialists. / Benjamin Déguénon combines a hatchet dedicated to the god Hêviosso (another facet of his personality is that of an avenger, who strikes men down when they behave badly on Earth), a Christian cross and an assen shrine to a dead person's spirit. The assen is a metal symbol linking the world of the living to that of the dead, where offerings of food and drink are made. This sceptre reflects the syncretism of spiritual values in contemporary Beninese society. / The sceptre by Prince Toffa, which is adorned in the Coca-Cola colours and has a sharp blade, alludes to the global hegemony of the United States and its economic and military supremacy. / Meanwhile, Azébaba's sceptre is clad in white, red and black threads. Each of the three colours has a meaning in Fon culture. White symbolises purity and peace, red evokes energy and sometimes danger, and black represents the invisible world in Voodoo practice. Their presence on the sceptre highlights the spiritual power of Fon rulers. / Tchif has designed a series of sceptres illustrating different facets of the power of the elements: the Earth with the master ploughman, the water with a fisherman and his Mami-Wata, the power of the yin and yang duality of the living and the dead. / Edwige Aplogan creates a sceptre for King Adandozan (1797-1818), who was known as a particularly bloodthirsty tyrant. His memory appears to have been so disturbing that his name, reign and symbols have been erased from the kingdom's historiography. The sceptre's handle is made from vermilion enamel, while the blade is a whirl of copper wire. Three faces can be made out, evoking forgotten figures from history like King Adandozan. / King Houndékpinkou, a ceramist who works on the fusion of soul and matter, adopts a unique language combining Japanese and Beninese influences. His sophisticated sceptre is smooth to the touch and adorned with sparkling decorations, bringing passion and royalty together with gold leaf and bronze or red silver enamel. The artist revisits the history of the sceptre through the creative act, seeking to fulfil the duty of memory. / Dominique Zinkpè illustrates the meaning of his surname *Afô man sô dan kpon*: if you tread on a snake, you risk getting bitten (fig. 7). The handle of his sceptre features a stylised reptile, while the blade takes the form of a foot with three toes that evokes a god from the Voodoo pantheon represented by a one-legged man. The glass, a carefully carved crystalline green, reminds us that power is no less fragile despite its shine. / Meanwhile, Kossy Aguessy created a sceptre with clean lines made entirely from polished bronze (fig. 8). Each side of the stick is engraved: his name in hieroglyphs and the Fâ sign *djogbé*.[6] A symbolic depiction of the artist as a monkey's head wearing a crown evokes both his lineage and his destiny, combining his physical and spiritual identity. The sceptre uses two African languages, which are likely to be related to one another as Fâ geomancy is believed to have originated in Egypt. Just as the

6 The word Fâ is used by the Fon people. The Yoruba say Ifa, while the Mina in Togo say Afa. Most scholars agree that Fa is the god or genie of divination, who acts as an intermediary between men and the gods. Fâ is a divinatory science that originated in Ancient Egypt. It is believed to have been brought to the ancient Danxome kingdom by Yoruba people coming from Nigeria. It is consulted for all kinds of purposes. Djogbé continues to be referred to as Ogbe-medji or Twice Ogbe. This first sign of the Fâ is believed to have created the world and contain the four elements: fire, air, water and earth, which combine with one another to give life. Ogbe means "life" or "world".

ancient sceptres reveal the personality of the Fon ruler depicted, these contemporary sceptres point to local artists' perspectives of their collective memory and current societal concerns.

Fig. 6. Gérard Quenum, Contemporary récade, 2015 © Le Petit Musée de la Récade (Le Centre, Abomey-Calavi)

Fig. 7 Zinkpe, Contemporary récade, 2015 © Le Petit Musée de la Récade (Le Centre, Abomey-Calavi)

Fig. 8. Kossi Aguessy, Contemporary récade, 2015 © Le Petit Musée de la Récade (Le Centre, Abomey-Calavi)

Ancient and Contemporary Sceptres in Dialogue

The Sceptre Museum offers visitors a venue where tradition and modernity sit side-by-side. Positioned alongside one another, these striking pieces serve to raise awareness among young people in particular, who are almost entirely ignorant of their history. Rather than the twelve kings referred to in school textbooks, children visiting the museum discover the history of the fourteen kings of Danxome, including King Adandozan and Queen Tassi Hangbé, whose role in the kingdom's history has been revived by the contemporary sceptres.

The guided tours at the Sceptre Museum are available in four different languages: Fongbé, Mina, French and English. The use of local languages Fongbé and Mina means that any local can enjoy the tours, regardless of their education level. French is available as it is the official working language in Benin, while English makes the material accessible to international tourists. The tours provide local people, schoolchildren from Lobozounkpa, as well as students and researchers, with a bridge to the past so that they can discover fragments of their history and their ancestors' ingenuity, creativity and expertise, and restore their pride in their identity. In this way, restitution (of ancient sceptres by Robert Vallois and the Saint-Germain des Prés Antiques Dealers' Collective, in this case) may be said to contribute directly to raising awareness and education in the society where these artistic and cultural objects were originally produced. Their presence at the heart of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their use in teaching and artistic creation demonstrate the importance of contact between a society and its heritage.

The contemporary sceptres expand upon and refine the narrative of….?. Contemporary artists offer reflections on our era while preserving the original form invented by the craftsmen of the Danxome kingdom. There is an old saying: "Kan xoxo nu é non gbè yoyor do" or "It is at the end of the old rope that the new rope is woven". This principle of continuity between tradition and progress underpins every individual's identity in contemporary Beninese society. One cannot exist without the other.

Conclusion

What impact did the restitution of these works have on the affirmation of identity and the healing of psychological wounds caused by the dehumanisation of Black Africans during the slave trade and colonisation? There can be no doubt that the Beninese public visiting Le Centre and the Sceptre Museum feel that they have regained their lost history and identity. Yet it remains unclear why some Europeans use the term "donate" with respect to objects that they took from Africa in the past. It is important to seek to understand why some decide to "donate" while others prefer to "return" works belonging to the societies from which they were stolen. Regardless of the term employed, both donation and restitution help deconstruct the ahistorical narrative fabricated by eminent Western scholars that underpins the racism still in vogue in our contemporary world and that persists in the form of the "ethnographic" viewpoint. The return of these looted objects has shown the whole world that African societies have a history, regardless of what has long been taught at schools

and universities around the globe. It is now crucial that African history is rewritten to ensure that children the world over are taught this new narrative and that future generations are equipped to accept one another on the grounds of human equality.

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What Challenges Does the Restitution of Cultural Assets to Benin Pose for Knowledge Production and Artistic Creation?

Romuald Tchibozo

Introduction

Some years ago, I explored the relationship between heritage and contemporary art in Africa (Tchibozo 2018a). The primary purpose of this research was to understand the sources of inspiration that could prompt artists to produce art when their heritage was scattered around the world and to ascertain whether such a situation could be interpreted in terms of resilience. Since then, major changes have occurred. With regard to the restitution of cultural heritage, some artworks, albeit symbolic, have been returned to the authorities in Benin. This sudden shift in international relations, which remains unfathomable in some regards, aroused much emotion as people were able to discover the genuine talent of their ancestors for the first time. These emotions were expressed at the first major exhibition, *Benin Art from Past to Present: From Restitution to Revelation*, organised by the Benin government to incorporate the returned artworks into the national heritage and avoid the potential for future controversy. The exhibition also helped revive memories of a hardly praiseworthy colonial past and played a key role in the drive to formally establish a common destiny. But we must realize that this will not be an easy task.

These works had long been kept in ethnographic museums which were the ultimate venue for appropriating artefacts from around the world as part of the scientific quest to create an encyclopaedia of world cultures. How can these artworks be reincorporated into a national space without harm? Under these new circumstances, can we now reverse the questions asked several years ago? Will the permanent presence of these artworks before the eyes of researchers and artists allow them to explore new directions of research and creation? In other words, how can our response to restitution produce new knowledge?

In this article, I will provide an overview of the context in which the restitution took place before exploring a case study and illustrating the different phases of the re-appropriation process.

I. From Distress to Elation

The euphoria surrounding the restitution of 26 artworks from the ancient kingdom of Danxomé, until recently a part of the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum collection, has led many to forget the difficult circumstances surrounding their initial departure from France. It would be a distorsion of history not to remember these

circumstances, even if it may seem as if we have already heard or read about them many times. They should be recalled whenever possible, as we are facing a complex situation to say the least. The returned artefacts are the testimony of a twofold violence, both political and psychological, which is representative of the scale of the events that have taken place since the late 19th century.

In 1892, the French army led by Colonel (later General) Dodds entered Abomey after a series of bloody and murderous battles. The troops of Abomey did not surrender immediately – the history of this episode is well-known and I will not linger on it. The kings' palace is said to have been set on fire and the looting that resulted in the removal of the now-returned artefacts is supposed to have been intended to "save" what could still be saved.[1] In 1894, after King Behanzin's surrender, Abomey was placed under French control, along with everything found there. The king was exiled from his homeland and spent his remaining time on Earth in Blida, Algeria after several years in Martinique. Abomey and the rest of the ancient kingdom of Danxomé became a scene of desolation, mourning, ruin and, above all, lost points of reference, as musicians and actors from the region continue to sing about and act out on stage to this day. Internationally speaking and as seen by the European populations, the argument for ransacking the kingdom was that it practised anthropophagy. Between 1890 and 1895, the Danxomé kingdom was pilloried in the press across Europe, where it was stigmatised as a despotic state practising human sacrifice. The obscured image of the kingdom presented in the French and European newspapers was used to justify the war, presenting it as a battle between civilisation and barbarism to bring an end to a kingdom stuck in another era. Véronique Campion-Vincent (1967: 27) sought to elucidate the situation: "The image of Dahomey portrayed in the press during the colonial conquest was distorted and lacked nuance; it was a truly mythical construction developed around the concept of 'savagery'." She demonstrates how this image was engineered to justify the colonial conquest of new territories in a context of rivalry between the traditional European powers. The image persists in Europe's collective memory to this day. In 2008, when I was attending the tourism salon in Madrid as part of a delegation from the Benin Ministry of Culture, I witnessed a scene that perfectly illustrated the complexity of our relationships. A Spanish woman wandering around the venue took several pamphlets about Benin from our exhibition stand and asked whether it was the same place as the ancient kingdom of Danxomé where people practised cannibalism. She added that she hoped things had changed since then. Stereotypes certainly have a very long lifespan. How can we eradicate this sinister image that continues to circulate?

Despite the country's independence in 1960, the distressing context in which artefacts were taken from Abomey to Paris has not been fully digested. Numerous attempts have been made to negotiate the return of the artworks. At the same time, the authorities were also working to develop a network of public museums allowing them to take charge of the nation's heritage. Museums opened in Ouidah in 1964, Porto-Novo in 1965 and Parakou in 1973. Legal instruments were also developed to protect what remains or will be returned and Decree 35/PR/MENJS was passed in

1 To date, it remains unclear who really set fire to the palace and why. Although pride, often attributed to the Danxomé kings in such situations, may have caused them to seek to avoid leaving their ancestors' memory in the hands of the enemy, caution must be exercised when analysing accounts of this episode. / If the pride of the Danxome rulers, which has been asserted many times, might have motivated them not to leave the memory of their ancestors in the hands of the enemy, it is necessary to express some doubts about the narration of this episode. The actual number of artefacts stolen during the fire lends weight to the argument presented here.

1968 with the aim of protecting cultural heritage. The decree had certain limitations, which were not addressed until 2007 when Law 2007-20 of 23 August 2007 concerning the protection of cultural heritage and natural heritage of a cultural nature in the Republic of Benin was adopted. This time, the law set out a specific structure for heritage protection, stipulating the creation of a national inventory of cultural heritage and a plan for safeguarding this heritage. It also provides for asset protection in the case of armed conflict and establishes conditions for the exportation of listed assets. These measures are accompanied by criminal sanctions. Nevertheless, the law has its own shortcomings due to a lack of implementing decrees.

In 1990, the country organised a National Culture and Sports Conference, where one of the resolutions agreed upon was the adoption of a cultural policy. In point three (3), entitled *Inventory, conservation and exhibition of cultural heritage*, the resolution states: "Benin's cultural policy will focus particularly on safeguarding and restoring endangered heritage [...] Therefore, the Benin government will proceed [...] to negotiate the necessary agreements required to repatriate our cultural heritage in the possession of the former colonial powers ." This text inspired chapter 3, article 13 (paragraph 3) of Law 91-006 of February 25, 1991 concerning the Republic of Benin Cultural Charter. It states that: "[the State] is also working towards the restitution of expatriated cultural assets". Benin began to awaken from its slumber, emerging from the grief into which it had been plunged by the loss of its artworks and started to demand their return. In 2016, the President of the Republic, Patrice Talon, sent an initial written request to France claiming the return of Benin's cultural assets. The request was dismissed by the François Hollande government according to French and European law, which states that the artworks benefit from the same inalienability as the entire national heritage.

However, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, former Director-General of UNESCO from 1974 to 1987, considered it legitimate for countries dispossessed of a significant part of their history to recover it. On June 7, 1978, he made a solemn appeal to the former colonial powers:

> The peoples who were victims of this plunder, sometimes over hundreds of years, have not only been stripped of irreplaceable masterpieces but also robbed of a memory which would certainly have helped them to greater self-knowledge and would certainly have enabled others to understand them better. [...] The men and women of these countries have the right to recover these cultural assets which are part of their being. [...] These men and women who have been deprived of their cultural heritage therefore ask for the return of at least the art treasures/master pieces which best represent their culture, which they feel are the most vital and whose absence causes them the greatest anguish. [...] This is a legitimate claim... (Mahtar M'Bow, 1978).

In April 2017, Emmanuel Macron was elected President of the French Republic. On November 28 that year, he delivered a historic speech to around 800 students in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. The speech itself represented a paradigm shift in international relations. Paul Ricœur expressed his unease at the prospect of such a shift in an interesting essay: "No one can say what will become of our civilization if it ever really encounters different civilizations by means other than domination and

conquest" (Ricœur, 2001). We are now experiencing this encounter by means other than force and I believe that President Macron's actions will ensure that scepticism is gradually replaced with intercultural comprehension supported by scientific research.

In the meantime, controversy has arisen over whether or not his intentions were genuine. A succession of conferences, articles, press interviews and books on the issue of restitution followed.[2] Disputes erupted over all kinds of questions, including the recipients of the artworks to be returned. Yet those discussing these issues did not appear to grasp the timing of the events: when the pillaging occurred, a war was being waged to conquer the land that became the Republic of Benin. There was no longer a state linked to the king, who had been vanquished and forced into exile. The ancient kingdom of Danxomé had been consigned to history. Its last pseudo-king, Agoli-Agbo, was little more than a chief appointed to oversee the newly conquered region by the colonial administration.

The situation in 2017 was tense. Few people expected history to change in their lifetime, not least the Benin head of state,[3] who nevertheless insisted and reiterated his demand. In response, to cut short the controversy, the French President commissioned a report from Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy. The recommendations made by the report led to the historical decision to return 26 artworks to the Republic of Benin. On November 10, 2021, they arrived in Cotonou amid much rejoicing in an event that will be remembered forever. Having left amid deadly battles and psychological violence, the artworks returned in far more joyful circumstances, welcomed as relics of the former kings and of the imagery that had shaped their respective reigns. Should we be happy or vexed by these circumstances? This is an important moral question, but one which is beyond the scope of this article. The main priority here is to consider the artefacts' future in this new context. They did not return unscathed from their stay in their adoptive country, as the following section will explain.

II. The Scientific Context Surrounding Restitution

The restitution was influenced by remote and more recent factors. It would not be helpful to review all of these, but some of them will be mentioned to support my reflections. I have selected three main aspects that are highly significant in terms of their lasting impact and how they symbolise the relations between the two parties.

The first aspect is relatively well documented. Since the arrival of the works in French public museums, they have undergone different presentations, depending on the evolution of knowledge on the territories where they come from, but also and above all, depending on the conjunctures of the artistic scene in Paris and in the world (Beaujean, 2007; Murphy, 2009; Tchibozo, 2018b). From the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography, inaugurated in 1876, to the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum, which opened its doors to the public in 2006, passing the Musée de l'homme, opened in 1936, the artworks underwent a number of museographic changes and were someti-

2 On this topic, see Dr Kwame Opoku 2017. https://www.modernghana.com/author/KwameOpoku.
3 He admitted as much himself in his speech on 10 November 2021 when the artworks were received at the Palace of the Republic.

mes displayed alongside the most famous of them all, the sculpture of the god Gu. In 1894 on, they were presented as war trophies in a logic of accumulation. By the end of the 1920s they began to be treated as unique art objects in response to an aesthetic regime that resulted in a far more subtle balance of power. In 1931, the artworks were brought together again to exemplify the French Republic's imperial grandeur at the *Ethnographic Exhibition of the French Colonies.* Artefacts illustrating the influence of royal power in Abomey, worthy of great respect as repositories of the memories of different royal reigns and therefore almost sacred, became an expression of France's technological domination, imposition of a specific vision of the world and imperialist influence. They were exhibited at different times and circumstances, subject to the need to underline France's political and psychological superiority.

The second aspect concerns the intensity of the scientific debate triggered by the presence of the artworks in Europe and the scale of their impact on society and artistic practice. When Carl Einstein published *Negerplastik* in 1915, it caused quite a commotion in the scientific community (to put it politely). The book led to the most formidable epistemological confrontation ever seen between ethnologists, anthropologists and philosophers or 'aestheticists'. The determination to claim that "the other", especially the non-Western, is different from "us" has persisted for decades. Should artefacts from elsewhere be considered ethnological exhibits or should they be viewed exclusively as art forms? In 1930, when the sculpture of the god Gu was exhibited in the gallery of the Pigalle Theatre in Paris, it was believed to represent an "epistemological convergence between the history of art and anthropology", as Maureen Murphy recalls.[4] The controversy continued: in 2015, Roberto Conduru took up the issue in a book co-edited with Elena O'Neill, in which he attempted to ensure that the Global South embraces the debate (Conduru, O'Neill 2015). Ultimately, the difficulty for some, to confine non-Western and especially African art into a purely anthropological experience, or for others to interpret it purely as an art form, gave birth to attempts of theorization of any kind, such as ethno-aesthetics. Can this notion of the ethno-aesthetics truly capture the African artistic experience? What do we make of this debate in these new circumstances in which artworks are being returned to the lands where they were created?

Finally, the third aspect in this analysis is the forced march of African art towards the canons of the European art world. During the colonial period, in the mid-1950s, a strategy for reorienting the rules governing artistic production was adopted in most African countries; in some cases, this involved passing down the obsolete rules of European fine arts, while in others, especially among young artists, it involved conditioning them to produce what the Western art market would accept (Tchibozo 2018a & 2019b). Workshops were organised all over the continent, especially in Nigeria, both Congos, Senegal, Uganda, Ethiopia, etc. and new movements were born. These include the Oshogbo School in Nigeria, the Poto-Poto School in Congo Brazzaville and the Hangar in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As early as the 1910s, however, the canons governing artistic practices in France, and by extension, Europe, were being questioned. These circumstances gave rise to two phenomena with incalculable consequences for artistic creation in Africa. Everything produced

4 Murphy (2009) has referred to La Revue Documents, which focused on archaeology, fine arts, ethnography and popular music and was first published between 1929 and 1930, as a source of evidence of this epistemological evolution.

by this generation of artists was labelled "naïve art", a term that was synonymous with "déjà-vu" and rather ironic in this context. Joëlle Busca (2000) describes the situation well, emphasising the lack of mastery of the rules adopted by these artists and their obsolescence in Europe. From "naïve art", the narrative shifted to "tourist art" or "airport art", which were terms used in Western literature to refer to a type of artistic production that began under the colonial regime. This marked a turning point, leading artists away from the areas in which they should have continued to work. They lost their way – although I do not wish to generalise – by moving away from the royal path sketched out by their predecessors and abandoning their artistic roots in many cases. In these new circumstances, how can we reconnect with these roots?

III. The Scientific Challenges

The task of identifying new orientations for research and creation, now that the artworks are permanently back on Beninese soil, will be immense. The challenge of this undertaking requires the mobilization of all actors, including officials whose concrete involvement will be the barometer of their commitment. The financing of research programs must seriously help us to trace the path to follow. Funding for research programs must help us outline the path to follow.

As a starting point, we must reflect on the narratives already constructed around these works. What will become of them? Will it be these narratives that continue to inform the exhibition of the returned artworks in this new context? What will their status be if we do not develop a different approach to the existing one? There is a rather fatalistic atmosphere surrounding these subjects of reflection, but this is certainly due to a form of emotional chaos surrounding the situation. A lot of people are not willing to accept this change occurring before our very eyes. They may well resist it – you can already sense it on the ground – without really knowing why. A certain amount of educational work will be required before actually launching these new intellectual and creative endeavours.

During the weeks preceding the restitution of the artworks, the two parties agreed to organise a Benin Week at the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum. A whole series of activities were planned for the occasion, including a day of reflection that was finally condensed into a morning because the official ceremonies were to take place at the same venue in the presence of the two heads of state. I had the honour of closing the morning session with a talk on 'The migration of Art Objects in World History'. Although far from being irrelevant in this configuration, the topic deserved a new approach, especially in these circumstances. As a result, I focused on the word "journey" (migration), which allows for a perspective which differs from the one opened by the original topic. Could this give rise to new questions?

If taken at face value, the act of migration is an active process rather than a passive one. It is a voluntary act, and I must insist on that aspect. Those who decide to migrate are aware of the potential for culture shock when they encounter "the other". They face the challenge of adapting to a new context and must be prepared to experience an identity crisis.

As a discipline, Art History has not been left untouched by the issue of migration and the creative process has been explored in the context of migration movements. This has led to the emergence of the concepts of the "centre" and the "periphery", which had already been applied in Europe since the Renaissance before being extended to cover the rest of the world after the colonial conquests. The artistic production of a large part of humanity was thus marginalised and it would not be until the mid-20th century that it began to be perceived as part of the complex migration process thus giving it a universal dimension (Ricœur 2001). Mieke Bal (2002) has shown that the history of art can only cover the culture of the specific geographical location being referred to. It is a collection of narratives that it cannot represent on its own. Against this backdrop, the discipline has opened up to other methodological approaches and become what could currently be referred to as "World Art Histories", echoing the plurality of cultural hubs around the world. The analysis of objects of migration or in migration adds complexity and renders the dominant narratives obsolete.

The pieces discussed here had not yet been classified as artworks or recognised as such by the discipline of Art History when they began their journeys to other lands. They travelled alone, without the opinions of anyone other than those of the people who had decided to transport them; they ended up in public museums, art dealers and even private collections. The act of acknowledging their potential role as part of the complex migration process could therefore give rise to confusion, which must be avoided at all costs. At best, one could in some ways speak of migration by transfer. Fresh perspectives of this kind must be constantly sought in partnership with our colleagues in the Global North. A better understanding of what these artworks were, are and may become is at stake. This will not be an easy task, but it is vital that they are given a new status. They were once feared artefacts in a context of royal power, with no concessions regarding their role in terms of commemorating ancestors, representing a philosophy and dominating their environment. After they were seized from their plinths in Abomey, they had lost all pretence of power by their arrival in Paris and had become mere objects to be displayed as a demonstration of France's supremacy and the defeat of a civilisation viewed as backward. Returning from this interlude, they are now situated within a nation state context, a Republic governed by republican rules that has no intention of gathering the rest of the world's masterpieces around them. As a result, it has become difficult to afford them the same significance as they had centuries ago, despite the nostalgia triggered by emotion.

Conclusion

Thanks to the perseverance of its political leaders, Benin is now entering a new chapter in the restitution of its cultural assets, which many believe is only just beginning. The 26 artworks returned to the country illustrate the way in which the issue of restitution appears to be restructuring international relations and triggering changes to the production of knowledge about the world's cultures and the consolidation of the creative industries. At this point in time, their presence will not immediately resolve all of the issues requiring research work, but their presence does indeed raise challenges for the global scientific community as a whole, both

in Benin and for our colleagues in France and elsewhere in the world, who have been working on these artefacts for many years.

In 2014, I did an experiment on the subject as part of the Humboldt Lab exhibition program with colleagues from the Berlin ethnographic museum. I published a statement on *Missing artefacts and scientific cooperation.*[5] Although the term "missing artefacts" can refer to the pieces that were looted and referred to as "spoils of war", it also encompasses all kinds of trafficked items, especially from the colonial period. Therefore, our expectations will not wholly be met by the restitution of the pieces since there is another equally concerning situation at play. To this day, I am unable to study certain forms of artistic production without having to consult works in private collections held abroad. This is what happened in 2013 when a student decided to research *Agonlin Sculptural Art: a Stylistic Analysis (Improving our Understanding of History through the Study of Bocio and Gelede Masks)*. The project was quite simply rendered impossible since a corpus spanning at least 50 years is required to study a stylistic trend. There is no Bocio left in Benin; all of the examples have been sold on the black market and their production ceased when the sculptors converted to Christianity, in spite of the fact that they were originally produced in vast numbers in the region.

It is thus more urgent than ever to set up research programs involving Master and PhD students covering all the areas where the artworks are now located, including Benin. It will also be necessary to develop tools for dialogue and research between researchers from Benin and from elsewhere, especially if their projects involve museums and research institutes as well as universities. This will have the advantage of reducing the asymmetry that has characterized these relationships up to now.

5 The statement, which can be read in German on the Humboldt Lab website, argues the need to study the origin of the artefacts displayed in European museums more closely and to discover their history. The exhibition held during this partnership was titled Objektbiographien and formed part of the main exhibition at the ethnographic museum in Berlin in 2015.

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