BLACK JACOBINS

@ the Caribbean Pavilion

National Art Gallery Committee

Preface.

Aimé Césaire once wrote that "the knot of colonialism began to unravel" when "black men stood up in order to affirm, for the first time, their determination to create a new world, a free world." C.L.R James also eloquently captured the poetry and the power of the Haitian revolution in his magnificent book,

THE BLACK JACOBINS.

While James was unaware at the time that Césaire was in fact simultaneously on a similar trajectory, incorporating Toussaint L'Ouverture into his first major statement on Négritude - **Le Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land),** he wrote "Men make their own history" and by narrating "the first successful slave revolt in history" **The Black Jacobins** in fact became an exploration of the relationship between consciousness and circumstances, between the willingness of human beings to act, and the material and social conditions that constrain or enhance their ability to so do.

Barbadian artists Ras Akyem Ramsay, Ras Ishi Butcher, and Ewan Atkinson, as part of the first **Caribbean Pavilion** at the **2010 Liverpool Biennial,** have been making their own histories, not simply as artists, but as persons who have undertaken similar explorations in the relationship between consciousness and circumstances of Caribbean artists, particularly in the complex, contentious and convoluted context of the contemporary art world's 'inhabitation' of the West India Docks at Liverpool. The Black Diaspora Visual Arts strategic agenda is about addressing as far as possible material and social constraints placed on our artists, providing creative opportunities both at home and abroad, for artists to act, rising above the singular narrative or notion of 'Caribbean art' to produce works that have a unique signature in style and content. These series of events uniquely fuse together regional, national and international relations within a 21st century diasporic context that in 2011 responds directly to the United Nations International Year For People Of African Descent.

In his own commentary on Négritude, Césaire explained "The West told us that in order to be universal we had to start by denying that we were black. I, on the contrary, said to myself that the more we were black, the more universal we would be". Césaire therefore argued in favour of cross-cultural fertilization. In his **Discourse on Colonialism** (1955): "A civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen; that the great good fortune of Europe is to have been a crossroads, and that because it was the

locus of all ideas, receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best centre for the redistribution of energy." We would argue that he has in fact made a strong case for the value and importance of Caribbean civilizations and creativity. Thus for us, it is not about re-appraising these two Caribbean lives but rather about the re-examining of their ideas within a visual arts, performative 21st century Caribbean diasporic context.

To read James is an exercise in rediscovering the world -- and an invitation not only to reinterpret it, but also to change it. In one of the most memorable passages from **Beyond a Boundary** James wrote:"Times would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place, the relations of countries and the relations of classes had to change, before I discovered that it is not the quality of goods and utility which matters, but movement; not where you are or what you have, but where you have come from, where you are going, and the rate at which you are getting there."

The Black Diaspora Visual Arts agenda is about identifying the Caribbean as a crossroads and the best centre for the redistribution of visual creative energy.

Once again, we wish to gratefully acknowledge the important support provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation, the Barbados Community College, the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, and the International Curators Forum in helping this goal become a reality by providing opportunities for Barbadian and Caribbean artists to explore these seminal questions in the 21st century we hope to define new , visual paths for getting there.

Alissandra Cummins
Chairperson
National Art Gallery Committee
September 11th, 2011

Introduction to the Black Jacobins Season.

The
BLACK JACOBINS
Season is a initiative of the Black Diaspora Visual Arts (BDVA) programme which began in 2007 as a strategic legacy of the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade commemorative year, led by the Barbados National Art Gallery Committee and the International Curators Forum - a UK-based network set up to address emerging international issues and a range of themes related to contemporary curatorial practice the Black Diaspora and visual culture in the 21st Century.

The BDVA programme has included arts events, installations and exhibitions complementary to a series of salons, seminars, symposia and conferences hosted in Barbados and benefitting other parts of the Caribbean.

The BDVA programme aims include:

- To raise the profile locally, nationally and internationally of Barbadian visual artists and curators
- To invite international visual artists and curators to Barbados to establish different fora for intercultural dialogue and professional development opportunities
- To prepare a 10 year strategic plan for the project in conjunction with the next 'Grand Tour' in 2017, coinciding with the Venice Biennale and Documenta.

A number of leading scholars, curators and artists have been invited to participate in intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange at symposia held in March 2008 and February 2009, the latter taking as its starting point generational shifts in the Post-War history of the Black Diasporic arts.

The third symposium in the series took place in Barbados on December 1 2009, taking as its theme, 'Caribbean Curatorship and National Identity' as part of a broader conference in partnership with the Museums Association of the Caribbean and the International Council of Museums (Barbados). The symposium focused on the intercultural competencies that support the professional development of cultural leaders and the promotion of formal and informal peer support networks with arts practitioners in Barbados and the Caribbean

Islands across the Black Diaspora.

It was out of this that many discussions took place on exhibition practices and critical discourse with a need to develop a season of events that took into context the past as an important marker for continuity, change, and a tool to help shape the future. This led to the development of a major idea that located important Caribbean historical themes within a contemporary 21st century context: The Black Jacobins Season.

Black Jacobins: Négritude in A Post Global 21st Century explores the idea of producing a major Caribbean season of events not as a regional entity (i.e. in the past Caribbean events have been based on island themes and regionality) but as a conceptual theme that links the past with the present. This season focuses on the legacies and contemporary impact of two major 20th century figures: the Trinidadian writer and intellectual C.L.R James and his project **The Black Jacobins;** and the Martinique poet and intellectual Aimé Césaire.

The Black Jacobins (published in 1938) by C.L.R James (1901 - 1989) examines the Haitian (Sainte-Domingue) Revolution of 1791 – 1803. Throughout the book, James takes an original look at revolution by analyzing revolutionary potential and progress according to economic and class distinctions, rather than racial distinctions. The book, which is a seminal text in studying the African diaspora, also focuses on Toussaint L'Ouverture as the revolutionary spearhead and organizational leader. In this sense the **Black Jacobins** has been seen as a publication which discusses Caribbean revolt within the context of colonial slavery as well as establishing possibly the first black diasporic anti colonial figure hero.

Aimé Césaire (1913 – 2008) formulated with Leopold Senghor and Leon Gontian Damas the concept and movement of Négritude, defined as "affirmation that one is black and proud of it". Césaire's thoughts about restoring the cultural identity of black Africans were first fully expressed in **Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Return To My Native Land** 1939), a mixture of poetry and poetic prose. The work celebrated the ancestral homelands of Africa and the Caribbean. Négritude has been seen as a major intellectual force that has influenced countless liberational leaders to artistic movements from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Power Movements.

The Black Jacobin Season sites were Liverpool, Barbados and Martinique. The organizing team included Allison Thompson, Alissandra Cummins, and Dominique Brebion led by David A. Bailey. **The Black Jacobins** was framed as a season of events that began on 24th March and extended to October 2011. The venues in Barbados which hosted this season were the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, Barbados Community College Morningside Gallery, the Savannah Hotel and the Queens Park Gallery. In Martinique the Frantz Fanon Atrium was the main venue hosted by DRAC. In Liverpool the Liverpool Biennial hosted the season within its City States theme.

The season had three major interrelated elements:

- **Historical Iconographies**
- **Contemporary Dialogues**
- **21st Century Jacobin Commissions**

Historical Iconographies explored the period spanning World War II, the movement for Federation within the West Indies, and the move towards Independence as a period of evolving ideologies of self-definition and determination. The work and ideas of both C.L.R James and Aimé Césaire are evident in or parallel those of a number of artists (their contemporaries) within the Caribbean as well as from the diaspora as well as non-black diaspora artists that relate to the overall themes of the Black Jacobins Season. This section was curated as a series of archival moving image screenings that took place in Barbados at the Barbados Museum & Historical Society and the Savannah Hotel. There were two reasons why the project curated this element. The first was to have images of C.L.R James and Aimé Césaire in visual dialogue about their works themselves which only moving image can do and secondly to have in the context of their dialogues historical iconographical works alongside the discussions. The key moving image works were as follows:

- **Stuart Hall In Conversation With CLR James.** A landmark documentary and the only filmed interview with C.L.R James. The film was produced by the British filmmaker Mike Dibb (who introduced the film at the showing in Barbados) and was made in 1984 and is a rare historical document of two leading iconic Caribbean intellectuals who discuss art and politics. In this documentary C.L.R James explores for the first time on film his rationale for producing a major historical publication in 1938 on the Haitian (Sainte-Domingue) Revolution of 1791 – 1803 which was titled **The Black Jacobins.**

- **Aimé Césaire—A Voice for History.** This moving image tribute to Aimé Césaire is truly a moving image archival document. This three part tribute was produced by the Martinique filmmaker Euzhan Palcy in 1994. This moving image piece explores all of our original historical iconographies themes by examining through the life of Césaire the period spanning World War II, the movement for Federation within the West Indies, and the move towards Independence as a period of evolving ideologies of self-definition and determination. It examines Césaire's relationship with individuals such as Wifredo Lam and art historical movements such as the Harlem Renaissance.

Contemporary Dialogues explored existing moving image and other art-works that emerged following the achievement of political independence within much of the West Indies, seeing how some artists have explored the legacy of C.L.R James and Aimé Césaire's ideas in their works. In curating this element the organizing team felt very strongly that it was important that the artists/curators work not get seen as merely an illustration of James and/or Césaire's ideas but as a piece that is 'in dialogue' with these concepts. An illustrated lecture by Richard J. Powell (reproduced here)

did a particularly comprehensive job outlining the depth and breadth of this influence on modern and contemporary artists.

In order to do this it was important to not only show the work but also have the artists/curators be present in a series of workshops to dialogue about the piece as well. For the Black Jacobins season the realisation of this element was curated as a series of discussions, screenings and an exhibition installation as follows:

• A series of artist and curator led workshops and presentations hosted in Barbados and Martinique on the theme of the Black Moving Cube & Curating In The Caribbean. Participants included: Mike Dibb, Yona Backer, Keith Piper, Imruh Bakari, Valerie John, Andrea Wells, Suzy Landau, Annette Nias, Gary Stewart, Richard Powell, John Franklin, Dominique Brebion, Veerle Poupeye, O'Neil Lawrence, Claire Tancons, Jennifer Smit, Sara Hermann, and Winston Kellman.

• Screenings of works by Alfredo Jaar and Gilles Elie-dit-Cosaque. These screenings were installed as projected works in Barbados and Martinique. In Barbados we projected Jaar's work Muxima produced in 2005. Divided into ten cantos, the film is guided rhythmically and conceptually by different interpretations of the folksong which is called **Muxima**. Expounding upon his ongoing examination of the dichotomy between the authority of images and their inability to fully convey the events they depict, Jaar found in music a resonance that further communicates the experiences of the people. The film is abundant with images that implicitly and poetically paint a portrait of a place rich in contradictions. As one example, Angola suffers from great differences in means – more than 80 percent of the population lives in poverty and lacks access to basic health and social services, but it is also a hub for European, Asian and North American investors in oil. In contrast to this Gilles Elie-dit-Cosaque's film Zétwal produced in 2008 which was projected in Martinique tells the story of Robert St. Rose, aka Zétwal, who in the 1970s in Martinique builds a rocket ship which is propelled by the power of the poetry of Aimé Césaire. Both artists have been directly influenced by Aimé Césaire and in most cases use their works as an ongoing contemporary dialogue.

• An exhibition of contemporary works. This was in collaboration with Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator, Urbanflo and the National Cultural Foundation. The exhibition which was hosted by the Queens Park Gallery in Barbados explored how contemporary artists in the 21st century dialogued with James & Césaire's ideas through the theme of 'cultural diaspora'. Artists participating were: Jean Chiang, Carol Campbell, Selina Roman, Teri Richardson, Wura Natasha Ogunji, Danny Ramirez, Alejandro Contreras, Jacquenette Arnette, Carlos Alejandro, Patricia Roldan, Caroline Holder, Vanessa Green, Rodney Jackson and Erman Gonzalez.

21st Century Jacobin Commissions. This section comprised new commissioned works

by artists based in the Caribbean region. The first two themes provided some assessment of what has brought us to this present, 'post-global' moment and can serve as a platform for the commissions. The selection of works for the commissions and indeed for all sections were cognizant of artists who, for various reasons, have not found representation in the larger shows devoted to art of the Caribbean and the diaspora but nevertheless have vital contributions to make to this debate.

For the Black Jacobins Season the 21st Century Jacobin Commissions had a very unique curatorial development. Rather than commission new work within the Caribbean it was radically decided to commission new work in a post-diaspora related site. In terms of marketing the project to a wider international audience the organizing team was keen that the Black Jacobins Season should be strategically linked to high profiled international events. The Liverpool Biennial invited the organizing team to submit an aspect of the Black Jacobins for its new Caribbean Pavilion which the team used as an opportunity to showcase new contemporary Caribbean work, artists' commissions from three countries and to draw international audiences to the Black Jacobins Season of events. Our participation was structured in such a way that the commissioned artists in fact went to Liverpool to make the work. One of the core issues / realities of exhibiting and 'sharing' work outside of the individual islands, whether regionally or internationally is the problem of movement. This is a critical diaspora problem. In recent discussions amongst curators and artists in the region, digital media and film have been identified as important formats for overcoming some of these challenges.

The Black Jacobins Liverpool Biennial Caribbean Pavilion as well as new commissioned artist's framework was developed out of the ideas from Professor Stuart Hall. In a seminal text Hall states:

"How are we to write the histories of non-western societies in relation to modernity? Modernity is ,as we know, an extremely slippery signifier, and appears here with as many quote marks as I can muster : and ' the modern' in its many derivatives – early modern, late modern, post-modern, modernity, modernism - has long been effectively appropriated to the story of the west, monopolizing for western civilization the privilege of living to the full the potentialities of the present 'from the inside'. It is therefore difficult to imagine this story in any way other than as a binary polarity: modernity and its 'Others'. Only two narrative alternatives then seem possible. Either the story is told from within the perspective of modernity itself: in which case it is difficult to prevent it becoming a triumphalist narrative in which the 'others' are permanently marginalized. Or one reorients the story within its margins, seeking by this move to reverse and disrupt the normalised order of things by bringing into visibility all that cannot be seen from, or is structurally obscured by, the usual vantage point." **Modernity and Its Others: Three 'Moments' In The Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts by Stuart Hall.**

In the groundbreaking essay 'Modernity and Its Others: Three 'Moments' In The Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts' Stuart Hall re-visits modernity through three historical art movements from the perspective of the Diaspora. This discourse stands as the theme of the Black Jacobins Liverpool Biennial Caribbean pavilion where THREE moments became symbolised by THREE Caribbean islands; the Bahamas, Martinique and Barbados.

For the Liverpool Biennial the Organizing team for the Black Jacobins Season in collaboration with individuals, partners and institutions from the Bahamas, Barbados and Martinique invited and commissioned 10 artists from the Caribbean to make new work. These 10 artists were selected purely on their ability to make highly conceptual mixed media work that responds to a series of contemporary and historical global themes. The uniqueness of this project is that for the first time artist from the Caribbean region were collectively making new work that responds to the environment of the City of Liverpool whilst maintaining a distinctive stance on what Stuart Hall might call a 21st century Caribbean modernist aesthetic legacy to the ideas of Aimé Césaire and CLR James.

The artists participating were as follows:

- Ewan Atkinson Barbados
- Ras Ishi Butcher Barbados
- Ras Akyem Ramsay Barbados
- David Damoison Martinique
- Christian Bertin Martinique
- Heino Schmid Bahamas
- John Beadle Bahamas
- Lynn Parotti Bahamas
- Lavar Munroe Bahamas
- Blue Curry Bahamas
- Holly Parotti as special lead curator

For us the Black Jacobins Season was not about re-appraising these two Caribbean intellectuals (James and Cesaire) but about the re-examining of their ideas within a visual art performative 21st century Caribbean diaspora context. Both these writers were using their art (in the form of the discourse of literature) as a political weapon. Today the title **Black Jacobins: Negritude In A Post Global 21st Century** refers to the historical movement of diaspora artists from the past to the present rising above the singular narrative or notion of 'Caribbean art' to produce works that have a unique signature in style and content. These series of events uniquely fuse together regional, national and international relations within a 21st century diasporic context that responds directly to the United Nations International Year For People Of African Descent.

By David A. Bailey MBE

Black Diaspora Visual Arts (BDVA)

International Curators Forum (ICF)

the Caribbean Pavilion at Liverpool– some thoughts...

Let me begin with a short digression. In her memoir entitled "Volcano", author Yvonne Weekes describes her disillusionment as a young black child in Britain, informing her skeptical English teacher that she and her parents are about to return 'home' to Montserrat.

"In front of a sea of white children [the teacher] says;

'There is no such place.'

And triumphantly brings out a globe to prove it. And amidst laughter and the tears welling in my throat, I see indeed 'there is no such place!'."

In case you think things have changed in the intervening four decades, a *New York Times* review of the recent **Rockstone & Bootheel** exhibition of West Indian art in Hartford, Connecticut suggested that for many viewers the Caribbean region was "a blank slate"(Benjamin Genocchio, December 4 2009). This despite the fact that, as the author himself points out, Hartford has the third-largest West Indian population in the U.S.!

And although on *Facebook* Bahamian artist, Blue Curry can boast that his **"swanky electric blue cement-mixer"** headed off Adrian Searle's review of the Liverpool Biennial in the *Guardian* (September 20, 2010), it's the ONLY work of art in this dismissive review for which the artist is unnamed. What's up with that?

Curator David A. Bailey is out to put the Caribbean 'on the map'....or at least on the programme at the 2010 **Liverpool Biennial.** And while I feel you cringe at the over-wrought cliché, the weight of symbolism is felt throughout this exhibition. And I can't help but feel that some 'mapping' of its formation and structure are necessary as part of assessing its manifestation which, frankly, was a confluence of relationships and happenstance as well as long-overdue necessity.

Through his ongoing work with the **International Curators Forum** and the Black Diaspora Visual Arts exhibitions and symposiums, Bailey has focused his attention on creating a platform for Caribbean and black diaspora arts at major international events, as well as bringing curators and cultural theorists to the Caribbean. He combines disguised guerilla tactics with a

core philosophy of collegial working relations to infiltrate the rigid art establishment and inhabit a shared and expanding forum to showcase Caribbean art and encourage dialogue and networking.

Bailey was the acting director of the National Gallery of the Bahamas in 2010. He also collaborates with the National Art Gallery Committee in Barbados, and more recently with colleagues in Martinique on a ten-year developmental project entitled **Black Diaspora Visual Arts.** Thus the working relationship with these three spaces provided the platform for organizing – and financing - the submission to Liverpool. Featuring the work of ten artists from Barbados, Martinique and the Bahamas, the **Caribbean Pavilion** seems an ambitious designation but also pointedly asserts its intention to establish a presence within the contemporary international biennial circuit, with particular reference to the grand Venice Biennale organized around national and regional pavilions. It also highlights work from some of the smaller islands in the region where typically cultural production from the Greater Antilles – Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti etc – gets more attention.

Here in Liverpool the exhibition is staged as part of the **City-States** project, sited at the Contemporary Urban Centre in collaboration with the **Liverpool Biennial. City States** comprises six self-funded international exhibitions that focus on the cultural dynamics of life in cities around the world. According to the **Liverpool Biennial** Guide, **City States** presents the work of 74 artists from 23 different countries, comparable in size to the approximately 60 artists that make up the core Biennial itself.

Titled "Three Moments", the **Caribbean Pavilion** takes as its inspiration the Stuart Hall essay "Modernity and its Others: Three Moments in the Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts." Hall, in a feature video-presentation at the 2009 **Black Diaspora Visual Arts Symposium** in Barbados, expanded on this essay to consider a parallel or possible successive 'moment' within the Caribbean which simultaneously acknowledges and critiques its precedents and parallels. It calls for a mapping of modernist developments to better describe and understand the present contemporary moment.

Contemporary art from the Caribbean has been receiving unprecedented exposure in recent years with major exhibitions organized by the Brooklyn Museum *(Infinite Islands)* and le Parc de la Villette in Paris *(Kreyol Factory)* as well as the much-anticipated but postponed *Caribbean Crossroads* organized jointly by three New York museums (Museo El Barrio, Queen's Museum and the Studio Museum). The recent *GlobalCaribbean* exhibition curated by Haitian artist Edouard Duval Carrie in conjunction with Art Basel in Miami, as well as *Rockstone & Bootheel* at Real Art Ways in Hartford presented arguably more focused examinations. *Afro Modernism,* staged at Tate Liverpool itself earlier in the year examined the wider black diaspora.

With their varying formats and mandates there is an acknowledged expanding exposure that the artists and their works receive, but there

is also wide-spread dissatisfaction within the region that the organizers just haven't quite got it right. And although all of these have been accompanied by catalogues, websites and / or public forums, the most common point of dissatisfaction is the lack of adequate critical discourse about the work, particularly from the region itself.

The Caribbean Pavilion is a smaller project, and more hastily organized. But the question remains: What exactly is an exhibition of 'Caribbean Art' supposed to achieve? For the **Caribbean Pavilion: Three Moments,** Bailey invited the artists to take up residence in Liverpool and several of the participants acknowledged that the opportunity to interact and collaborate was one of the most meaningful outcomes of the event. Bailey also instructed the artists that work should respond to the city. Liverpool is one of Britain's largest cities whose growth was due to its importance as a port; at one point in the early 19th century 40% of the world's trade passed through Liverpool's docks.

This history and growth are indelibly linked to trade with the West Indies and the Atlantic Slave Trade and this story is extensively narrated in the recently opened International Slavery Museum, located at the Albert Dock right next to the Tate Liverpool. The city is also home to the oldest Black African community in the country. So while many of the artists participating in the **Liverpool Biennial** created site-specific work in response to the location, its relevance for Caribbean artists is particular and I wonder why work by Caribbean artists was not more central to the construction of the Biennial as a whole.

The relationship between local and global, geography and history, ownership and entitlement, authenticity and relevance are dialogues that recur in much of the work in the **Caribbean Pavilion.** Simultaneously there is the weight of the traditions of representation and symbolisation.

Martiniquan artist **Christian Bertin** presents ***Sinobole a Vendre,*** a bicycle-pulled cart offering "snowballs" or snow cones for sale. It is an assemblage of popular culture and post-colonial theory displaying packets of sugar and cans of corned beef along with the writings of Césaire, Fanon and Naipaul bolted to the cart. My initial 'mis-reading' of the sign advertising the syrupy sweet treats was 'Symbols for Sale' which seemed somehow appropriate: the multiple mis-interpretations and mis-readings – both intentional deceptions and unintentional ignorance – that underlay descriptions of the region from the earliest writings; and the idea that symbols, the visual signifiers that represent experience, are readily and cheaply available. The itinerant artist, like an itinerant vendor, is engaged in production and exchange. Like all commodities, the meaning and value of these symbols fluctuate, undergoing constant transformation as a process that hopefully enables us to communicate meaningfully in an unstable world. **David Damoison,** also representing Martinique, speaks of his own work as a process of "collecting symbols," both as a way of exploring identity as well as establishing links.

Various modes of transportation appear throughout the exhibition as metaphors

for displacement, diaspora, transience and improvisation. Ships that literally link these two trans-Atlantic regions – the Caribbean and Liverpool – are depicted or are alluded to in several of the works. But often too they are disabled or distorted or mutated in the same way that Bertin's cart with stacks of books bolted to the wheels is immobile. The most dramatic expression of this is Bahamian artist **John Beadle's** monumental sculpture, ***Live Load.*** A large rudder, balletically poised on the tip of an iron spike is both stabilized and restrained by series of ropes tied off to the wooden planks of the gallery floor, creating a palpable tension between opposing forces. The sense of monumentality is not only the scale of the object itself but rather its metonymical function referencing the ghostly absence of the ship as well as its human cargo. It also isolates its function as a navigational instrument and the moral and ethical considerations that guide it.

There are a number of interesting parallels with the video by **Heino Schmid** (Bahamas) entitled ***"<" ('less than').*** This also is a work about balance and tension. In a very minimalist setting the artist attempts to demonstrate how the base of one beer bottle can stand on the neck of another. After some fine adjustments the artist steps out of the frame, leaving only the two precariously balanced bottles. The viewer is attracted by the 'cool' factor of this bar trick, and indeed the artist practiced for several months to perfect it. And Schmid is attracted by the social engagement aspect of his work – both the idea of the local bar / rum shop as a gathering point; as well as the link to earlier works where the artist would put drawings or notes in beer bottles left at various locations to be 'discovered'.....another kind-of ship metaphor. The acute angle formed by the two bottles inspires the title, "less than" suggesting inequitable relationships and the impossibility of sustained balance. The 'trick' to achieving the balance is a small amount of water in the vertical bottle which fortuitously creates a little horizon line within the bottle itself. The tension here is measured in breathless milliseconds as the viewer waits for the inevitable collapse of the structure, followed by the bottles rolling off screen. The viewer is caught watching the looped and endless repetition of success and collapse in anticipation, as if perhaps the outcome might change.

In ***Em-pyre (Business as Usual),*** one of two constructed altars by **Ras Akyem-i Ramsay** (Barbados), the slave ship plan is simultaneously church door and guillotine. This frustrated architect possesses a craftsman's sensibility to materials so that this faux- derelict portal looks to be stained by an equally false former grandeur, suggesting the manipulation, machinations and travesties of history. Akyem extended this relief sculpture out into the gallery space with the addition of a seat fastened to the floor at the supposedly optimal viewing range. In the same way that the profuse number of videos throughout the biennial often included seating because viewers were expected to focus their attention for anywhere from 1 to 30 minutes, Akyem seems to demand equal time, inviting the viewer to engage in contemplation or meditation before this 'altar'. I'm not sure if

anyone took up Akyem's invitation. But a number of the artists in this exhibition construct works that play at overtly engaging the participation of the viewer (Bertin did eventually make – and sell – snowcones) and / or challenge the audience's expectations and reception of Caribbean art.

Blue Curry's untitled work is smart and ironic in its intent to confound traditional expectations of Caribbean culture. His pimped-out cement mixer hypnotically churns a viscous, paint-like vat of suntan cream, its distinct *Hawaiian Tropic* scent wafting through the space. What does it mean to be a cultural producer in a region dependent on marketing itself as a generic paradise for the carefree enjoyment of others? The Caribbean itself becomes a cliché where images of Bob Marley and fruit-ladened Haitian markets become ubiquitous for a region made up of multiple languages, ethnicities and geographies. Curry's response is minimalist and industrial, only creolized.....Marcel Duchamp on vacation.

Following his recent solo-exhibitions in Barbados (Secret Diaries) and the Bahamas, (Diaries Unlocked), **Ras Ishi Butcher** continues his explorations of subtly textured panels of black and white. The 64 squares that make up ***The Game*** are arranged in a large chess board pattern on Velcro strips. But the constantly changing surface patterns introduce additional underlying possibilities for relations of symmetry and asymmetry. The game Ishi is alluding to is the playing out of power relations, particularly within the art world and particularly with regard to race. For all of the artists agreeing to participate in this exhibition of 'Caribbean' art, there is a balancing act or a compromise between grabbing visibility when it is offered but also accepting a certain marginalization or compartmentalization. And I've heard it said that success for a Caribbean artist means being able to leave the Caribbean. But an aspect of Ishi's work, whether explicitly acknowledged or not, is that the individual units are not fixed and there is always the potential for different combinations and arrangements – either by the artist or the viewer – it is, after all called 'The Game'. (And Ishi, like his brother-in-arms Akyem, includes a rum-shop style crate in front of the work, inviting the viewer to sit down and play along.) So there is a certain underlying contingency in what appears as a very rigid grid. And the ability to manipulate the system is not always immediately visible.

Ok – I want to digress here again momentarily, although it relates back to my earlier discussion of the traumatizing effects of the education system. On my daughter's first day at primary school in Barbados, the teacher explained to all the boys and girls in their brand new blue uniforms that they must learn to sit quietly on the floor, with their legs crossed and hands folded in their laps, with their heads facing the front of the room, and with absolutely no talking while they listened attentively to the teacher read them a story. My daughter turned to all the new impressionable students sitting around her and said, "Let's not."

I imagine that's what Fidel Castro was like in preschool. It was a long year.

Ewan Atkinson (Barbados) focuses on childhood experiences, and more specifically the formative nature of the British colonial school system, and the values it (insidiously) inculcates beneath the enchanting veneer of storytelling. He chooses sites that are traditional, quotidian and mundane – the suburb, the family, the school - from which to launch his own quiet revolution. With ***Pages 18 to 27 of The Nelsons' New Neighbourhood Reader, Morality Tales for the Discerning Neighbourhood (Under Glass)*** the artist displays his surreptitiously adulterated take on the "Nelson's West Indian Reader." Introduced in the 1930s (and apparently still used in schools up until the 1990s) the Nelson's Reader was intended to teach young members of the colonies how to read, with a healthy dose of morality lessons. Atkinson's version is naughty but nice. He presents ten pages framed as museum artifacts for closer inspection. The short poems, narratives and accompanying exercises are re-written with Atkinson himself role-playing a range of characters in the accompanying illustrations. In the two-part "Planning a trip" Uncle travels to Liverpool, "that big-ass place" which is linked to Barbados through their respective statues of Lord Nelson, their Empire Theatres, British cars, and gay cyber-sex.

For the Liverpool installation Atkinson included school chairs, a work table and exercise books, encouraging viewers to complete the accompanying tasks to be posted on the wall. Some viewers apparently familiar with the often gratuitous activity rooms at the end of exhibitions did not appear to decipher that these exercises – for example : "Describe the last time you got lucky." - were not really intended for children. Viewers however can still complete the lessons – and see this really great work online at http://www.ewanatkinson.com/ewanatkinson.com/Neighbourhood_Reader.html

While Atkinson's book is meticulously preserved behind glass, Bahamian artist **Lavar Munro's** graphic fantasy, ***This Is My Account,*** is splattered across the opposing wall. Munro, a young Bahamian artist who works primarily in illustration, was inspired by the graffiti he saw around Liverpool to work directly on the gallery wall itself. Incorporating paper cutouts and 'tagging' the wall with blasts of spray paint, Munro creates a flowing fantasy of sexual confrontation, domination and mutilation that combines intricate art nouveau imagery with shot-gun blasts of dripping paint. The delicacy of the drawing contrasts with the violence of the imagery, exposing the vulgarity that seeps out from beneath a veneer of propriety.

Lynn Parotti (Bahamas), as has been pointed out elsewhere, is the sole female artist in this exhibition (Bahamian Kendra Frorup was initially invited but was not able to participate). Parotti constructs a tight maze of large paintings collectively titled ***The Space Between Want*** with two distinct and yet interdependent bodies of work. Three oil on canvas paintings depict Bahamian scenes representing sex, worship and money, major themes that, for the artist "define who we are." In the centre of the space, two paintings on glass depict British ports - the West India Docks at Canary Wharf in London

EWAN ATKINSON **PAGES 18 TO 27 OF THE NELSON'S NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD READER, MORALITY TALES FOR THE DISCERNING NEIGHBOURHOOD -(UNDER GLASS)-**

Year: 2010

Size: 76cm x 115cm

Media: Mixed media

EWAN ATKINSON **PAGES 18 TO 27 OF THE NELSON'S NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD READER, MORALITY TALES FOR THE DISCERNING NEIGHBOURHOOD (UNDER GLASS) (INSTALLATION VIEW FROM LIVERPOOL)**

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Year: 2010

Size: 76cm x 115cm

Media: Mixed media

RAS AKYEM I RAMSAY

BARBADOS

"In the 'ritual' of making art, I seek to give evidence to something which has no other mundane means of manifesting itself; and always with the hope that the result (when it emerges) would surprise me ... consequently, in this new body of work I'm attempting to map/negotiate that 'uncertain' space/terrain in the sub-conscious where reality exists with-out the burden of imposed meanings ... and could be defined by prerequisites other than linear logic ..."

RAS AKYEM-I RAMSAY **"TRADE" WINDS**

Year: 2010

Size: 132cm x 152cm

Media: Acrylic on canvas

RAS AKYEM-I RAMSAY **EM-PYRE - (BUSINESS AS USUAL)**

Year: 2010

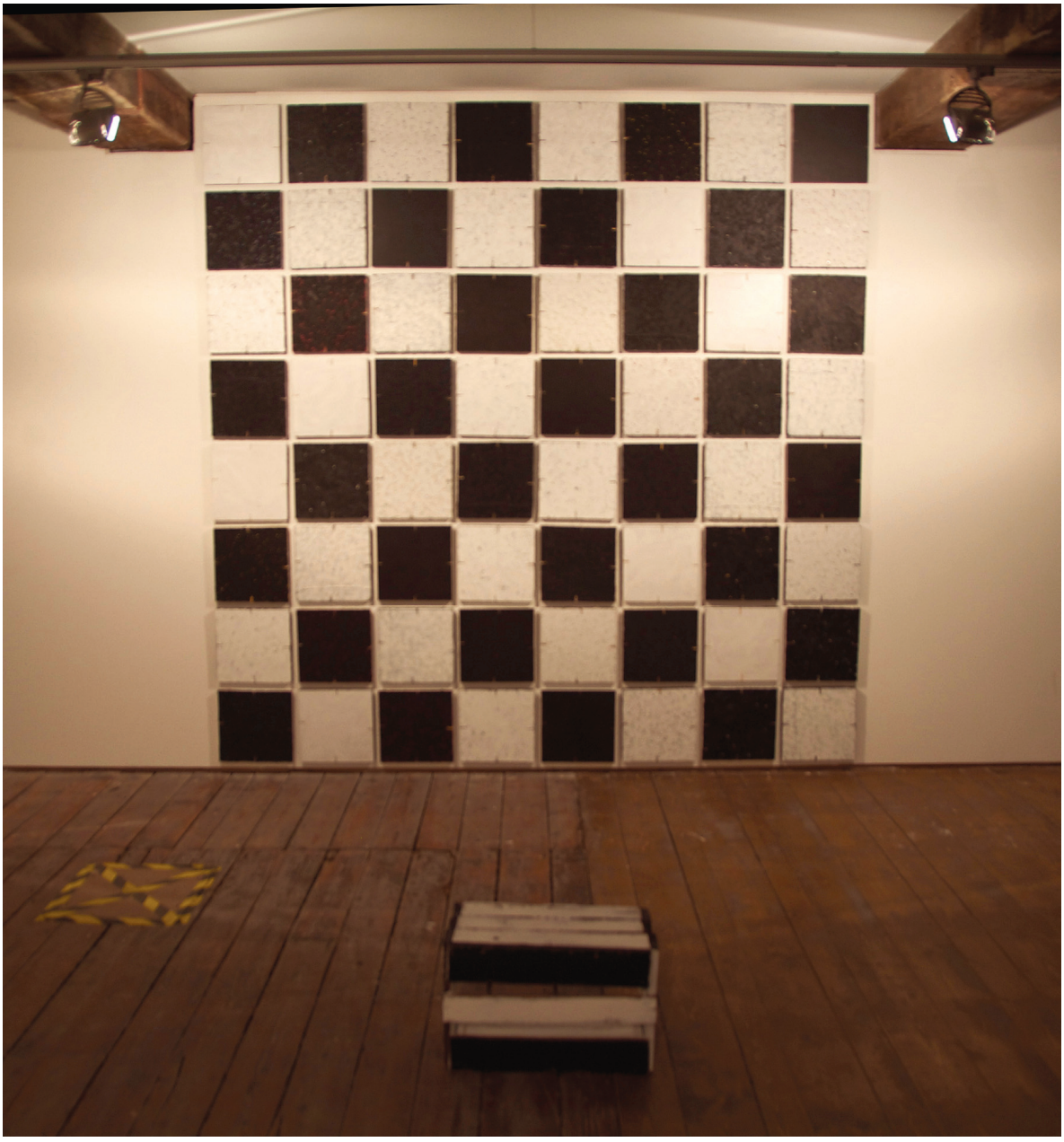
Size: Various dimensions

Media: Mixed media installation

RAS ISHI BUTCHER

BARBADOS.

"My works for the Liverpool Biennial attempt to address or interrogate Slavery and the Art World's best kept Secret, RACISM."



RAS ISHI BUTCHER **THE GAME**

Year: 2010

Size: 256cm x 256cm

Media: Mixed media

RAS ISHI BUTCHER **TRIANGLE**

Year: 2010

Size: 127cm x 127cm

Media: Mixed media

Voyage to Atlantis.

by Richard J. Powell

Can I go on my way without you,
Whoa... how can I know?
If I go on my way without you,
Whoa... where would I go?
Set sail with me,
Misty lady, set my spirit free.
New love to find,
And though I leave another behind,
I'll always (come back to you)
I'll always (come back to you)
I'll always (come back to you)
I'll always (come back to you)

The Isley Brothers, Voyage to Atlantis (1977)

In contemplating the legacies of C. L. R. James and Aimé Césaire for today's artists and scholars of the African diaspora, the 1977 song, ***Voyage to Atlantis,*** by the popular rhythm and blues group The Isley Brothers, kept resonating in my head. The literary masterpieces by the former two luminaries of Caribbean arts and letters, James's ***The Black Jacobins*** and Césaire's ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Return to My Native Land),*** were, of course, prescient testaments to what we now refer to as the Black Atlantic: an historical site of collective trauma, mass migrations, freedom dreams, and reinventions of the self. Although popularized in the 1990s by the black British sociologist Paul Gilroy, the white American art historian Robert Farris Thompson pioneered this concept, arguing as early as 1969 for a "transatlantic tradition" of African diasporic arts in the Americas.[ii] The Isley Brothers' 1977 song ***Voyage to Atlantis,*** covered by assorted guitarists on YouTube videos and studied by countless other musical aspirants, epitomized that black diasporic moment in the 1970s when grassroots, African American music fused with counter-cultural, Euro-American psychedelic sounds, forming a truly dispersed, Afro-futurist aesthetic.[iii] It is not too much of a stretch to

read and contemplate these texts by James and Césaire, and to simultaneously hear, rolling and rocking behind their words, the resounding cry of Marvin Isley's guitar and the pleading falsetto of Ronald Isley's lyrics.

"Can I go on my way without you" was not only Ronald Isley's rhetorical question for an already departed lover, but the implicit challenge that James's and Césaire's respective books, from the vantage point of a tumultuous Black Atlantic, posed. And the penultimate question from both authors was: Whether an Atlantic perspective – a view which takes into account an African past, legacies of slavery, revolutions won and lost, and colonialism's pervasive hold on people's futures – can propel one forward or, rather, weight one down like an anchor, to the bottom of a deep, blue-black sea? What both books, through the imposed soundtrack of ***Voyage to Atlantis,*** asked is to consider the historical and imagistic landscapes of lives shaped under the double-yokes of oppression and exploitation and, once considered, to rise up from the depths of those harrowing experiences and initiate a change for the betterment of all humankind.

But moral battles are never easy, and neither of these texts suggested that revolution and decolonization were immediate paths to personal fulfillment and happiness. Indeed, ***The Black Jacobins*** ends on a rather depressing note, informing us that, a century plus after Haiti's independence, fascism was on the rise globally and Africa and the Caribbean were still under the political and economic dominion of Europe and the United States. And Césaire's ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*** was less prescriptive in its messages than descriptive, illuminating an island-universe of both dire circumstances and unfathomable potentialities and, ultimately, painting with words an Atlantis-like archipelago that fundamentally promises no real return.

So what is the legacy of C. L. R. James and Aimé Césaire for today's watchers and voyagers? For starters, we're not talking about readings of ***The Black Jacobins*** and ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*** on the order of a deceased family member's last will and testament, when priceless treasures, family heirlooms, and money are parceled out to survivors. No. What we're talking about here is something akin to 'accidental grace': beneficence that comes your way simply because you're at the right place at the right time. And because you're a knowing and open recipient of the gift. And whom and where we are today – twenty-first century witnesses to high-speed information networks, gross socio-economic inequities, and class- and generation-based insurgencies worldwide – invite James's and Césaire's insights into our collective consciousness, winding their way into our musings, critiques, and anxieties around contemporary life. This essay proposes several Jamesian and Césairian points of view out of which selected modern and contemporary artists with ties to the black Atlantic (and especially to the Caribbean) have made use of and deployed in their work. While very few of these artists would consider their work indebted to James and Césaire, a cursory look at these works brings into serious question such disavowals. And, at the very least, these

works suggest that, if not directly informed by ***The Black Jacobins*** and ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,*** the artists have unconsciously received from these two forefathers an alternative modernism and, like the repeated refrain from ***Voyage to Atlantis,*** have imagined a return to a black diasporic/Caribbean space that, in light of current geo-political conditions and one's capacity to conceptually isolate and parcel that "native land", never really existed or, tantalizingly, is unreachable.

Legacy 1:
A fierce and intrinsic racial/cultural identity

I first met Trinidadian artist LeRoy Clarke around 1975, on the occasion of the opening of his solo exhibition of paintings and drawings at Howard University in Washington, DC. What I remember about his work was a kind of fluid yet tactile linearity, reminiscent of the bark drawings by artists in Central Africa's Ituri rain forest. Although it wasn't the kind of work I was necessarily interested in at the time, I was intrigued with its associative nature (referring to human hair, to vine-like vegetation, and to energy visualized) and how the work, in spite of its abstract quality, alluded to a conceptually operational African diasporic sensibility. While a strong case could be made for Clarke's stylistic debt to the Cuban master Wifredo Lam and, relatedly, to the Chilean visionary Matta, one could also argue for C. L. R. James's imprimatur on his fellow Trinidadian, by way of creating art out of a deep reservoir of disciplinary citations throughout the black Atlantic, all in service to the greater political/artistic project at hand.[iv]

Similar overtures to African imagery and spiritualities, both on the continent and beyond, were manifested in the collagraphs of the late Cuban artist Belkis Ayón. Ayón made no apologies for her work's visual obligation to such Afro-Cuban religious and performance art traditions as *Abakua* (the Nigerian, Cross-River-derived all-male secret societies in Cuba), but other artistic lineages emerged as well, from Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1976 masterpiece *La última cena (The Last Supper)* to the form fitting/body suit clad, masked superheroes in Marvel comic books.[v]

Works like these, with their encoded and hybridized Africanities, recalled those famous, stinging lines from Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal:*

My négritude is not a stone, nor deafness
Flung out against the clamour of the day
My négritude is not a white speck of dead water
On the dead eye of the earth
My négritude is neither tower nor cathedral
It plunges into the red flesh of the soil
It plunges into the blazing flesh of the sky
My négritude riddled with holes
The dense affliction of its worthy patience.[vi]

In the twenty-first century, Trinidadian artist Natalie Wood literally envisioned her négritude with holes and air pockets, using the artistic medium of corrugated cardboard to fashion stock Afrocentric figures. The allusions in her work to cheap, industrial packaging, like Césaire's strategic negations in the previous passage, replaced lofty platitudes with more pedestrian imagery, visually underscored in Wood's monochromatic paperboard designs.[vii]

Césaire's négritude, defying both deafness and noise, had a counterpart as well in British artist Sonia Boyce's 2007 double screen video ***Crop Over,*** which pairs the symmetry and decorum of an eighteenth century English estate with the bacchanalian cacophony of drummers, dancers, and stilt-walkers from Barbados. In juxtaposing Bajan folk characters Mother Sally and Shaggy Bear, Boyce shared Césaire's fascination with cultural surprise and wonderment, as experienced in the lives and rituals of common folk. Like many of Boyce's video projects, *Crop Over* argued against a doctrinaire, one-dimensional cultural identity, replacing that caricature with masquerading and gyrating philosophers, whose worldview juggled serious discourse and the pleasure principle in a delightful admixture.[viii]

Legacy 2:
Historical awareness

"In a scattered series of disparate islands" wrote C. L. R. James in ***The Black Jacobins,*** "the process [of history] consists of a series of uncoordinated periods of drift, punctuated by spurts, leaps and catastrophes … ." James, viewing the modern Caribbean through the political ups and downs of Saint-Domingue, likened historical progress to a multivalent, inventor's contraption, which starts, stops, revs up, and putters out at a moment's notice. In this same introductory passage James more conventionally summarized that "[the] history of the West Indies is governed by two factors, the sugar plantation and negro slavery."[ix] In framing human actions in the region through the socio-economic forces of agricultural production and conscripted labor based on racial difference, James reminded his readers of the necessity of a long, unvarnished memory: an historical awareness which, ideally, enabled students and others to learn invaluable lessons from the historical record and not make the same mistakes as their forbearers.

In contrast to C. L. R. James's history lessons, Bajan artist Ras Ishi Butcher tempered his historical didacticisms via a pictorial system of geometric and informational signage. *Piece of de Rock* (2006-8) – Butcher's trans-historical triptych featuring a khaki-suited, one-eyed colonizer, a West Indian chattel house, and an image grid of art historical references, both personal and indexical – privileged the historical record in Barbados and other former plantation-based economies (within the framework of a postmodern discourse on the 'dispossessed' in contemporary Caribbean society), but not to the detriment of an overarching design schema and an expressive, post-painterly approach to acrylic on canvas.[x]

Boat (Figure 1) – Jean-François Boclé's 2004-9 sculptural installation comprised of hundreds of broken-down, rope-bound cardboard boxes forming a boat's contours – nodded rather obliquely to Caribbean histories and cultures and, alternately, gestured to countless other circumstances where the transport of peoples and goods via the sea is fraught with political and economic significance. A Martiniquais living and working between Paris and Brussels, Boclé knows all too well about fugitive existences, and the role art can play in drawing greater attention

to this historical and contemporary reality. "America, where the Atlantic drowned, is my laboratory," stated Boclé. "It is the place from where I think. Our history is not so short; it goes beyond the sense of what is measurable: the immeasurableness of five centuries of colonial tragedies and of the trauma of the old frontiers of the world." Both a metaphorical boat and island, Boclé's cardboard assemblage carried the migrants' fantasies of escape and dreams of material accumulation, reconstituted and recycled from Boclé's and James's notions of historical progress and struggle.[xi]

Legacy 3:
World citizens and architects of modernity

Cultural theorist Kobena Mercer's important edited series on cross-cultural perspectives in the visual arts took on the enormous task of rewriting the conventional narratives of modernism in art, expanding the European and American art canons to include countless other artists and art works from across the globe and different cultural backgrounds. And the Tate Liverpool's 2010 exhibition, 'Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic', made manifest many of the same art historical addendums proffered in Mercer's series.[xii]

Invariably missing from the mostly black male correctives to the story of modernism in art, African American painter and Howard University art professor Loïs Mailou Jones traveled a long and distinguished career path in the twentieth century: a journey that took her through the era of the New Negro, a Négritude-infused France, the Haitian Renaissance in art, post-Independence Africa, the Black Arts Movement and, just before her death in 1998, a feminist-informed aesthetic.[xiii] From her part-time studio and home in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, circa 1982, Jones painted *Suriname*: an homage not only to South America's northern outpost of Black diasporic culture, but an abstract tribute to the women there, whose patchwork madras head-ties, shawls, and robes challenged, via Jones' vision, Piet Mondrian's distilled geometries.

Similarly Jones' fellow Washingtonian, Afro-Caribbean artist Simon Gouverneur, brought to the 1980s painting scene an arcane (but decidedly diasporic) pictorial symbolism. An artistic forerunner of Ras Ishi Butcher's post-painterly systemics, Gouverneur's 1986 painting *Charm* indexed shapes and numerals but, in contrast to other circa 1970s and 1980s informatic painters (like Robert Indiana, Alfred Jensen, and others), Gouverneur often included Caribbean-based signs in the mix (e.g. the idiomatic crab), expanding his systemics to include symbols and insignia from the Black Atlantic. When Césaire writes in ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal:*** "My name is Bordeaux and Nantes and Liverpool and New York and San Francisco. Not a corner of this world but carries my thumb print and my heel-mark on the backs of skyscrapers and my dirt,"[xiv] one can imagine Simon Gouverneur's universal crab, slowly crawling across the computer keyboards and digital screens of the West.[xv]

Notably, Cuba's thumb prints and heel marks (to paraphrase Césaire) are all over today's art scene, dialoging with other contemporary art

practitioners on an equitable and competitive basis. In C. L. R. James's re-issued edition of ***The Black Jacobins*** in the early 1960s, he wonders out loud about Cuba's own recent revolution and what that cataclysmic event would mean for the region as a whole. Flash forward fifty years to Los Carpinteros, a collective of two Cuban artists (Marco Antonio Castillo Valdés and Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez) who, in Cuba's part musical, part aesthetic traditions of *son* and *mambo* and *guanguanco*, played visual jokes and puns on the contemporary art scene. *16 m.,* a sculptural installation from 2010, is a *tour-de-force* of black humor or, actually, black 'black' humor, capturing postmodern angst (through the ripped out hearts and souls of an extended rack of suits), but in an Oldenburgian, supersized way.[xvi]

Legacy 4:
Art's liberatory effects

Commenting on the francophone idea of *négritude*, C. L. R. James wrote: "Négritude is what one race brings to the common rendezvous where all will strive for the new world of the poet's vision. The vision of the poet is not economics or politics, it is poetic, *sui generis*, true unto itself and needing no other truth."[xvii] While reflecting on this particular passage, I encountered Jamaican artist O'Neil Lawrence's *Discarded-Reliquary* (2008), an image which, in its conscious deployment of the black body in nature, unconsciously gestured towards the poetic. Like the nineteenth-century American painter Winslow Homer's watercolors of drowned and beached Bahamians after a hurricane, Lawrence's staged scenarios are not so much tragic as sensuous, combining figures and seascapes in a subliminal mix of eroticism and bodily transcendence: arguably two of the key ingredients for liberation.[xviii]

James's call for poetry's self-sufficiency was also present in the work of the Bahamian artist Janine Antoni. From her notorious performances in the 1990s (with her whole body and soap and chocolate), to some of her most recent works with video and sculpture (as, for example, her 2008 installation *T-E-A-R)*, Antoni never lost sight of art's poetic potential and its internal, unassailable truths. *T-E-A-R* combined a large video projection of an eye, whose blinking motions were carefully coordinated with the thunderous sounds of a demolition ball (theatrically lit and on display) crashing into its intended target.[xix] Like Aimé Césaire's use of a surrealistic language with the chance, say, of creating mental oases and inner explosions, Janine Antoni's works refused interpretive closure, freely brushing (or colliding) against histories and contemporary events with the hope; no, the expectation of *anything.*

Finding a rich, artistic resource in the black Atlantic landscape or, specifically, in the Caribbean seascape, was something the Dominican artist Tony Capellan explored in *Mar Invadido* (or the *Sea Invaded*, after Tony Cragg) from 2009. Installations like these which literally excavated the sea, shore and garbage heaps of contemporary society, reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's path-breaking assemblages from found objects and detritus in the 1950s, commented on a range of social issues, from

environmental pollution to the poetics of the discarded-and-rediscovered. But Capellan made a special statement in *Mar Invadido*, assembling and transforming industrial waste into a metaphorical sea, each container and utensil evidence of a life, a hand, and a touch: a thousand meaningful experiences squeezed into one, tiny space, and light years removed from the mundane realities of plastic.

Transforming the ordinary into the fabulous or, perhaps, the opposite (i.e. turning extraordinary ideas and images into something everyday, practical, and accessible) was also the project of Karyn Olivier, a U.S.-based, Trinidadian artist (Figure 2). Olivier's installation *ACA Foods Free Library* introduced art (and, by extension, poetry and fantasy) to the patrons of a Caribbean grocery store in Hartford, Connecticut, thus, reaching out to audiences who are not usually considered important or relevant to contemporary artists. Revealingly, it required a project like Olivier's *ACA Foods Free Library* to counter James's assertion that "the vision of the poet is **not** economics or politics." To the contrary, Olivier's grocery store intervention brought together the economic, the political, **and** the artistic/poetic into the literal storerooms and shelves of Caribbean immigrants, encouraging impromptu reflections and considerations of the meaning(s) of sustenance.[xx]

Legacy 5:

Ambition & will to tread heavily over social conventions

In *ACA Foods Free Library* Olivier destabilized more conventional notions of art, forcing viewers to set aside the idea of something pictorially familiar and comfortable, and to rethink the world of art (in terms of juxtaposition, disrupture, confrontation, and shock). Aimé Césaire put forth this concept in ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,*** proclaiming

I want to discover the secret of great speech and of great burning. I want to say storm. I want to say river. I want to say tornado. I want to say leaf, I want to say tree. I want to be soaked by every rainfall, moistened by every dew. As frenetic blood rolls on the slow current of the eye, I want to roll words like maddened horses like new children like clotted milk like curfew like traces of a temple like precious stones buried deep enough to daunt all miners. The man who couldn't understand me couldn't understand the roaring of a tiger.[xxi]

Césaire's taunt, "[t]he man who couldn't understand me, couldn't understand the roaring of a tiger", might also be applicable to the Jamaican American artist Renée Cox who, for the past fifteen years or so, has trafficked in an ironic realm of image-making which pairs visual surprise, humor, and racial/cultural discourse in a volatile cocktail that frequently elides a more pedestrian understanding of visual matters. An early work by Cox, ***The African Origin of Civilization*** (Figure 3), was a harbinger of future provocations by this important artist, in its satirical meditation on black nationalism and masculine posturing. Cox, like the best of West Indian calypso singers, raconteurs, and jokesters, always sends multiple, often conflicting messages in her art, and she never loses sight of the importance of humor and

symbolism in visual culture, even if it means losing more myopic, unsophisticated viewers in the process.[xxii] "We have lost the meaning of the symbol," Césaire lamented in 1944, presaging the interpretive roadblocks artists like Cox have faced in their refusal to "dumb down" their work. "The literal has devoured our world", Césaire continues, "[s]candalously."[xxiii]

But not in Haiti, where language, image, and performance are never what they superficially convey. And so it is no surprise that both James and Césaire, in their respective ways, celebrated the Haitian imaginary, and saw in it a template for the region and the world to rise up and embrace a spiritually-informed, utopic future. Nevertheless, this black Atlantic worldview (in the guise of négritude and through the lens of Haitian history) is not a sentimental, positivist perspective but, rather, alternately hot- and cold-blooded, realistic but not adverse to flights of fancy, and capable of balancing the life affirming and the inevitability of tragedy and death with agility, perspective, and style.

One can only imagine what James and Césaire would have said about the art of André Eugene, a member of the Haitian art collective Atis Rezistan, whose sculptures and assemblages of welded junkyard steel and recycled materials mightily contrast with the sensuous paintings and steel-drum cut-outs of earlier Haitian artists. Created in honor of Gede, the Haitian *lwa* of death (and of life's penultimate 'bottom line'), Eugene's work exuded both beauty and brutality and, if in affect only, joined scores of other diasporic artists/activists in prodding the public into seeing anew and taking action. Art historian LeGrace Benson had also noted Atis Rezistan's double-barreled impression, observing that "[like] Poussin, the Grand Rue artists know that Eros is the other face of Thanatos and the skull that requires feeding is the top portion of a sexually explicit body."[xxiv] That this call to aesthetic rupture and social insurgency can also operate on a more personal and miniscule scale was the message of Puerto Rican artist Miguel Luciano's *Platano Pride* (2006). The main publicity photograph for 'Kréyol Factory' (a major exhibition of Caribbean art on view in Paris, France in 2009), *Platano Pride* struck viewers in ways akin to Césaire's attestation "I want to discover, I want to say, I want to roll," etc: through the corporeal audacity of black youth, and the outrageous, multivalent, and seemingly eternal symbolism of the banana.[xxv]

Legacy 6:
Acknowledging the power of modern and contemporary mass media

Long before Miguel Luciano's *Platano Pride* and also before Jean-François Boclé's twenty-first century banana installations, ripening and rotting inside pristine art galleries, the Paris-based Haitian painter Hervé Télémaque thoroughly excavated this same diasporic iconography. Visually improvising in paint and a collage sensibility with the racially problematic advertisements for the French cereal *Banania* and other popular references, Télémaque channeled the circa 1960s preoccupations with mass media and popular culture in art, but inadvertently through C. L. R. James's observation that "it is the modern media of

mass communication that has turned essence into existence." Well, Télémaque might have rhetorically posed the question to James, exactly **what** essences and **whose** existences have the mass media metamorphosed? From colonial gall to Nouveau Réalistes *sang-froid?* From Pop Art parody to black Atlantic signification? Or, from French *divertissement* to Haitian carnaval?[xxvi]

Trinidadian artist Christopher Cozier was essentially asking these same questions about black culture and mass media in his 2006 installation *Available At All Leading Stores.* Again, comprising the very familiar cardboard boxes, but now silkscreened, Andy Warhol style, with the word "FEAR", Available At All Leading Stores interrogated the commerce and distribution of fear throughout the world. And fear is a product not unlike Luciano's platanos and Télémaque's *Banania*, in that the commodity – in the guise of the immigrant, the criminal, the terrorist, and the black body in general – is assumed to have originated in the African diaspora and, subsequently, gets distorted, replicated, dispersed and sold by powerful, media savvy others.

Another commodity which, along with fear, is often perceived as originating in the black Atlantic world and, yet, looms large and pervasive in the mass mediated consciousness of Europe and the United States is catastrophe. Although no region of the world is totally protected from catastrophic disasters, natural or man-made, the black Atlantic world, at least in the panoptic eyes of the mass media, is perceived of as predisposed to calamity and devastation. Artist Dawn DeDeaux, living and working in the Caribbean's northernmost community, New Orleans, Louisiana, knew firsthand this phenomena and its commodification, as evidenced in her *Hurricane Suite in Nine Movements:* floor-mounted light-boxes with nine, meteorological photo-transparencies of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina (Figure 4). Recalling Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar's photographs and light-box projections of genocides, the victims of political violence, and other atrocities, *Hurricane Suite in Nine Movements* turned the over-developed world's obsessions with the weather (and, by association, poor people's misfortunes due to natural disasters) into a soothsayer's pool, revealing the spinning and churning forces of destruction to the sage's overhead. "If not a consequence of global warming" DeDeaux wrote in 2005, "Katrina is the indifferent manifestation of a weather pattern to be measured in centuries, not seasons." "Thinking in such meteorological time, biblical scale and mythic proportion" she continued, "contemporary art is the smallest speck of time, and I am wiped off the map." The grand scale and super-attenuated focus of DeDeaux's photographs bring to mind the almost divine breadth and range of contemporary photographic technologies; imaging capabilities that, when directed towards peoples, places, and events in the black diaspora, almost always carried sinister, more problematic associations.[xxvii]

Legacy 7:
Woman-as-an-ideal

Hovering behind James's ode to the revolutionary zeal of Saint-Domingue's generals and ma-

chete-toting foot soldiers were the undulating, towering shadows of the undifferentiated black masses. Césaire, too, paid tribute to them: "those who know the humblest corners of the country of suffering." Both James and Césaire would have agreed that black women were especially representative of this army of might and suffering. "In the Maroon woman," wrote literary critic Michelle Cliff, "the identities of Warrior and Mother come together."[xxviii] And yet the social and political realities of Caribbean women are largely subsumed in James's and Césaire's writings by the fantastical: literary conventions and surrealistic imagery which transformed these women into larger-than-life archetypes and the carriers of the culture. "True civilization is in the realm of obsession" wrote Césaire in 1944. "Civilization is an absurd idea which, felt and lived in its entirety, by that very fact and by that fact alone, becomes true. I preach obsession. The true ideal: the 'possessed' woman."[xxix]

Was Césaire in this brief passage talking about an antiquated, socially misogynistic sense of women-as-property, or was he talking about a gender-specific propensity for focus, preoccupation, and spiritual surrender? The Haitian painter Luce Turnier, herself a single-minded interpreter of her people at mid-twentieth century, probably would have interpreted Césaire to mean the latter. A product of the famous Centre d'Art alongside Haiti's self-taught masters, Turnier knew what "possession" meant in the Black diaspora, and her mostly anonymous women, painted with overtures to Henri Matisse and Hector Hyppolite, conveyed that spirit of absorption and introspection from both traditions.[xxx] The Guyanese author, Beryl Gilroy (sociologist Paul Gilroy's mother), conjured in her writings similar female forces, terrestrial and otherworldly, inspired by her maternal grandmother's tales in which she "transformed the invisible into the tangible."[xxxi]

James's and Césaire's literary legacies not only offered diasporic delights to later generations; they reminded us of the occupational hazards of living in the Black Atlantic. In Césaire's ***Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*** one especially hears those stinging indignities and sharp blows, punctuated by poetry and prose. Riffing off seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European prints which depicted slave-era instruments of bodily confinement and punishment, Bajan artist Joscelyn Gardner created a virtual portrait gallery of diasporic victims: ghosts whose elegant, braided and corn-rowed coiffeurs intersect with leather collars and iron muzzles in a bizarre, sadistic arabesque.[xxxii] Gardner's *Creole Portraits II: "A Collection of Singular & Scarce Creole Portrait Heads to perpetuate the Memory of the WOMEN of EGYPT ESTATE in JAMAICA"* (2007) could just as well be the visual counterparts to Aimé Césaire when he wrote:

Wrap yourself around my new growth
Lie on my measured fingers
I give you my conscience and its beat of flesh
I give you the fires which grill my weakness
I give you the chain gang
I give you the marsh
I give you the Intourist of the triangular circuit
Wind consume
I give you my quick words
Consume and wrap ... .

Césaire's ecstatic give and take in this passage, moving from the corporeal to the political, begins and ends with an imagistic sense of enfolding, hugging, and wrapping. The universal "you" and recipient of his rhetorical largesse, like the "you" in the Isley Brothers *Voyage to Atlantis* lyrics ("I'll always come back to you"), is female, maternal, and alluring, capable of enveloping everyone and everything within her purview. This all-consuming, wrapping metaphor in the Black diaspora is not only aquatic and symbolically female, but manifested in the very image of the black woman and her millennial love affair with the draped and cloth-adorned head and body. Known primarily for her collaged and printed books, the Surinamese artist Patricia Kaersenhout digitally inserted herself in Jan Vermeer's well known *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Figure 5), wrapping her own head in the turban of one of art history's most iconic models. As if to claim for herself this literal and figural mantle from Dutch art history, Kaersenhout joined James and Césaire in troubling the received versions of history, and like her Surinamese sisters (as Loïs Mailou Jones does in her painting *Suriname*), Kaersenhout unraveled and cut up the imported madras for a new set of head-ties and bandages.[xxxiii]

"And as you wrap kiss me with violent trembling",

Césaire continued:

Kiss me until I am the furious WE
Kiss, kiss US
but also bite
bite to draw blood from our blood!
kiss, my purity is bound to yours alone
but then kiss
like a field of just filaos
in the evening
our variegated purities
bind me, bind me without remorse
bind me with your vast arms to the luminous day
bind my black resonance to the very navel of the world
bind me, bind me, bitter fraternity
strangle me with your lasso of stars, then rise
Dove
rise
rise
rise ... [xxxiv]

In this salvo to an all-enveloping (and sometimes all-consuming) black Atlantic, Aimé Césaire offered us a gift. An animated gift which kisses and bites us, opens flesh and mixes blood, hugs and strangles us, but ultimately lifts us up, turning us into sojourners, setting sail on a spiritually liberating voyage, via C. L. R. James's Saint-Domingue and tomorrow's Caribbean, to Atlantis. *Voyage d'Atlantide.* A place that is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, and where, if only in our minds and souls, we will always, always return.

NOTES

i. ***Voyage to Atlantis,*** on The Isley Brothers, 'Go For Your Guns' (T-Neck ZK 34432), 1977.

ii. C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins: ***Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*** (1938); reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1963; Aimé Césaire, Return to My Native Land (1938); reprint, John Berger and Anna Bostock, tranls., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970); Paul Gilroy, ***The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*** (London: Verso, 1993); and Robert Farris Thompson, ***African and Afro-American Art: The Transatlantic Tradition*** (New York: Museum of Primitive Art, 1969).

iii. For a discussion of 1970s music and its overtures to afro-futurism, see Kodwo Eshun, ***More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*** (London: Quartet Books, 1998).

iv. For examples of the kinds of works Clarke created during this period, see LeRoy Clarke, Taste of endless fruit - ***Love Poems and Drawings*** (Brooklyn and Port-of-Spain: self-published, 1974).

v. ***Siempre Vuelvo: Colografías de Belkis Ayón*** (Havana: Galería Habana, 2000).

vi. Aimé Césaire, ***Return to My Native Land***, 75.

vii. "Natalie Wood," in Christopher Cozier and Tatiana Flores, eds., ***Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*** (Washington, DC: Art Museums of the Americas / Organization of American States, 2011), 98-9.

viii. Allison Thompson, "Sonia Boyce and ***Crop Over," Small Axe*** 13 (June 2009): 148-63.

ix. C. L. R. James, ***The Black Jacobins,*** 391.

x. I write at length about Butcher's art in Richard J. Powell, "The Systems and Semiotics in Ras Ishi Butcher," in ***Ras Ishi: Secret Diaries*** (Edgehill, St. Thomas, Barbados: Miller Publishing Company Ltd., 2009).

xi. Jean-François Boclé, "Terra Incognita – Part 1," last modified September 12, 2009, http://www.moba.be/press_bocle_bio.htm.

xii. Kobena Mercer, ed., ***Cosmopolitan Modernities*** (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005); and Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, eds., ***Afro-Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic*** (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010).

xiii. Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, ***The Life and Art of Loïs Mailou Jones*** (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994).

xiv. Aimé Césaire, ***Return to My Native Land***, 52.

xv. ***Icon Culture: The Late Paintings of Simon Gouverneur*** (McLean, VA: McLean Project for the Arts, 2000).

xvi. ***Los Carpinteros Handwork: Constructing the World*** (Köln: Walther König, 2011).

xvii. C. L. R. James, ***The Black Jacobins***, 401.

xviii. "O'Neil Lawrence," in Kristina Newman-Scott and Yona Backer, eds., ***Rockstone & Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art / Real Art Ways 4*** (February 2010): 16-7.

xix. On display in New Orleans, Louisiana during ***Prospect. 1. New Orleans*** (November 1, 2008 – January 18, 2009).

xx. "Karen Olivier," in Kristina Newman-Scott and Yona Backer, eds., ***Rockstone & Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art / Real Art Ways 5*** (March 2010): 18-9.

xxi. Aimé Césaire, ***Return to My Native Land***, 49.

xxii. Among the very few scholars who see Renée Cox's work as inherently political is Arthur Danto, "American self-consciousness in politics and art," ***Artforum*** 43 (September 2004): 206-9. For a study of the socio-political strategies in African American and Afro-Caribbean humor, see Simon Weaver, "The 'Other' Laughs Back: Humour and Resistance in Anti-Racist Comedy," ***Sociology*** 44 (2010): 31-48.

xiii. Aimé Césaire, "Calling the Magician: A Few Words for a Caribbean Civilization," (1944); reprint, Michael Richardson, ed., in ***Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*** (London: Verso, 1996), 121.

xxiv. LeGrace Benson, "Atis Rezistans: The Place, The Video, The Academy," ***Journal of Haitian Studies*** 15 (Spring 2009): 358-64.

xxv. ***Kréyol Factory: des artistes interrogent les identités creoles*** (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2009).

xxvi. Anne Tronche, ***Hervé Télémaque*** (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), and C. L. R. James, ***The Black Jacobins***, 407.

xxvii. Dawn DeDeaux, "On the Death of New Orleans," ***Art in America*** 93 (November 2003): 47.

xviii. Michelle Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter, or Into the Interior," in Noreen Tomassi, Mary Jane Jacobs and Ivo Mesquita, eds., ***American Visions/Visiones de la Américas: Artistic and Cultural Identity in the Western Hemisphere*** (New York: ACA Books, 1994), 158.

xxix. Aimé Césaire, ***"Calling the Magician …:*** 121.

xxx. John H. Hewitt, "The Evolution of Luce Turnier" ***Black Art: an international quarterly*** 3 (1978): 48-63.

xxxi. Beryl Gilroy, "Writing, Ancestry, Childhood and Self," in Carole Boyce Davies and 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, eds., ***Moving Beyond Boundaries, Vol. 1: International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing*** (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 53-60.

xxxii. Charmaine Nelson, "Black Hair/Her-stories: Joscelyn Gardner's Inverted Portraits" in ***Joscelyn Gardner/White Skin, Black Kin: 'Speaking the Unspeakable*** (St. Ann's Garrison, St. Michael, Barbados: The Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 2004).

xxxiii. Anthropologists Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits explored these fashion statements in "The Koto-Missi," in ***Suriname Folk-Lore*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 3-8. Also see: Elmer E. P. Kolfin, "Een lenticular van slavernij. Verschuivende perspectieven in de verbeelding van de slavernij: van Frans Post tot Patricia Kaersenhout," in R. de Jong and A. Zondervan, eds., ***De kleine geschiedenis van slavernij. Sporen in Amsterdam II*** (Amsterdam, 2003): 13-34.

xxxiv. Aimé Césaire, ***Return to My Native Land,*** 91-2

DAVID DAMOISON **2 SEMAINES ET DEMIE. IMPRESSIONS DE LIVERPOOL**
Year: 2010
Size: 229cm x 426cm
Media: Digigraphies

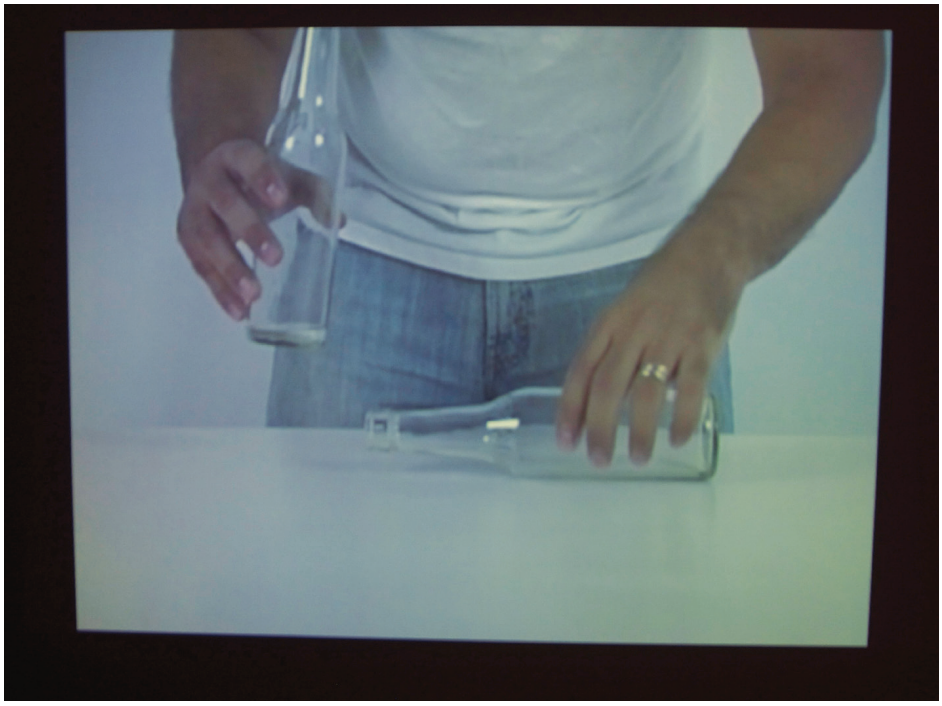
DAVID DAMOISON **DETAIL FROM 2 SEMAINES ET DEMIE. IMPRESSIONS DE LIVERPOOL**

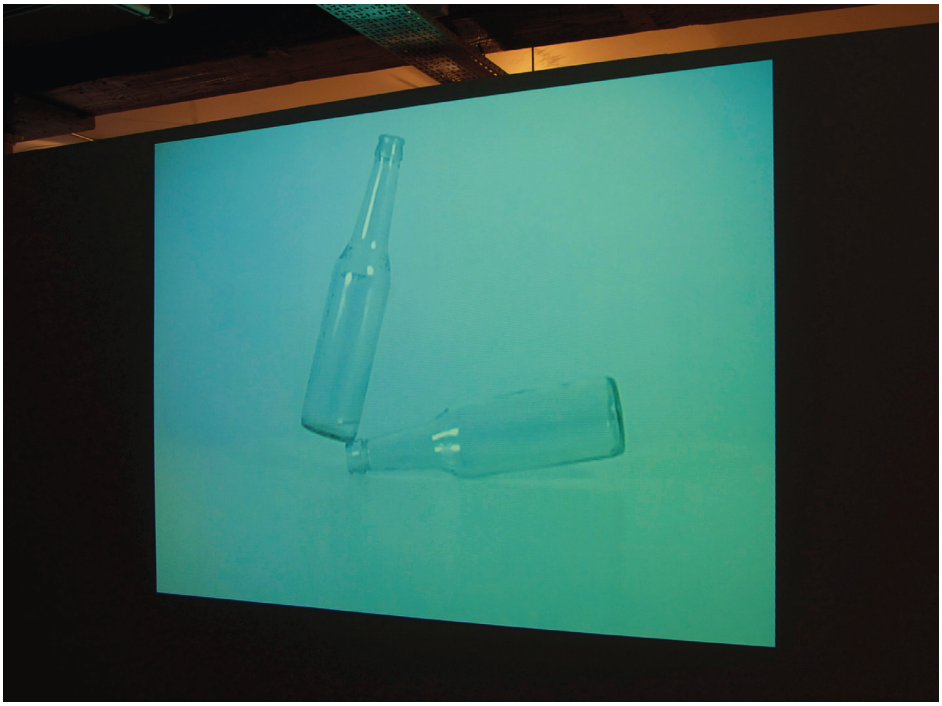
CHRISTIAN BERTIN **SINOBOL À VENDRE**

Year: 2010

Size: Various Dimensions

Media: Wood, plexiglass, books, bottles of syrup, bicycle, umbrella, Madras fabric, gloves, carpenter's tools, tarp, radio, mobile phone, salted Cod, Ghana oil, Corned Beef, found objects





HEINO SCHMID '<'

Year: 2010

Size: Various Dimensions

Media: Digital video - 1 minute 51 seconds (looped)

JOHN BEADLE **LIVE LOAD**

Year: 2010

Size: Various Dimensions

Media: Wood, cardboard, jute, metal, varnish charcoal, asphaltum

LYNN PAROTTI **THE SPACE BETWEEN WANT**

Year: 2010

Size: Various Dimensions

Media: Graphite on paper, acrylic, spray paint

BLUE CURRY **UNTITLED**

Year: 2010

Size: 100cm x 100cm x 130cm

Media: Customised cement mixer, sun cream

LAVAR MUNROE **THIS IS MY ACCOUNT**

Year: 2010

Size: Various Dimensions

Media: Graphite on paper, acrylic, spray paint

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