A woman with glasses and a green shirt is looking at a large mural. The mural features a figure with a sword and a shield, set against a background of stylized patterns.

JESS HILL



BROWN

Racial Slavery

A man is painting a mural. The mural is colorful and abstract, with orange, red, and green tones. The man is wearing a dark shirt and is focused on his work.

RÉNOLD LAURENT

Marronage

A man with a beard and glasses is working on a sculpture. He is wearing a striped shirt and is using a tool to shape a piece of material. The sculpture is a stylized figure with a large head and a small body.

EDOUARD DUVAL-CARRIÉ

& Freedom

About the Center

The Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice is a scholarly research center with a public humanities mission. Recognizing that racial and chattel slavery were central to the historical formation of the Americas and the modern world, the CSSJ creates a space for the interdisciplinary study of the historical forms of slavery while also examining how these legacies shape our contemporary world.

Center for the Study of
SLAVERY
& **JUSTICE**

Racial Slavery Marronage & Freedom

A **10**TH ANNIVERSARY RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

Edouard Duval-Carrié

Jess Hill

Rénold Laurent

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Racial Slavery, Marronage & Freedom: **A Different Story of Freedom**

There is a different story of human freedom other than the conventional ones told to us. In the conventional story of freedom, freedom is sometimes an ideal; other times it is connected to individual choice and then sometimes it is understood as a negative kind of freedom – a freedom from. All these versions of freedom primarily focus on politics, or our capacity to purchase a consumer good. But there is another kind of freedom, one which emerged from racial slavery: Black freedom.

Historical sociologists tell us that in Western society the ideas and practices of freedom emerged in Greek slave society. One central meaning of this freedom was the right to participate in political life. Over time in the West, this idea became dominant and within the framework of the American and French revolutions in the 18th century, the dominant idea of freedom was linked to that of political liberty. Just recall all the talk and proclamations about liberty during the American Revolution. None of it was meant for the enslaved Africans nor the dispossessed Indigenous population. Then the prevailing idea of “slavery” for the white male settler was a lack of political equality, not the racial slavery nor indentured servitude of the Indigenous population. Let’s just recall Stephen Hopkins’ best-selling pamphlet at the time, *Rights of the Colonies Examined*, in which he argued for political independence and political equality (right to vote) but was silent about the system of racial slavery. So, the constitutive grounds for the making of America was racial slavery, Indian genocide and dispossession. We cannot think of the historical significances and meanings of America today without recognizing these historical grounds. Yet, if the dominant idea and practices of freedom in the Americas were linked to ideas of political liberty and then economic choice, there was another, a distinctive idea and practice which emerged from the enslaved African population in the Americas.

Racial slavery was a specific form of human domination. As a social system, it was violent with those holding power doing so absolutely. Du Bois noted it was a social system in which another human being was under the arbitrary will of another. In such a system, freedom means non-domination. When we add to this mix, anti-Black racism, then freedom also becomes a set of practices which redefines what it means to be human. So what we have here is a history of Black freedom in the Americas – a series of practices and ideas in which the enslaved seek to create new conceptions and new possibilities. Under the social system of racial slavery, these ideas and practices of freedom are what we now call Black abolitionism. These practices and ideas ranged from everyday refusals, resistance, rebellion and where and when possible, revolution. One of the most critical of these revolutions was the dual Haitian Revolution of the late 18th century. The Revolution, like all major world revolutions, placed new political and deeply philosophical questions on the table – what could freedom look like when human domination as a form of oppression and the “aristocracy of the skin” are overthrown? These were an entirely different set of questions and issues than those posed in both the French and American Revolutions. They are as yet unanswered. But the fact that enslaved Africans opened the possibility for us to think about these is one reason why the Haitian Revolution is a world historical one. Another practice of freedom by enslaved Africans was marronage. In the Americas, wherever there was racial slavery, the enslaved ran away to form free communities. To be a Maroon was to be free in a social system of racial slavery. Equiano, the former enslaved writer, once noted that slavery was a state of “constant war.” In this war, marronage was about becoming the site of a free Black community.

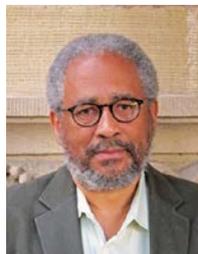
Complex practices of freedom continue to animate Black struggles. Because of this, for our 10th-anniversary exhibition, we felt it was opportune for us to invite Edouard Duval-Carrié, Jess Hill, and Rénoald Laurent, three artists we have worked with in the past, to produce new art that would engage this theme of racial slavery and freedom.

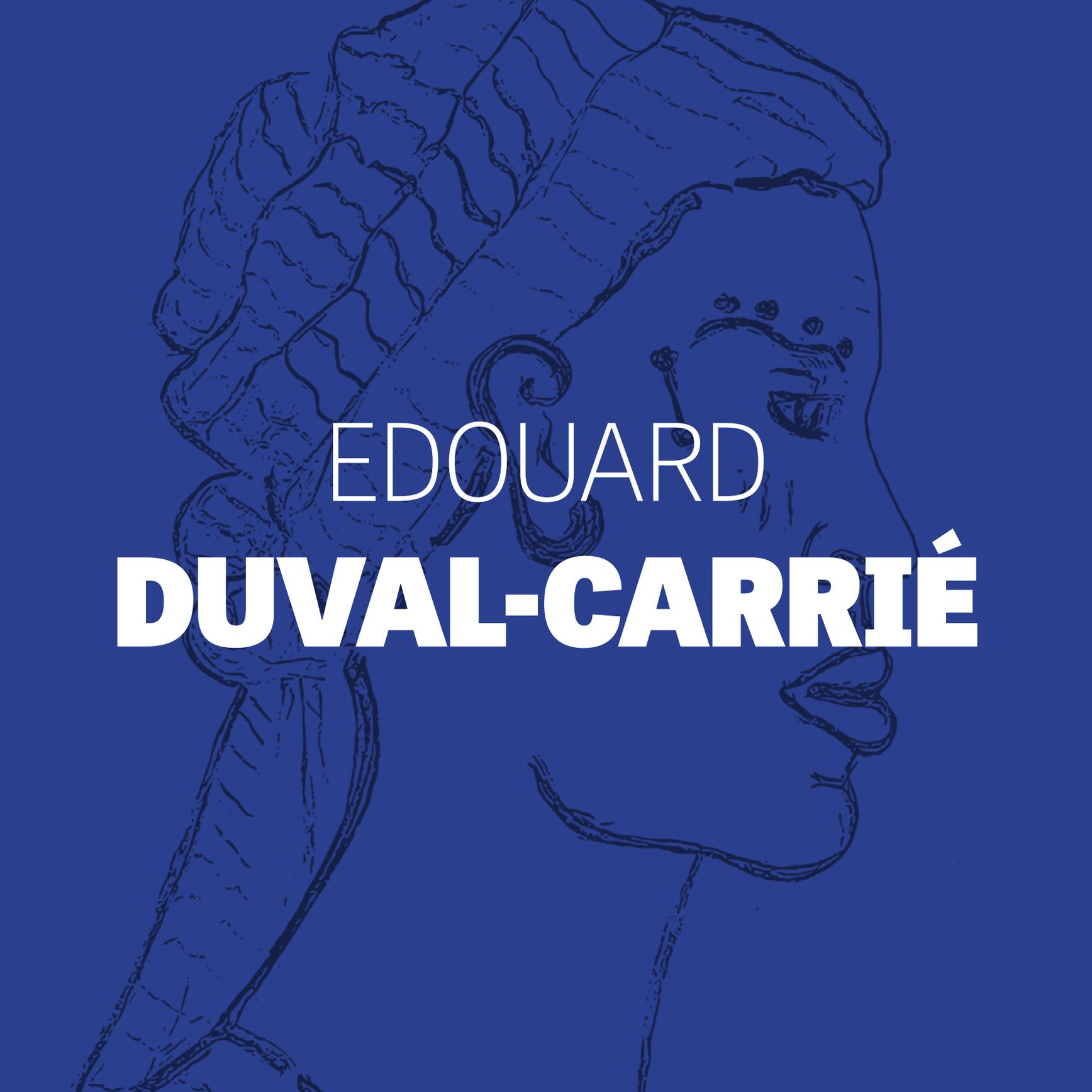
I want to thank Edouard, Jess, and Rénoald for their work on this project. I want to thank all the persons who have worked to make the exhibition possible: Erin Wells, Mark Foster, Benjamin Kaplan and the CSSJ staff.

In the end, this exhibition is both an echo and reminder: an echo of the struggles past and a reminder about those to come. Freedom remains the ground on which we can all create a more humane world. But, it is not the freedom of political liberty, nor consumer choice: it’s a freedom which grounds itself upon the ending of all forms of human domination. The first enslaved African discerned this and sang about it. Today, we walk and trod those grounds until we are free.

ANTHONY BOGUES

Asa Messer Professor of Humanities and Critical Theory, Professor of Africana Studies, Director of the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, Professor of History of Art and Architecture





EDOUARD
DUVAL-CARRIÉ



Edouard Duval-Carrié

is a multidisciplinary artist and curator based in Miami, Florida. Born and raised in Haiti, Duval-Carrié fled the regime of “Papa Doc” Duvalier as a teenager and subsequently resided in locales as diverse as Puerto Rico, New York, Montreal, Paris, and Miami. His works address the complexities of the Caribbean and its diaspora.

He has exhibited in major museums, art institutions, and galleries in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Some of his exhibitions are: *The Art of Embedded Histories* (2019); *Decolonizing Refinement* (2018-2019); *Mémoires Encastées/Memory Windows* (2018). Duval-Carrié’s works were recently shown at the fifteenth edition of *documenta*, a prestigious international exhibition held in Kassel (2022). In 2018, Duval-Carrié was the inaugural recipient of The Ellie’s Michael Richards Award given to a Miami-based artist who has cultivated an original practice over a long period of time. He has collaborated with the Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice on several exhibition projects.

Artist Statement

The Caribbean has always been a theater for historical colonial encounters. These encounters produced new people, new religions, new cultures, and new economies – a New World. This so-called New World created a historical moment of relentless change, altered meanings, and adaptations. Central to these adaptations was the production of sugar on plantations which also became scenes of slave rebellions and the Haitian Revolution. Plantations became sites of death and life while creating new tastes and desires in the Americas and Europe. Many Caribbean artists since have been focused on how to grapple with the creation, constant unfolding, and afterlives of the colonial encounter, and what these produced within the everyday.

The symbolic and cultural histories of Haiti have been one powerful and distinctive thread in the ways that Caribbean artists have sought to interpret the colonial encounter and its consequences. Described by the Haitian intellectual Stephen Alexis as “marvelous realism,” Haitian art as a current within Caribbean art has been seminal. Within this frame, the work of Edouard Duval-Carrié finds its focus. His artistic themes are many variations on the symbolic and historic life of the region. His work weaves the aesthetic with the everyday, creating signs that represent a Caribbean Diaspora in motion. He paints and sculpts the loas or deities of Vodou, showcasing how they migrated from the Caribbean to North America. In these and other works, he is preoccupied with history and the creation of memories without histories, but also with the politics of history and knowledge. His paintings and sculptures explore how the region’s flora and fauna were intrinsic to the colonial enterprise, and the ways in which our natural environment has itself been transformed into a new problem of our times. Throughout all of Carrié’s work is the drive to create a visual grammar of the region as an experimental colorist and mixed-media artist.



Cécile Fatiman,
2022

Edouard
Duval-Carrié

waterjet cut
aluminum
72" x 44" x 12"

PHOTO: MARTINA TUATY

Edouard Duval-Carrié

THROUGHOUT his decades-long career, internationally renowned visual artist Edouard Duval-Carrié has uncovered the connective tissue that binds the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the modern world. As a Haitian American, he often relies on the particular historical circumstances of the Haitian Revolution as a discursive foundation from which to explore the broad impact of the institution of chattel slavery and its aftereffects in Haiti and anywhere else that found itself mired in the economic and cultural networks of the slave trade. For the artist, this discourse maps onto his own biographical trajectory of diasporic migration between nodes of the Black Atlantic world. Born in Haiti, Duval-Carrié and his family left the country for Puerto Rico when he was young, fleeing the authoritarian regime of François Duvalier. As an adult, he returned to Port-au-Prince for a time, lived for many years in Paris, and now calls Miami home. In Duval-Carrié's art, it always comes back to Haiti, even when the connections are not so obvious. Wherever in the world his art practice takes him, the artist continually demonstrates the primacy of Haiti's role in the histories of trans-Atlantic slavery, and how the effects of the Haitian Revolution persist into the present day.

For the subject of his work commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice (CSSJ) at Brown University, Duval-Carrié has chosen Cécile Fatiman. Cécile Fatiman, is a name that most U.S. Americans would

not recognize. In Haiti, however, she has earned a legendary status similar to that of Harriett Tubman. The written archives reveal little about Fatiman, other than that she was an enslaved woman said to have performed religious rites at a ceremony at *Bwa Kayiman* in the woods of Northern Haiti on a late-August night in 1791.¹ This ceremony, conducted alongside an enslaved man named Dutty Boukman (for whom there is significantly more archival evidence), launched the uprisings that began the tumultuous thirteen-year struggle of the Haitian Revolution which would lead, eventually, to Haiti's independence in 1804. Like an Old Testament prophet herself, Fatiman appealed to divine forces – the Abrahamic god, the deities and spirits from West and Central Africa, and any others who could intercede on behalf of the Africans to exact retribution against their enslavers and correct the injustices of slavery.

For Duval-Carrié's sculptural rendering of Fatiman, he plays on the motif of the bust, a commemorative medium so often reserved in the Western context to memorialize heads of state, influential thinkers, "Great Men," and the like. Here, we see her profile cut from aluminum. There does not exist, as far as we know, any contemporaneous visual evidence to guide Duval-Carrié in his depiction of Fatiman's physical features. Yet we feel a certain power, we are sized by a face which has the mark of pain but the courage and determination of revolt. She looks straight ahead, searching for a new horizon.



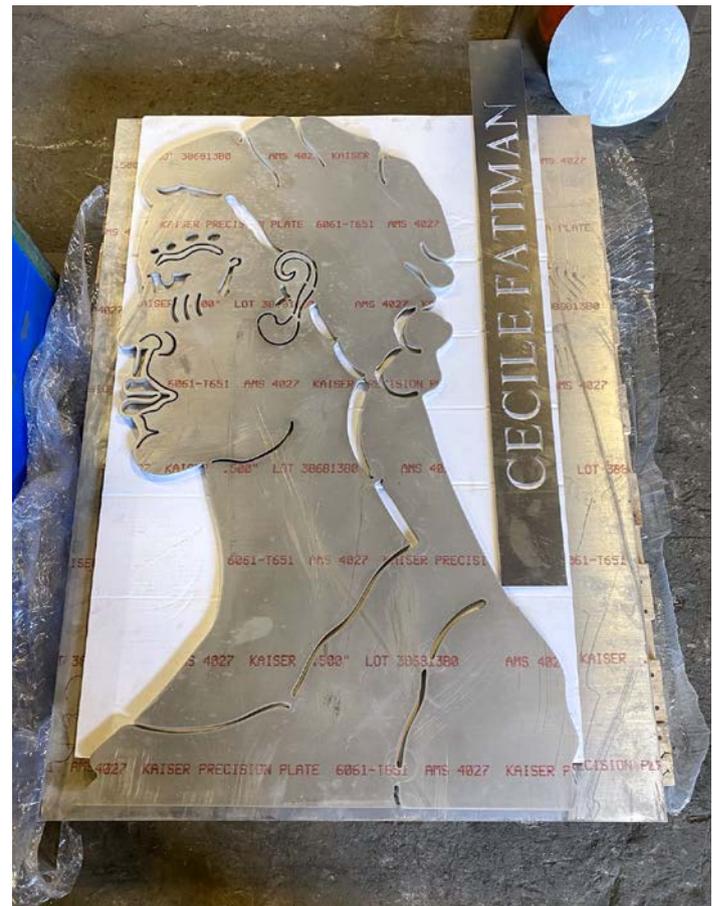
Preliminary figure sketch of Cécile Fatiman

and the Art of Memory

Duval-Carrié's profile portrait of Fatiman marks the latest in a series of collaborations between the artist and CSSJ. Previously, in 2019, a selection of his recent works were displayed between two locations at Brown University – the Cohen Gallery and the CSSJ gallery. As is typical for the artist, the chosen works focused on historical subjects related to Haiti and the Black Atlantic world: in this case, King Henri Christophe of Haiti took center stage but was reimagined by the artist by drawing from the historical fiction of Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier.² Through these multi-leveled adaptations, Duval-Carrié interrogates the construction of history according to dominant epistemologies. Whose stories are excluded from the official renderings of historical memory? How does a national citizenry recognize and remember the contributions of non-dominant groups? How is the act of writing history complicit in “silencing” the actions of those who do not hold political or cultural power, as late anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot has instructed us?³ Duval-Carrié extended these questions to the histories of racialized violence in his *Memory Windows*, several of which were included in the same exhibition. Cast in colorful resin and backlit, these works include drawings of personages from the artist's previous work, repurposed photographic images, recreations of small ornamental tchotchkes, and found objects such as seashells or the bodies of insects. Such an array mimics the ways in which human beings attempt to capture the past through acts of collecting, cataloging, preserving, and reinforcing the notion that to “remember” is an action that refers to the past but is constantly reframed in the present.

This work of exposing the deep connections of chattel slavery is the very mission of the CSSJ, one that investigates, uncovers, and foregrounds the ways in which slavery has shaped our laws, institutions, and society. By its very nature,

the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a global endeavor that violently ripped apart and haphazardly reassembled a vastly diverse array of peoples, cultures, languages, and religions in new and strange lands. While the shape of the power dynamics therein took on characteristics that fit each locality, those dynamics relied on fundamental principles that



valued human beings on a scale determined by race and ancestry. Fatiman recognized the abhorrent injustices that came with the institution of slavery and remains a seminal figure of the New World. For Brown's campus, this sculpture makes a physical and aesthetic declaration of the important work undertaken by the CSSJ to uncover and illuminate the fundamental underpinnings of oppressive systems so often repressed in self-congratulatory foundational myths. By memorializing Fatiman for the first time, Duval-Carrié and CSSJ declare the importance of such an undertaking and make a case for the continued work of reassessing and unsettling our national origin stories, so often taken for granted.

PETER L. HAFFNER, PH.D.

Assistant Professor of Art History and affiliated faculty in African and African American Studies at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky

¹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: 2004), 100.

² Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World* (New York: 1957).

³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: 1995).



JESS
HILL



Jess Hill received her BFA in Printmaking, with a minor in Art History, at the University of West Georgia. She is a recipient of the 2017 Emerging Artist Residency from the Atlanta Printmakers Studio and was the Heimark Artist in Residence at Brown University's Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice in 2018. She has been a part of several group exhibitions across the United States.

Jess Hill is a mother of three beautiful children. She is currently living and working in Atlanta, Georgia, where she was also born and raised. Her work focuses on how we view each other through the prisms of race and gender. She explores and celebrates the differences among the human race.

Other themes that appear in her work include class, religion, and cultural patterns. She uses printmaking and mixed media methods in expressing her art form. Her ultimate goal is to dismantle the barriers and institutions that allow human beings to believe they are separate from each other so we can truly embrace each other's differences.

Artist Statement

Growing up in the South, I learned about slavery very early in life and realized its effects on many cultures. I am Black and I am a woman; I am both all the time. No matter how much I may try, I cannot escape the remnants of slavery, the subjugation of patriarchy and the harsh reality of living in an "imperialist-white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchal world" (a term coined by bell hooks: author, feminist, and social activist).

Slavery in the United States, partly motivated by capitalism, pitted poor whites against poor Blacks, mulatto Africans against dark-skinned Africans, man against woman, kinky hair against straighter hair. Today, the media continues to perpetuate these divisions so much so that other countries uphold the same ideals of whiteness and masculinity that torment African descendants and people of all genders.

These divisive labels and categories are simply distractions that keep us under the illusion of being separate. Yes, each cultural group is different, with different traditions, religions, and values. I search for things that unify the human race: we all are born and we all die. No one chooses what they are born into. Realizing that these groupings are uncontrollable, one can relinquish the notion that people must adhere to a specific ideology.

Historical and present-day issues have heavily influenced my work. Cultural patterns and humanism were my starting points in the exploration of unity. In my work, I use brown paper bags, newspapers, textiles, fantasy, African Folklore, quilted patterns, and symbolisms as representational items.

I explore myself and my family through other cultures as a way to fill the void of my estranged American culture. I am intrigued by cultures that are still connected to their historical traditions, customs, ancestors, and customary ways of life. Enslaved Africans were stripped of their cultural identity in an effort to demoralize and dehumanize them. My work gives back the power and right to identity through positive images of all humans as strong beings. My goal is to change common thinking from individuality to global similarity. Seeing 'me' in 'them' and 'them' in 'me'; this is the first step to unity and peace among all.



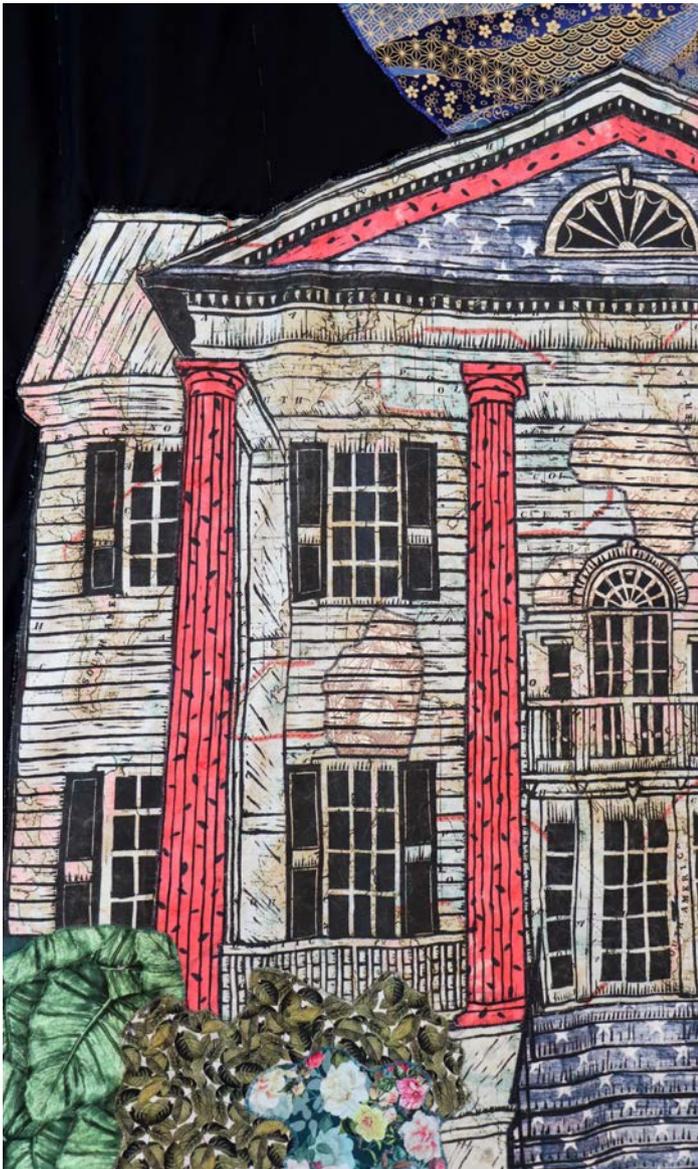
*Oh Say Can
You See America
and Its Birth, 2022*

Jess Hill

mixed media
99" x 71"

PHOTO: JESS HILL

Inheritance and Memory:



BLACK IDENTITY in America is rooted in the ambiguous memory of enslavement and its complex narratives that conjure a collective insistence to thrive in the face of adversity. Black artists occupy a nuanced position in their ability to maintain the integrity of what it means to be both Black and creative, shaping new perspectives on the social constructs that link the contemporary moment to the past.

A correlation can be made between the significance of artmaking and the sacrifices of formerly enslaved Africans throughout the period of the transatlantic slave trade. Systemic inequities that undergird artmaking in the form of disproportionate pay and a lack of care surrounding the conditions of life outside of art may find their roots in the legacy of a plantation economy. The perpetual nature of producing new works often relegates artists to sharecropping their imaginations for the sake of visibility and acclaim – not far removed from the forced labor of the enslaved to produce cash crops that sustained the development of the New World. Amid the harsh repression of enslavement, our ancestors claimed the emancipatory power of creativity, as a means of liberation from the shackles of bondage, despite the continued subjection they faced. Artists of today can reclaim the ancestral memory of this power to subvert limitations as a moral compass to reckoning with the aftermath of slavery.

Contemporary visual artist and printmaker Jess Hill dedicates her art practice to creatively representing the experiences of Black women. Carrying out an inheritance of aesthetics rooted in matrilineal craft traditions, Hill's embodied artistry infuses her own personal experiences as a mother with the power to create as an extension of one's inner knowing. Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Hill's experiences in the American South and contemplations on race, gender, and identity show up throughout her work. Jess Hill received a BFA in Printmaking from the University of West Georgia

The Artwork of Jess Hill

and engages in the process of relief carving – the oldest form of printmaking. The printmaking process requires a level of intuitive awareness as the artist guides carving tools to create textural depth through directional lines, developing an image in reverse. The artist recognizes that this process yields therapeutic benefits despite its physical demands on the body. The scale and meticulous details of Jess Hill's work, paired with artistic skills in drawing, painting, photography, and sewing, invoke themes of social justice and a desire to mitigate the ills of marginalization.

In commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice at Brown University, Jess Hill was invited to create new work for the Center's retrospective exhibition. Hill pays homage to formerly-enslaved Africans whose captivity and sacrifice loom over the experiences of Black people today. Hill says, "I think that they are worthy of having their stories told: they are worthy of being remembered." *Oh Say, Can You See: America and Its Birth* (2022) depicts the common iconographies associated with the history of enslavement – a three-part textile portrait featuring the stylistic interpretation of a slave ship, cotton field, and the "big house" plantation home; symbolic markers of the geographical landscapes that brought about ancestral terror.

Rather than printing on paper, Hill's composition makes use of fabrics, juxtaposing a spectrum of red, white, and blue colors with printed textiles featuring the motifs of an atlas, stars, and heaps of cotton – a canny way of exploring the correlation between slave labor and the textile production industry. Viewers are called to consider how these symbols have been imprinted on our collective consciousness and impacted our understanding of the Black American experience. This take on the artist's desire to honor the experiences of the formerly enslaved by extracting them from the landscape explores



In the Land of the Free and the Home of the Slaughtered, 2016, relief print on cotton fabric, 48" x 65"

concepts of non-presence as a means of honoring the flesh for the way it evades and occupies traumatic spaces.

Hill's latest piece builds upon themes expressed in her former work, *In the Land of the Free and the Home of the Slaughtered* (2016), which explores themes of enslavement through the lens of her mother's experience working at the Boone's Hall Plantation in Charleston, South Carolina. Required to wear the attire of an enslaved woman during the parties they would host, Hill explored the trauma transmitted through the generations of her bloodline. The triptych features Hill's self-portrait alongside depictions of her mother and oldest daughter dressed in Victorian garments; weapons in hand and recollections of enslavement beneath their skirts. Hill attributes the inspiration for the center panel in the triptych to *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* by Betye Saar which features the figure of a mammy, a caricature of a Black slave, with a broom in one hand and a rifle in the other rebelling against her past enslavement.

At the root of Black resistance is creativity. Art in this instance serves as a liberatory function, rooted in the power to imagine and direct the creation of new structures reflecting our values. Black people are gifted with a cultural inheritance to create, not solely in response to the oppressive conditions that propel creativity as a basis of survival, but through the rich legacy that connects back to African paradigms of thought and expressions. “My identity as a black woman is shaped by the experiences of Black women before me, and I also think that my experiences are shaping a new identity for generations to come.” – Jess Hill.

DANIELLE MASON

Cultural preservationist and scholar-practitioner engaged in the matrilineal transmission of womb wisdom through writing, ethnography, and curriculum development

The background is a complex, abstract composition of swirling, organic shapes. The color palette is dominated by warm tones: various shades of orange, from light peach to deep, dark burnt orange, interspersed with muted greens and earthy reds. The textures are varied, with some areas appearing smooth and others more textured, suggesting a layered or perhaps stone-like surface. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and organic complexity.

RÉNOLD
LAURENT



Rénoald Laurent was born in Source Bretoux, a village at the foot of the Marbial Valley – a few kilometers from the city of Jacmel, Haiti. At the age of ten, he began to draw and paint under the direction of his father, Maccène Laurent. Soon he abandoned the style of his father and began to create new perspectives and techniques in his paintings, eventually settling on abstraction as his mode of visual communication. He views abstract painting as the most expressive means to explore the extraordinary powers of the imagination.

He has collaborated with several cultural institutions in Haiti including the Haitian Art Museum in Port-au-Prince. In 2019, he was the Heimark Artist in Residence at Brown University's Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice. His work has been exhibited several times in Haiti and in other countries.

Artist Statement

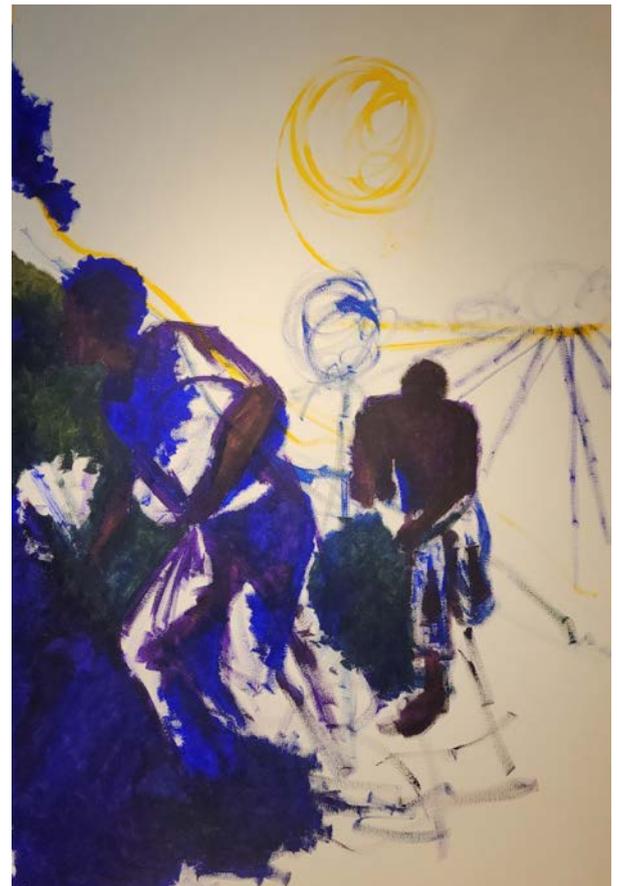
My main subject is communication: whether it's a dialogue between the materials I choose to work with and the subject matter of the painting itself; a dialogue among the shapes, colors, shadows, and light that I paint; the ongoing dialogue between the different collections of my work as I change and develop as an artist; or the various exchanges that occur between my paintings and the diverse spectators who confront, encounter, and ponder my work. Always hoping to encourage these different forms of communication, I try to make each of my paintings at once an alluring and complex topic of conversation. So, for example, my paintings will broach elusive, contested, and personal topics such as "memory," "resistance" and "spirituality." My paintings try to invite a viewer's take on the multiplicity of their meanings.

Very early on in my career as an artist, I turned to my roots, the ancestral past of my country, Haiti, to enrich my artistic vision by drawing inspiration from the tangible and intangible aspects of Haiti's heritage. Because Haiti has a strong sense of history and heritage that travels and inspires beyond its own national borders, my collaboration with the CSSJ feels not only quite sensible but also destined to happen. The collaboration helped bring into stark relief my desire to think seriously and creatively about slavery, its aftermath, and ever-pulsating movements for justice across Africa and the African Diaspora. How do you capture captivity? Indeed, how do you capture liberation? In whatever way one chooses, one must talk with my paintings in order to find those complicated answers for themself.

I use different materials, classic and unconventional. By “unconventional” I allude to a very specific technique in which I deploy mixed media: including, but not limited to, fabric, charcoal, resin, and sometimes even coffee grounds. Depending on the context in which I am working, I will favor certain materials over others. For example, for this exhibition, I use acrylic paint and recovered pieces of fabric to create a painting in relief and to think about recovery as a form of repair and justice work. By “recovery,” I mean how I reuse and ultimately transform these materials whose introduction onto the canvas always brings the eye to a center of interest. Through my superimpositions of layers of colors, shapes, and brushstrokes, I try to create a luminous and spiritual image as a symbol of hope.

In *Marrooning, when the slave snatches his freedom*, I try to place particular emphasis on marronage as a living testimony to the slave’s ability to escape dehumanization and the pedagogy of terror that aims to shatter all hope for freedom. I imagine the slave settling in a community in a region far from the slave society and rediscovering his ancestral traditions. I imagine too, the slave traveling in his own internal universe to recharge, find energy, hope, and to formulate a strategic response to oppression. Overall, I try to offer a spiritual vision of the resistance strategies of the slaves in their long walks toward freedom.

Preliminary figure sketch of *Marrooning, when the slave snatches his freedom*



***Marooning,
when the slave
snatches his
freedom, 2022***

Rénold Laurent

acrylic on canvas
60" x 40"

PHOTO: PATRICK SYLVAIN





*Procession of
slaves celebrating
the abolition of
slavery in the
United States, 2022*

Rénold Laurent

acrylic on canvas
70" x 40"

PHOTO: PATRICK SYLVAIN

The Memory of Slavery and Modernity

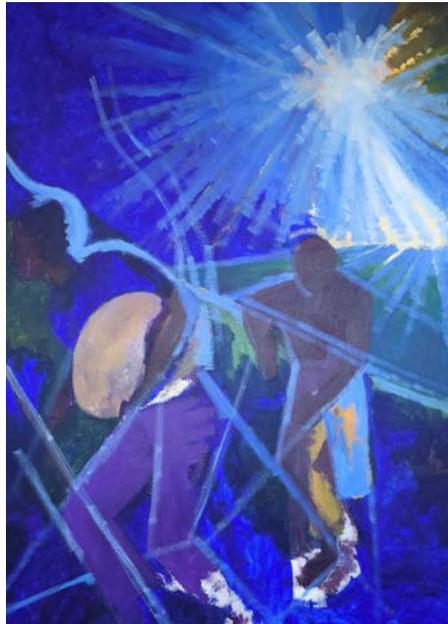
IN RECENT YEARS, the general representation of slavery as well as its representation in art and literature has gained considerable significance in practice as well as in theoretical, academic and critical reflections, and in cultural activities such as exhibitions, festivals, broadcasts, media, monuments and commemorative activities. The emergence of social media has made it possible for any citizen to attempt to question the educational curriculum or official discourses on slavery in general and on the so-called triangular trade and its consequences in Africa, America and Europe. All this has given rise to a different way of thinking about the enslavement of Africans and a new approach to modernity itself, which is now approached as a multi-faceted phenomenon. Since modernity starts with the arrival of European colonialism in America, understanding it requires an analysis of slavery and the birth of racism based on skin color. Thus, representing slavery or those who are its victims, namely African captives, does not only imply that the artist or the writer should solve an aesthetic problem, but it is also a way to take a position faced with and within this modernity. Having said that, the work of the contemporary artist on the memory of slavery can only be a poetic work, that is to say a reflection on art. The artist is confronted with a collection of images, depictions and writings that allow him to question the visible, the aesthetic or the ethics. He is exposed to several ways of expressing slavery through the art of the past and of today; ways of comparing memory and

representation while reshaping himself in the ever-present modernity. It is in this context that, by examining the images and writings on slavery in the United States, Rénoald Laurent chose to highlight the escape from slavery and the celebration of the end of slavery by creating two abstract works.

How could we understand this artistic choice? What can the abstraction of a historical phenomenon as concrete as slavery suggest?

Although Laurent is best known for his abstract works, he has never abandoned representational art, even though he most often creates these on commission. That said, in the context of this exhibition, he could have given us representational works which would have the benefit of speaking to us more directly. However, the iconography of slavery is, in a way, codified: rows of captives, captives spread out like merchandise in the slave traders' holds or on the decks; slave markets, slaves working in the fields or performing tasks related to their circumstance; scenes of punishment; domestic slaves serving their masters, runaway slaves, dance scenes, scenes of celebration

after the abolition of slavery, etc. These images, created by white artists in circumstances reflecting various slavery or abolitionist ideologies and sometimes mere concerns of artistic description, pose real problems for the contemporary artist when it comes to drawing inspiration from them in the context of the memory of slavery. Added to these images are numerous commentaries on American slavery.



Sketch of Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom

in Two Works by Rénold Laurent

Many of these commentaries portray the image of submissive slaves resigned to their fate, but in reality slaves have always known how to react against their masters and their circumstances by all sorts of means. It is thus this image that Rénold Laurent criticizes in the works he displays in this exhibition. Abstraction gives him a voice to challenge this image.

Laurent drew inspiration from traditional iconographic collections, reinterpreting them, transcending them, putting them in abstract form. This work of reinterpreting realistic or figurative works is not unusual of the artist's style. It has been part of his artistic research for many years. One of his best-known reinterpretations is his abstract reworking of French romantic painter Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. For his works on slavery in the United States, the painter adopted this same process of artistic and aesthetic transformation to pre-existing images. In doing so, Laurent moved away from representation towards evocation. His works evoke two moments: the period of slavery (but he refuses to show submissive slaves, he refers rather to the escape from slavery where slaves fight to regain their freedom) and then the end or abolition of slavery marked by parades celebrating the event. The transformation of realistic images into abstract works emerges both as an act of protest, as we just mentioned, but also as a demonstration of the challenges of memory that the period of slavery poses when we know that even today, despite all

the civic advances, the lives of Black people in the United States still need to be defended. Laurent's works, since they are not purely representational and given the historical periods evoked in the United States, function as commemorative plaques of the resistance of enslaved Africans to regain their freedom. Laurent shows us that the African, even when enslaved for several generations, had never forgotten that his ancestors were always free. It is from this memory that he draws the strength to brave all dangers to obtain this freedom that the 2019 film *Harriet* by Kasi Lemmons illustrates very well.



Sketch of *Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States*

Ode to the Escaped Slaves

Laurent's works, although they correspond to his aesthetic of abstract re-reading of realist or representational works, are, for this exhibition, the fruits of veritable documentary research. The artist was not only satisfied with revisiting the iconography of slavery in the United States. The themes he chooses to address in his two works are therefore derived from a historical consciousness. Indeed, the history of Africans revolting or fighting against slavery has long been obscured in conventional American historiography. The first work presented by Rénold Laurent is titled *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom* in reference to this concealment of the resistance by enslaved Africans in the United States. Escape from slavery was one of the most effective means of protest against the bondage of Black people. To do this, Laurent has chosen abstraction as his artistic expression. What does this



suggest, when we know that for more than one of them, a figurative representation would have the benefit of a direct reading, minimizing ambiguities as much as possible?

While Laurent's work wants to revive the escape from slavery, it is the moment of escape that interests him: the escaped slave's confrontation with a hostile environment. It is thus a moment where tension is at its highest. In this context, abstraction insists that the viewer question the smallest details, the smallest features of the shapes, points and lines, while imagining the landscape. In *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom* by Laurent, the color blue dominates the entire work. This color is almost fetishized in the artist's aesthetics but it takes on a particular importance and significance here. This blue is the effect of a light that not only illuminates the fugitives by enveloping them, but it is also this light of awareness of their humanity that guides them. It is determined by a plain white dot at the top right of the painting. This bluish light unites the fugitives in a kind of solidarity. There is a movement that sweeps them up in a whirlwind that seems to make them inseparable and perhaps invincible in their determination.

The Fragility of the Celebration

The second work is titled *Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States*. Unlike the first canvas where a blue light illuminates the shapes in a circular motion that harmonizes them, in this second work the strokes are fragmented: the yellow that served as an outline of the shapes in *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom* completely pervades this painting. It is the color of the sun, of joy, of celebration. There is a lot more movement in this painting which undoubtedly indicates a loss of concentration, a relaxation, a utopian vision of the future. At the top of the painting, there is a burst of joy; not to mention the small torches that signal the small groups marching in procession, sometimes in a disorderly fashion. But the artist is not fooled: he shows that the danger is not completely over

LEFT: In-progress photograph of *Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States*

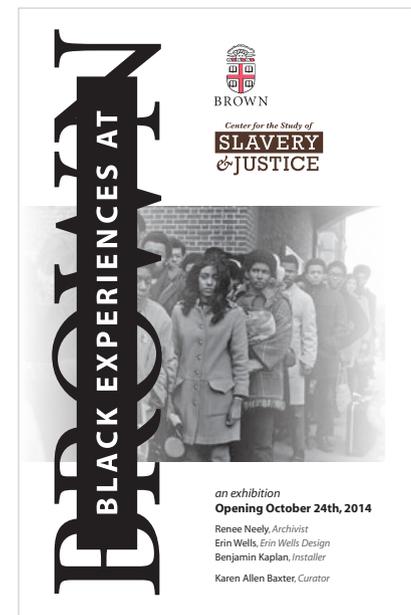
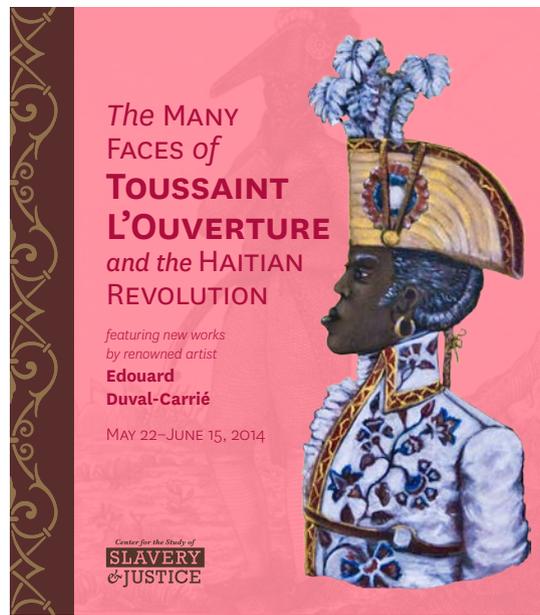
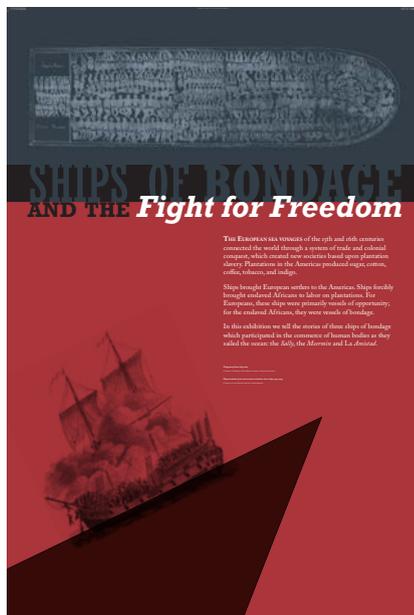
despite this change of situation. He inserted small cotton balls into the canvas to signify that despite the abolition of slavery, the cotton fields are still there and still form the basis of the economy of the American South. After the excitement of the party, it is necessary to return to reality, to wake up to the understanding that other obstacles are now emerging and that they will not be easier to overcome.

As mentioned above, the artist's work on the memory of transatlantic slavery could not go without questioning modernity and himself in regard to the former. Slavery required a completely different definition of man; it made humanity a plural entity to justify itself. Skin color determines one's place in the human race. If the aesthetic shapes the artistic work, the artist's work on slavery must necessarily question this aesthetic and compare it with history, for the scars and traumas at stake are real and are still dividing the world. Rénoald Laurent has chosen to evoke the memory of slavery in the artistic expression that has always been considered the culmination of modern art. He thus brought together two extreme expressions of modernity: transatlantic slavery and artistic abstraction.

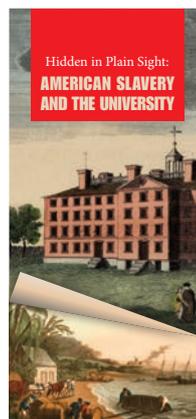
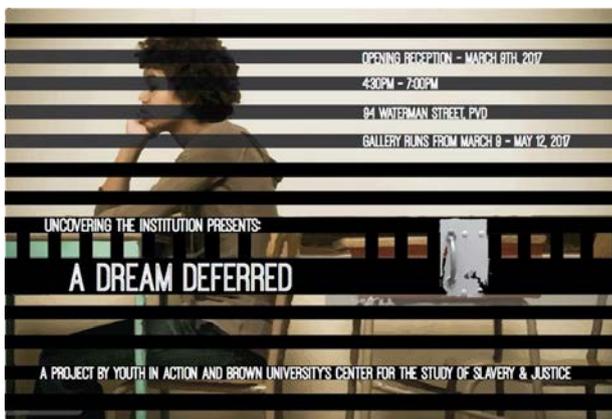
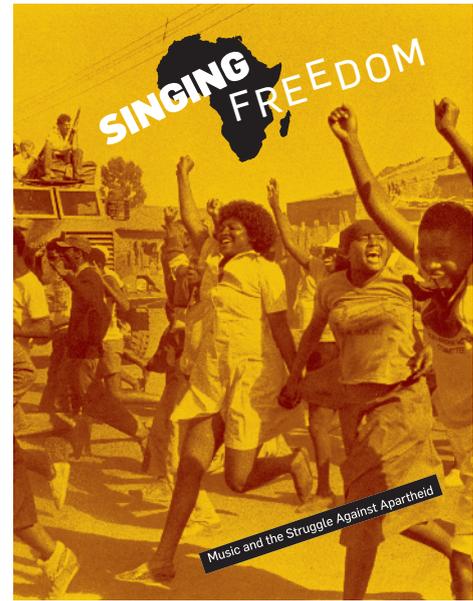
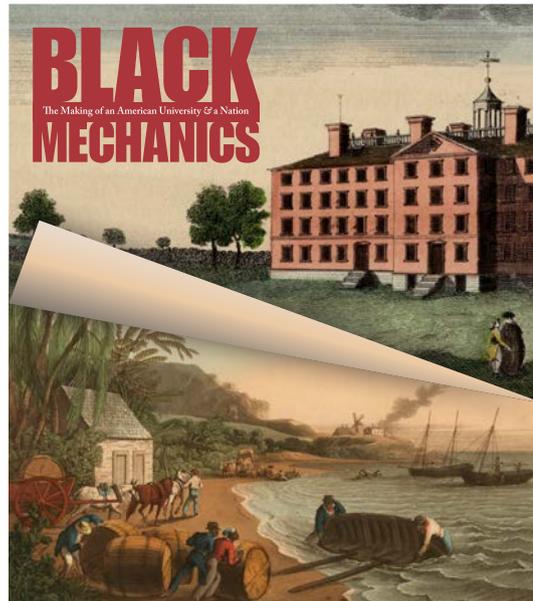
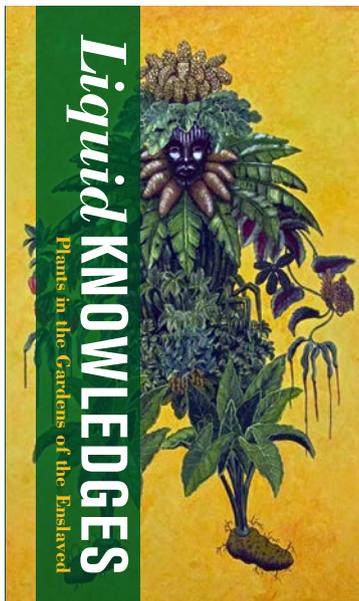
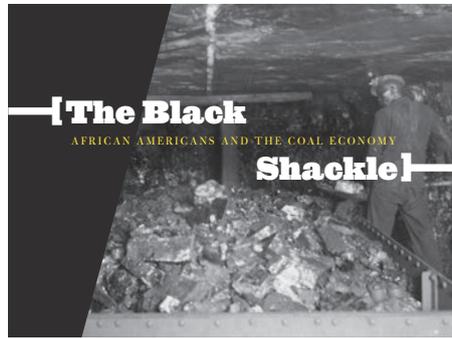
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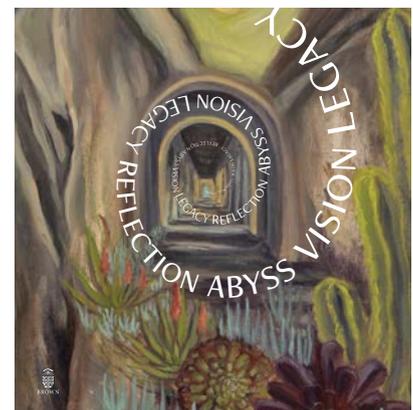
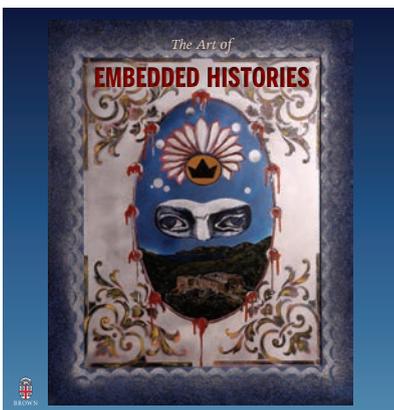
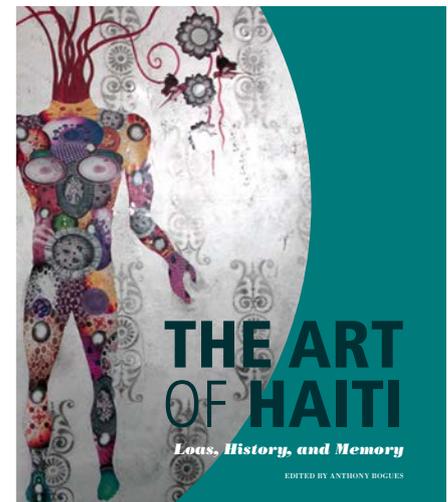
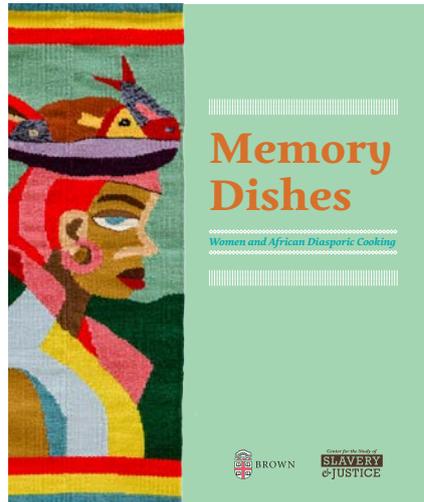
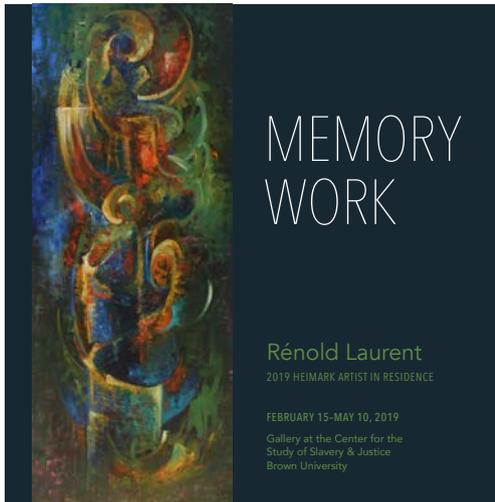
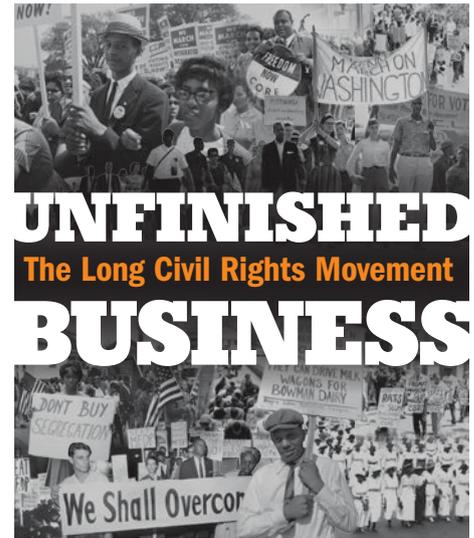
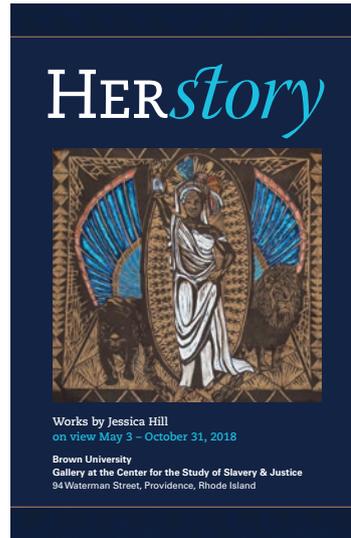
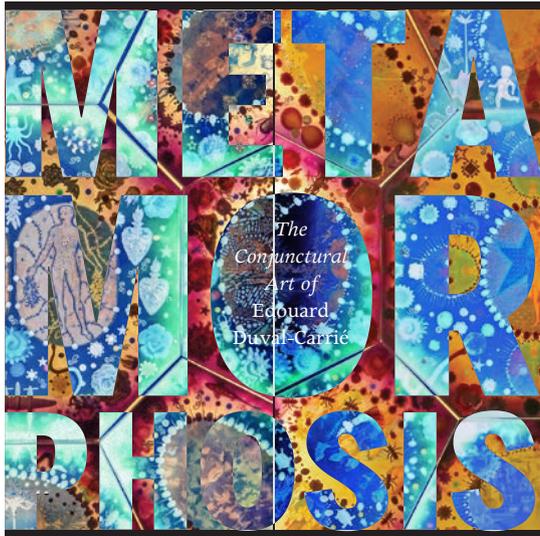
Specialist in Art History and Aesthetics, alumnus of the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Port-au-Prince in Contemporary Literature, Sterlin Ulysse also studied Contemporary Cultural Criticism at the Université Paris 8 and Art History and Latin American Studies at the Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès.

Celebrating 10 Years of Exhibitions at the Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice



Exhibition of Slave Shackles





Past Exhibitions

Ships of Bondage and the Fight for Freedom (Brown University and Iziko Museums of South Africa), 2013; *The Many Faces of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution*, 2014; *Black Experiences at Brown: A Visual Narrative Exhibition*, 2014; *Breaking Chains*, 2015; *Transatlantic Legacy: Full Circle*, 2015; *Exhibition of Slave Shackles* (in collaboration with ISM, Liverpool), 2016; *The Black Shackle: African Americans and the Coal Economy*, 2016; *Hurt People Hurt People*, 2016; *Liquid Knowledges: Plants in the Gardens of the Enslaved* (in collaboration with Little Haiti Cultural Center, Miami), 2016; *Black Mechanics: The Making of an American University and a Nation*, 2016; *Singing Freedom: Music and the Struggle Against Apartheid* (catalogue in collaboration with Iziko Museums of South Africa), 2016; *A Dream Deferred: Questions of Power & Freedom in Rhode Island's Public Education*, 2017; *Hidden in Plain Site: American Slavery and the University*, 2017; *Makers Unknown: Material Objects and the Enslaved*, 2017; *Metamorphosis* (in collaboration with Miami Contemporary Art Gallery), 2017; *Herstory*, 2018; *Unfinished Business: The Long Civil Rights Movement*, 2018; *Memory Work*, 2019; *Memory Dishes*, 2019; *The Art of Haiti* (in collaboration with Colorado Springs Art Museum), 2019; *The Art of Embedded Histories*, 2019; *Entangled Legacies*, 2020; *Reflection/Abyss/Vision/Legacy*, 2021

Acknowledgments

Since 2012, the Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice has engaged in questions around the complex practices of freedom that have historically and continue to animate Black freedom struggles globally. As the staff began to envision an exhibition to mark the Center's 10th anniversary, we knew immediately such an exhibition would require engaging the distinguished group of artists who have become CSSJ partners and friends over the last 10 years. We were honored that Edouard Duval-Carrié, Jess Hill, and Rénoald Laurent agreed to be part of this exhibition, helping visitors reflect on the theme of racial slavery and freedom. Each artist has a body of work that is deeply connected to the values and mission of the Center.

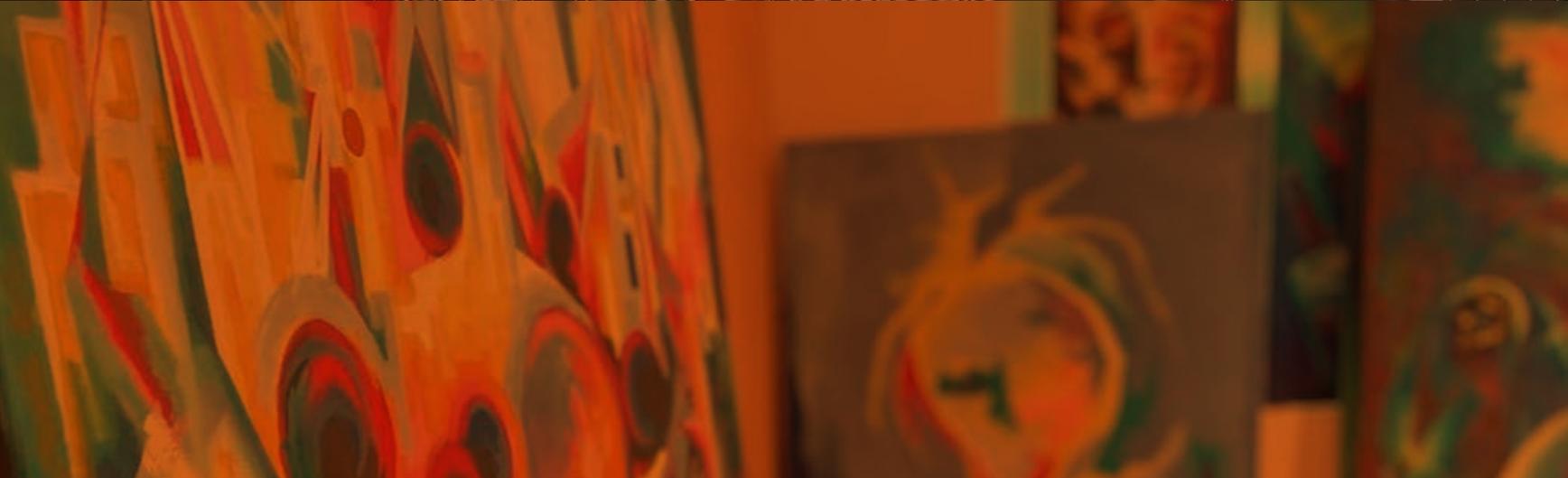
Additionally, we would like to thank all who have made this exhibition possible: Erin Wells, Mark Foster, Benjamin Kaplan, the staff of the Brown Arts Initiative, and current and former CSSJ staff members Kiku Langford McDonald, Rée Obimpe, Nada Samih-Rotondo, Africa Smith, Maiyah Rivers, and Shana Weinberg.

On this occasion of the Center's 10th anniversary, we would like to recognize the many individuals who allowed the Center's work to grow and flourish over the last decade. The work of the Center would not be possible without the support of the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, and the Office of the Dean of the College. Thank you to

all the dedicated individuals on the President's Advisory Council for the CSSJ and the Faculty Advisory Board who continue to provide guidance for our work.

The Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice would like to sincerely thank its major donors for their support: Ms. Barbara and Mr. Tom Bale, Mrs. Emily and Mr. Michael Cavanagh, Ms. Katherine Chon and Mr. Bradley Mylles, Ms. Alana and Mr. Paul Choquette, Mrs. Ann Coles, Ms. Donna Emma and Mr. Larry Davis, Mr. David Haas, Ms. Holly Hagens and Mr. Todd Sisitsky, Mrs. Libby and Mr. Craig Heimark, Ms. Sharon and Mr. Joseph Holston, Ms. Debra Lee, Mr. Luis Lopez, Mrs. Patricia and Mr. Timothy Schantz, Dr. Ruth J. Simmons, Ms. Ricki Stern and Mr. Evan Guillemain, Mr. Lawrence Title, Ms. Mary and Mr. Jerome Vascellaro, Abrams Foundation, American Endowment Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Firelight Media, Jewish Community Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Wyncote Foundation.

We also wish to thank the Friends of the Center for all of their work since the beginning. Each year the work of the Center broadens and deepens. Each contribution sustains our work. Finally, we would like to especially thank Maria Lima, Nelson Ramos, and Robert Farizer, the Center's caretakers and groundskeeper, for creating a clean and beautiful space in which we can do this work.



A **10**TH ANNIVERSARY RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

Center for the Study of
SLAVERY
& **JUSTICE**

