



NARRATIVE OBSESSION

IN THE POST-COLONIAL PSYCHE



Compelled To Become A God

The dominance of written and printed word as opposed to spoken traditions, changed and enabled colonialism, cultural subjugation, and ultimately assimilation. The objecthood of writing in the form of 'the document' enabled longevity, preservable paper dictating ownership for those who could read—treaties, novels, laws, philosophical and religious texts—bestowed a power over those who hadn't been trained in a specific language or its interpretation. The inequality this produced in colonies around the globe in many cases was exacerbated by an intentional lack of access to education. Propaganda glorifying the conquering European forces of the West became the only palatable histories of the ruling states. Post-colonial theory seeks to excavate and correct these skewed, hegemonic narratives.

As an area of research, this theory began in the field of literature with an assessment of Western-centric projections onto characters in fiction. It has since expanded to include the disciplines of art, anthropology, philosophy, and sociology. A foundational text on the subject is Edward Said's 1978 publication *Orientalism*. It exposed European fantasies denigrating colonial subjects in a constant barrage of fetishization and 'othering' across Asia and the Middle East. Although many aspects of Said's original argument have been refuted as restrictive in geographic, cultural, pedagogical, and religious scope, institutions and society at large have been deconstructed via this metatheory since the early '80s.

Narrative Obsession in the Post-Colonial Psyche navigates diverse histories through the impulses of artists engaged by works of literature, in both fiction and fact. Works on view challenge institutional power structures and address problematic legacies, highlighting the discreet colonial impact of industry and tourism on both humans and the environment. Unlike traditional literary criticism, the visual artists presented are not confined to the theoretical strictures of research; their approach to the subject ranges from documentary-like accounts to a proliferation of fantastical ones, essentially reversing the European gaze which governed, manipulated, or destroyed cultural expression considered 'Other.'

Kara Walker's book *Freedom, a Fable* with the subtitle of "A Curious Interpretation of the Wit of a Negress in Troubled Times" (1997) was the foundation for developing this exhibition, firstly because it is a fictional story authored by Walker—unusual in contemporary visual art—and secondly due to the fact it is accompanied by pop-out illustrations central to her output as an artist. Her practice encapsulates concerns embodied throughout *Narrative Obsession*, and also contains a wealth of fictional intent mingled with literary references. In *Freedom, a Fable*, the predicaments of a woman traveling—against her volition—from her homeland to the New World are described. It doesn't seek to set out a history based on perfunctory facts, including dates and placenames, so much as it describes a universality, playing with the readers sense of time. The adult characters are nameless, such as 'Captain—' or the protagonist 'N—,' this device enables us to inhabit both roles: the thief of destiny and the person it is stolen from. The only people named are the children 'Hannibal' and 'Cane,' who

'N—' attempts to save. Ultimately, 'N—'s' experience makes her decide to become a god, stepping outside of the power structure implicit in the tale, transforming into an empath responsible for all humans:

She has taken to referring to these unknown Africans as her people. She would like to claim ownership, "But not with papers or deeds or laws or such-like, but with undying devotion, and when I've earned myself that then I'll work on the White people as well!"¹



Kara Walker, *Freedom: A Fable*, 1997. Bound volume of offset lithographs and five laser-cut, pop-up silhouettes on wove paper. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co. © Kara Walker.

narratives expose the poverty of morals, ignorance of ethics, control, and abuse that become normalized under such a disturbing practice. Dehumanizing to both slaver and slave, it bred white entitlement in the former and allowed for blanketed hegemonic stereotyping onto the latter. Silhouettes were a popular pastime for women in the 19th century. Many were highly adept at depicting family members, but in Walker's hands, this technique attains a fine art status with her incredibly dynamic scenes more akin to cinema, or monumental public murals. The aesthetic of her outlined stories destabilizes our sense of the present, they could be historical artifacts from that period, except for the violence and friezelike quality of the subject matter.

The artist, who has described herself as an "unreliable narrator," referenced driving past the Victoria Monument on the Mall in London as the spark that ignited her interest in making her monumental fountain *Fons Americanus*, a Turbine Hall commission for Tate Modern in 2019. Like most of Walker's practice, it takes

Walker's work is drenched in the literary tradition of the Antebellum South, seemingly alluding to books such as *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853), a memoir by Solomon Northup; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe; or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain. The perversity of the act of enslavement and ownership over the fate of others is exploded in the artist's psychosexual power plays, realized in large-scale silhouettes in which

inspiration from literature and history, one thinks of novels such as *Moby Dick* (1851) by Herman Melville and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) by Edgar Allan Poe. The artist also seems to reference abolitionist poetry or speeches, lines like "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine, You may rejoice, I must mourn." by Frederick Douglass² come to mind. Instead of Winged Victory atop the Victoria Monument, in the Turbine Hall commission, there is a figure of an African woman with water pouring from her breasts and sliced throat. Walker, who often begins the process of making by writing, has said of the piece: "I wondered how to return the gift of having come to be through the mechanics of finance, exploitation, murder, rape, death, ecological destruction, co-optation, coercion, love, seafaring feats, bravery, slavery, loss, injustice, excess, cruelty, tenacity, submission and progress conceived in the U.S. to live in this time and place with this opportunity this ability."³ Her spectacular visualization of the experiences of those who drowned or survived the journey to the New World is a monument to those lives and deaths, a counter-narrative to history as written by the victors.

Cultural projection aimed at subjugation, particularly in the guise of religious assimilation, was an immensely powerful tool for hegemony, resulting in the conforming of hearts and minds, reinforcing the mores of Europe. Narratives in terms of laws and Western religions were often an inseparable combination in the subduing of colonial peoples, and morality codes banning the practice of other religions caused widespread cultural genocide. The French expansionist project in the Americas is detailed in the notorious Code Noir ("The Black Code") from 1685, which reads in Section III: "We forbid any public exercise of any religion other than the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman; we wish that the offenders be punished as rebels and disobedient to our orders. We prohibit all congregations for this end, which we declare "conventicles," illicit and seditious, subject to the same penalty which will be levied even against masters who allow or tolerate them among their slaves."⁴ There are some sixty articles in the code, detailing the control over most aspects of people's lives, giving a chilling account of the expectations of those described as property and treated inhumanely.



Hew Locke, *Pilgrim*, Central Park, 2018. G-type photograph with mixed media. Courtesy of Hew Locke and P-P-O-W, New York. © 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London.

A different relationship exists to race and slavery in Europe than the Americas, the latter is well documented with established facts backing the receiving and exploiting of people through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, some 12.5 million captured men, women, and children were put on ships in Africa, and 10.7 million arrived in the Americas from approximately 1526 to 1867, but European colonists, countries, and corporations, who were largely the powerhouses driving this sadistic trade, are relatively unblemished by comparison.⁵ This is largely because it was conducted elsewhere, chattel slavery didn't happen on mainland Europe (there are of course exceptions, and indentured servitude certainly did), European nations have not been forthright regarding

their participation in the practice, which is still largely unresearched and unwritten. Nevertheless, the subject has been explored by a number of UK-based artists of African descent including Keith Piper, Hew Locke, and Yinka Shonibare CBE RA.

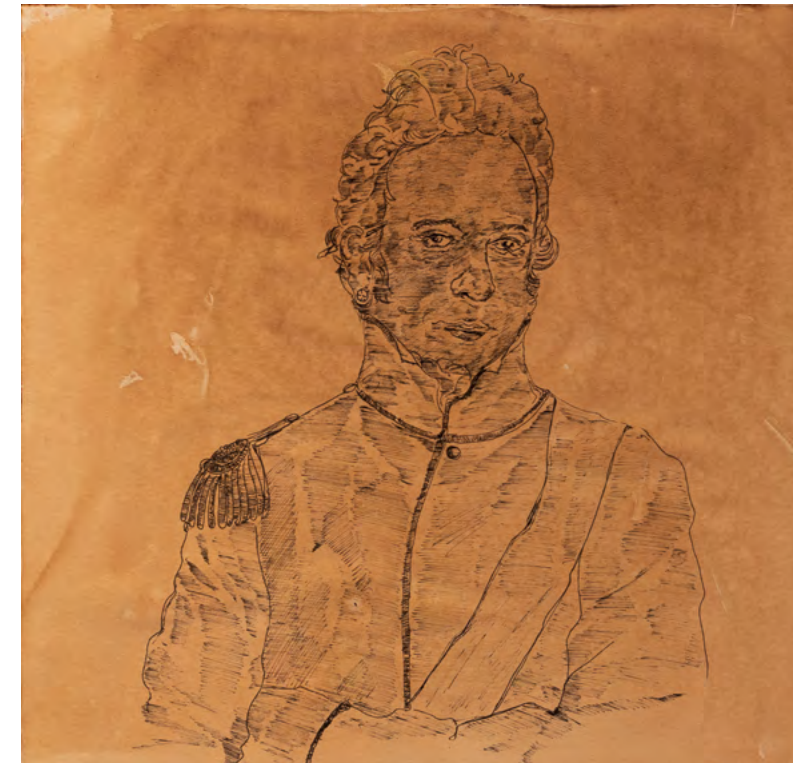


Yinka Shonibare CBE, *Hybrid Mask (Bamana Ntomo)*, 2023. Wood, acrylic paint, and brass. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, NY.

he encountered racist statues and images in antique shops.⁷ His use of valueless junk, painted in gold, points to the worthlessness of these statues—in this particular context—and their negative effects in essentializing the population of Indigenous peoples they displaced. In another work *Souvenir 15 (Martha Washington)*, 2023, excavating the history of American colonialism, he decorates a mass-produced porcelain bust of “Lady Washington,” as she was referred to, a prominent slaveholder, and wife to George Washington. Although she did

London-based Hew Locke grew up in Guyana, a former British colony. His art tackles a vast array of instruments of power, symbols of authority, and systems of control. Ideas of trade and value permeate his prodigious output – series categorized on his website include: *Coats of Arms, Finance & Trade, Boats, Architecture, Royalty*, and in this exhibition *About Statues*. In 2018, Locke photographed a number of historically contentious public statues in New York City, including Christopher Columbus, Alexander Hamilton, J. Marion Sims, Peter Stuyvesant, and George Washington. In *Pilgrim, Central Park (2018)* Locke covers the figure in what he refers to as realizing an impossible proposal,⁶ that could not be made to the existing monument, embellishing the image with gratuitous amounts of gold or filigree-like objects. While the pilgrim is anonymous, the visual statement implies he is the first thief to arrive and establish a permanent colony. The artist was influenced by trips to Georgia with his father as a child, where

free her husband's slaves after his death, her active complicity in benefitting from human bondage during her lifetime is referred to by the excessive trappings of empire-like decorations applied to her figure.



Umar Rashid (Frohawk Two Feathers), *Gaius Catullus, or Jerry, Duke of Charleston. (South Carolina). Plotter*, 2021. Ink, coffee, and tea on paper, mounted on panel. Courtesy of the artist and CulturalDC.

free her husband's slaves after his death, her active complicity in benefitting from human bondage during her lifetime is referred to by the excessive trappings of empire-like decorations applied to her figure. British artist Yinka Shonibare CBE RA, skews, corrects, and eviscerates existing historical tales of race and class in his multidisciplinary practice. His use of Dutch wax Ankara fabrics make his work immediately identifiable, the material became emblematic of African independence in the '60's. Shonibare's embrace of his honorary title Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and Royal Academician could be seen as tongue-in-cheek, considering he deals exclusively with the complicated legacy of colonialism and global expansion, but also illustrates a new openness evident in formerly white-only institutions. In *Hybrid Mask (Koré) II (2023)*, the artist reclaims the overarching influence of African art on Modernism, in a process he refers to as “Picasso in reverse.” Shonibare acknowledges that “Picasso was interested in appropriating from another culture, and I also appropriate from European ethnic art.”⁸ His appropriationist methodologies run counter to the current politicized discourse on usage and ownership of cultural artifacts, where the subject itself has become territorialized and segregated by specific race, nationality, gender, etc. Through underscoring this fact, his focus is to enable a new conversation within contemporary society about diasporic influences, essentially letting go of segregated thinking. The African masks address Shonibare's identity as a “post-colonial hybrid” who, like Walker, is a summation of the legacies of both oppression and thwarted ancestral histories.

The impetus to redress hegemonic narratives in order to control them and in the process correct skewed histories is continually present in the works of Umar Rashid. The writer, poet, painter, and rapper was brought up in Chicago, but is currently based in LA. He has self-created monikers for each of his outputs, and for a time used the name Frohawk Two Feathers for visual art purposes. In *Gaius Catullus, or Jerry, Duke of Charleston. (South Carolina). Plotter (2021)*, and *Claire Fontaine. A creole woman from Martinique who supplies weapons*

to the abolitionists but manages to never get caught. (2021), the artist attributes and strips away elements of truth conflating them with fantastical ones, taking ownership over the oft-tragic outcomes for rebels, runaways, and oppressed peoples. The playful tone in his pen and ink drawings ensures a compelling visual

experience, viewing history as fluid and foregrounding it as propaganda central to the colonialist project. His painting series including *Colonial Basketball*, *Bound*, and *Anti-Colonialism in Four Easy Steps* depict scenes from his fictional “Frenghish Empire (1648–1880),” which run counter to real historical empire-building, but are no less complex. He has said,

“I don’t shy away from Africans from the continent’s role in the slave trade. I don’t shy away from the Arab role in the slave trade. I don’t shy away from complicity. I’m trying to write a comparative re-telling of a historical narrative, where Black people are present and the instances where we were victorious and the times where we lose too. There’s so much history that is missing with us. Hopefully [my work] will inspire more historians to be less lazy with their research, with their writing of these new books for subsequent generations.”⁹

History is a distorted subject, because the poor or vanquished seldom have histories written about them, the fiction of history is made fluid in terms of identity and events in Rashid’s created universe. He describes

who his art and extended cultural output are for: “It is for all the people who’ve never felt like they were enough, or who never felt visible. It is to make the invisible visible. It is to tell a story in the hopes that we learn from it and don’t forget.”¹⁰

Rashid’s color palette and excavation of history are reminiscent of the strategies employed by painter Firelei Báez, whose works on paper and canvas address similar issues from a feminist perspective and an awareness of aesthetic power. According to the artist “In most power relationships you have the victim trying to solve a situation, and I don’t want to create narratives of victimhood. I want to flip it. The freedom that I offer in each painting is in the mutable body. In having bodies in constant transition, it leaves it open to the viewer to shift ideas of power, in that process you shift the world around you, that’s where beauty can be subversive.”¹¹ In



Firelei Báez, *Patriarch*, 2013. Pigmented linen on cotton base sheet. Courtesy of the artist and Dieu Donné.

Patriarch (2013), which recalls the silhouette in Walker’s practice, a kaleidoscope of bright colors is applied directly to the male portrait, removing the gravitas in how men were portrayed in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Here, Báez complicates this history further with the outline of an anonymous white person, reversing

the essentializing gaze of Western projection, and possibly pointing out the inherent toxic masculinity of this period. This critical position about the trust in mastery, masculinity, or male-narrated history alludes to the quackery of those engaged in the early taxonomy of animals, plants, and insects of the New World, such as Swedish biologist and botanist Carl Linnaeus. The 10th edition of his book *Systema Naturae* published in 1758 became the basis for scientific racism through his quasi-fictional definitions of *Homo sapiens*.¹² Báez, employing methodologies echoing those of Rashid, visually depicts fantastic creatures redolent of those described in this book, and simultaneously critiques their inherent preposterousness. In the process, she rises above the ludicrous fantasies of ‘scientific’ enlightenment ideas.

Early attempts at anthropology that became more formalized as a field of research during the enlightenment, were frankly ethnocentric in the extreme. Again, the outrageous and careless theories projected on non-Europeans examined by Báez, Walker, and Piper, are also addressed by Frida Orupabo. Tackling images



Frida Orupabo, *Untitled (girl with knife)*, 2021. Collage with paper and pins. ©Frida Orupabo. Courtesy of the artist and Nicola Vassell Gallery. Photograph by Adam Reich.

from web-based photographic archives related to anthropological research, works such as *Without Guilt* (2022) reference materials from an unspecified range of time. Source photographic elements are screen-grabs, which she then enlarges to use as compositional blocks for collages. As she states “Most archives are not forbidden to enter, but you’re only allowed to look, not grab. There’s pleasure in breaking in and snatching, and there’s anger behind it, too—especially when I encounter images that have watermarks, images that are owned by institutions and probably white people.”¹³ There is implicit violence in the cut sections of the hybrid bodies she creates, revealing the brutality of researchers and their biases, conscious and unconscious. In *Untitled (girl with knife)*, 2021, the sense that this person has any agency over themselves is negligible, as there is a white arm gripping the hand that, in turn, holds the weapon. Orupabo’s anger is understandable and palpable. “Often there’s no name attached to the person depicted, because it’s not like the person who owns the image has done any research. At best, it’ll say “slave girl.””¹⁴

Cultural artifacts can be highly problematic, their existence, display, and contextualization have been an



Gerard & Kelly, *Panorama*, 2021. 4K video, color, sound, 22 minutes. Courtesy of the artists and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Gerard & Kelly.

increasing concern within museums and other institutions throughout the world. Some exist in storerooms, others are public facing, or even buildings themselves. In Gerard & Kelly's *Panorama* (2021), the self-aggrandizing mural *Panorama du Commerce* (1889) of the Bourse de Commerce—formerly the Paris stock exchange—is given voice by performers who symbolize Future, Allegory, and Memory. Each section of the piece's representational narrative is meant to glorify modernization through global trade. The enormously scaled work visually portrays Western ideas onto a myriad of New World peoples and cultures. The artists have described the piece as “a hybrid between a dance film and a cinematographic essay.”¹⁵ In an act of correcting the mural's depiction of harmonious global trade—one where no one is suffering—the character of Memory played by Soa de Muse narrates the scenes of the painting, picking out elements of humanity, and relationship archetypes occurring between Indigenous peoples. A minimalist musical score by deceased queer African American composer Julius Eastman accompanies the film. His compelling compositions add a subtle grandeur to Gerard & Kelly's vision which in turn is grounded in their background in contemporary dance, literature, and gender studies. *Panorama* points to an acknowledgement that representation, however flawed in historical terms, can be reimagined, and stimulate contemporary discourse confronting imbalances and cultural projection.

The Trophies of Empire (1985/2017) by Keith Piper, similarly addresses the resplendent architecture of Europe, in this case Plantation House (and others) in London. Text in this video work is based on slide reels, made for the original installation piece of the same name. It reads, “You look at this building and wonder how many hours of underpaid black labor it took to build.” The accruing of wealth that enabled the erection of such spectacular dwellings was partly due to, as Piper quoting Marx states, “turning Africa into a warren for the

commercial hunting of black skins.”¹⁶ Colonists were never “a great civilizing, Christianizing force,” as was often claimed. Racial profiling and its continuance in Britain, exposes how ‘othering’ promotes racial tension through extending colonial narratives in post-colonial contexts. The consummately researched video also looks at reverse-colonialism—although it isn't referred to as that—the paranoia of European or First World countries being overwhelmed by migrants. It is ironic that the West never showed any such consideration in its parasitism of any other region globally, or its projection of its culture on them. Fears in countries such as England, in this case, of being “swamped” by the ‘other’ is perfectly summed up in a quote from Margaret Thatcher saying “People are rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture, if there is any fear that we might be swamped then people are going to get rather hostile.” While looking

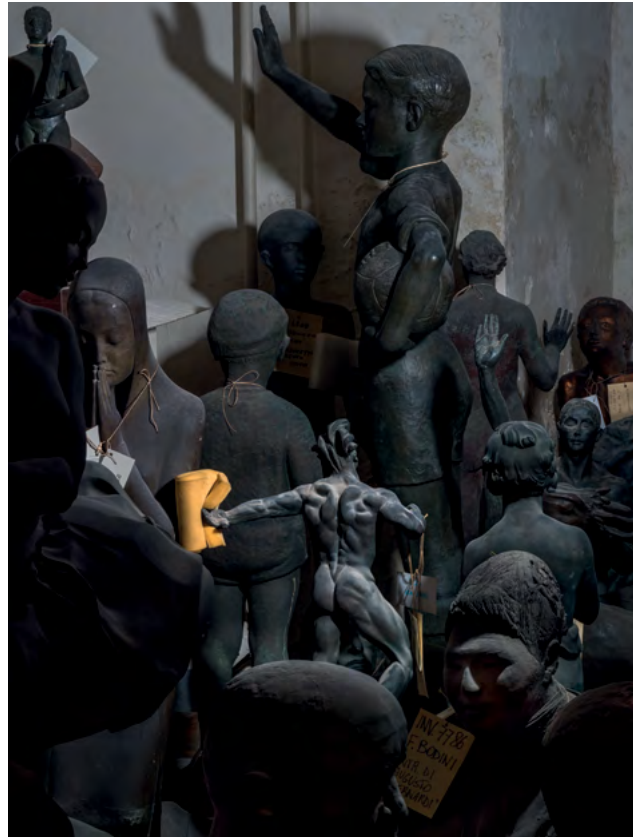
unflinchingly at movements such as the British National Party and their vicious racist graffiti and brutalization of Black and Brown people in the '80's, Piper also highlights those involved in the suspiciously racist origins of a number of major companies in the UK, specifically Edward Lloyd and David Barclay who respectively benefited from slavery. The former a founder of Lloyds' bank and insurance company, and the latter Barclay's bank.¹⁷ In 1822, the Slavery Abolition Act in the UK outlawed the ownership of other people. The 46,000 owners affected by this were financially compensated in payments from the government, which were finally repaid in full by 2015. These facts were uncovered by University College London's Legacies of British Slave Ownership project, and as Piper stated to the Tate, “We can only fully understand history and all its complexity if we are able to go back and encounter the objects themselves,”¹⁸ in this case the documentation. When the argument for reparations to descendants of the formerly enslaved is made, the point is often put that that is ancient history, but apparently not for the descendants of the slavers.¹⁹



Keith Piper, *The Trophies of Empire*, 1985 (2017 remix). Still. Digitized continuous sequence of 162 35mm slides. DV and sound. 10:34 min. Courtesy of the artist.

Public institutions of a different ilk, such as museums, are represented in photographic works by Elisa Sighicelli. The entitlement of early 20th century Europe and the subsequent emergence of eugenics allowed an entire continent to implode. Fascism ran rampant, and the cultural production reflecting this has become highly problematic in regards to conservation and display. Museum holdings of artists seen as culturally and historically significant, but who also made objects reflecting a problematic ethos are addressed in *Untitled (1075)*, 2021. In the storeroom of Galleria Arte Moderna Milano, Sighicelli photographed

statues in their un-curated state. Amidst the teeming cluster of figures in the composition, there is a Balilli boy (Italy's equivalent of the Hitler Youth) giving a fascist salute. While the sculpture itself has never been exhibited, the ideas of empire building, white supremacy, and fascism continue to be present as a political specter in Italy and globally. In a recent outrage, a large group of men gave fascist salutes in central Rome on January 7, 2024 to mark the deaths of three neo-fascists forty-six years ago.²⁰ This worrying development occurs in differing forms of aggression, in addition to the amnesia of its disastrous outcomes, as the Second World War falls out of living memory.



Elisa Sighicelli, *Untitled (1075)*, 2021. Archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist and Rossi & Rossi Gallery.

magical properties and the promise of athletic accomplishment. The visual branding of Michael Jordan is clearly visible on many of his sculptures, and it was a huge step forward that an American company had a Black athlete as the face of a product which went on to rival the success of the brand itself. Jungen's work references identity politics, those especially problematic in the naming of North American sports teams, alluding to the fetishization of Indigenous warrior masculinity, such as the Atlanta Braves or Chicago Blackhawks. The

Imperialism was driven by market forces, and the pressure of the bottom line ensures that strategies employed in the New World in that period still thrive today. The contemporary reality of global trade is that corporations ensure cheap products to the mass market, often manifesting as fast fashion or aspirational brands. Our complicity in this machine of capitalist production is questionable, promoting a quiet colonialism that takes business to those who will do it cheaper, in poverty, and in abominable working conditions. Discreet corporate practices, mirroring former colonial strategies, are explored by Joiri Minaya and Brian Jungen.

On a visit to Niketown in the early '90s, Jungen was struck by the presentation of trainers in vitrines akin to museum displays. He saw the commodification and elevation of sports shoes as parallel to what was happening to First Nations Peoples' art at the time.²¹ The artist initially came to prominence with a series of 23 sculptures collectively named *Prototypes for New Understanding* (1998–2005)—the quantity related to Michael Jordan's team number. It began his long-term methodology of deconstructing Air Jordans, an aspirational product, which to the artist contained



Brian Jungen, *Variant #4*, 2016. Nike Air Jordans. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery.

gratuitous over production of mass market items. In a sense, by making these useful temporary products into art through deconstruction, he eliminates the problem of their throwaway nature, creating readymades contemporizing the Dane-zaa lineage and history in their assembly.

Gated tourism in Labadee, Haiti benefitting Royal Caribbean cruise lines is dealt with in Joiri Minaya's video piece *Labadee* (2017). She quotes text from Christopher Columbus' diary where he first sees land to pose the question of what has changed in terms of exploitation since then. The island paradise inside the fence—where food and pleasure are plentiful—is contrasted by a group of young boys with plates, begging in the actual country adjacent to this enclosure. Economic disparity of First World escapism at Third World prices is central to the theories present in her post-colonial storytelling, one has to ask if there is really such a thing as post-colonial, when, with the aid of global markets, manipulation of trade enables exploitation of the poor, in every possible way. This is a facet of a more complex history, although slaves in Haiti led a revolution in 1791 resulting in the nation's independence in 1804, twenty-one years later the Baron de Mackau arrived with five hundred canons on ships pointed at the capital Port au Prince. The aim was to re-enslave the population or procure reparations for former slavers, this national mugging crippled the 'post-colonial' state for hundreds of years. In today's money the payment is \$560 million, but the estimate of long-term growth this has cost Haiti, is in the region of \$21 billion.²³ In a number of previous works such as *#dominicanwomengooglesearch* (2016) Minaya calls attention to the plight of women in the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean islands, and their susceptibility through poverty to sex work and human trafficking. On a postcard stand white tourists'

sculptures disassemble, recontextualize, and overwrite these functional objects. Totemic to teenagers and sports fans, they now adhere to the sculptural rules of tribal art aesthetics. They draw on the visual lineage of Jungen's mother's Dane-zaa heritage to question cultural stereotypes and global work practices. Many corporations who charge low prices for highly desirable products are based in a trade that can only be described as colonial in financial and hierarchical terms, notably Nike's much publicized use of contemporary forced labor.²² Even though the colonizers have long gone, the exploitation continues in many companies. In *Variant #4* (2016) we see an example of this abstracted simulation of the Northwest Coast Indian mask tradition of First Nation Peoples. There is a commentary throughout his work on waste and the

fetishization/exploitation of their circumstances is laid bare, groups of men appear in photographs with very young girls, many of the men are protected in a state of erasure and we are confronted by the female gaze of the women among them. The digital collages are interspersed with images of European artist Paul Gauguin's



Joiri Minaya, *Labadee*, 2017. Still. HD video, 7:10 min. Courtesy of the artist.

paintings of barely teenage girls. The question in this instance becomes, what has changed since Gauguin? Does he become a symbol of actions without consequences and the entitlement of hegemonic behavior?

Recent years have seen increased discourse regarding internalized colonialism, and the decolonizing of spaces, countries, museums, even ourselves, in becoming aware of implicit biases or imbalances of power. Can there really be such a state as post-colonial when the systems of manipulation in poorer countries still give way to pricing and access determined by former colonists? Is it instead a state of discrete-colonialism, money funneled through companies, not explicitly sully the reputation of identifiable countries, exploiting elsewhere with no witnesses? Is it another type of fantasy, and ultimately just a narrative?

The artists in *Narrative Obsession in the Post-Colonial Psyche* engage in discourse, visually illustrating the loopholes, inequities, and the ever-present legacy of colonial strategies. Hegemony in a traditional sense of an occupying force imposing draconian laws may not still be the case in some countries, but the methodologies often remain. Art has the power to highlight and keep these issues current. There is a power in literature as there is a power in art to affect social change, enabling the viewer or reader to inhabit the experience or imagine the trauma of the 'other.' Narratives in varying forms investigated by these artists are an attempt at escaping them, overturning them, rediscovering them, or deconstructing them. Each of them interrupting—through inventing their own stories—the construction of colonial epistemologies, exposing the larger context of distortion of reality and the role of propaganda in pre, present, and post-colonialism. Reminiscent of Walker's compassionate protagonist 'N—'s intention, fiction can help people overcome intergenerational trauma to embrace healing and empathy, and, in the process, transform themselves into Gods.

—George Bolster, April 2024

Endnotes

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¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Báez, Firelei. "An Open Horizon (or) the Stillness of a Wound." *Art21*, February 10, 2021. <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/firelei-baez-an-open-horizon-or-the-stillness-of-a-wound/>.

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Image Credit

Front and Back Covers: Front and Back Covers: Évariste Vital Luminais, detail of North America section of *Panorama du Commerce*, 1889, as seen in Gerard & Kelly's *Panorama*, 2021. Courtesy of the artists and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Gerard & Kelly.

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Narrative Obsession in the Post-Colonial Psyche is curated by Anjuli Nanda Diamond and George Bolster. On view from May 16 to July 13, 2024. Featuring Firelei Báez, Gerard & Kelly, Brian Jungen, Hew Locke, Joiri Minaya, Frida Orupabo, Keith Piper, Umar Rashid, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Elisa Sighicelli, and Kara Walker.

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