



THE VISUAL LIFE OF SOCIAL AFFLICTION

A Small Axe Project

THE VISUAL LIFE OF SOCIAL AFFLICTION

CURATORIAL TEAM:

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Dedication

BELKIS RAMÍREZ

25 enero 1957 - 15 mayo 2019
25 January 1957 - 15 may 2019

Belkis Ramírez was an artist with a deeply poignant and expressive sense of the gendered modes of social affliction. Her art offered us a way to critically consider the full implications of the demand for gendered social justice. For those of us who had the privilege to know her, she brought astonishing light into our worlds, and a wicked sense of humor. Belkis Ramírez was a gift to us, and we honor her work and life.

René Peña

ARTIST

René Peña

COUNTRY

Cuba

TITLE

Untitled

MEDIUM

Digital Photography

DIMENSIONS

60 in. w x 32.308 in. h

(1524mm w x 820.6232mm h)

PHOTO CREDITS

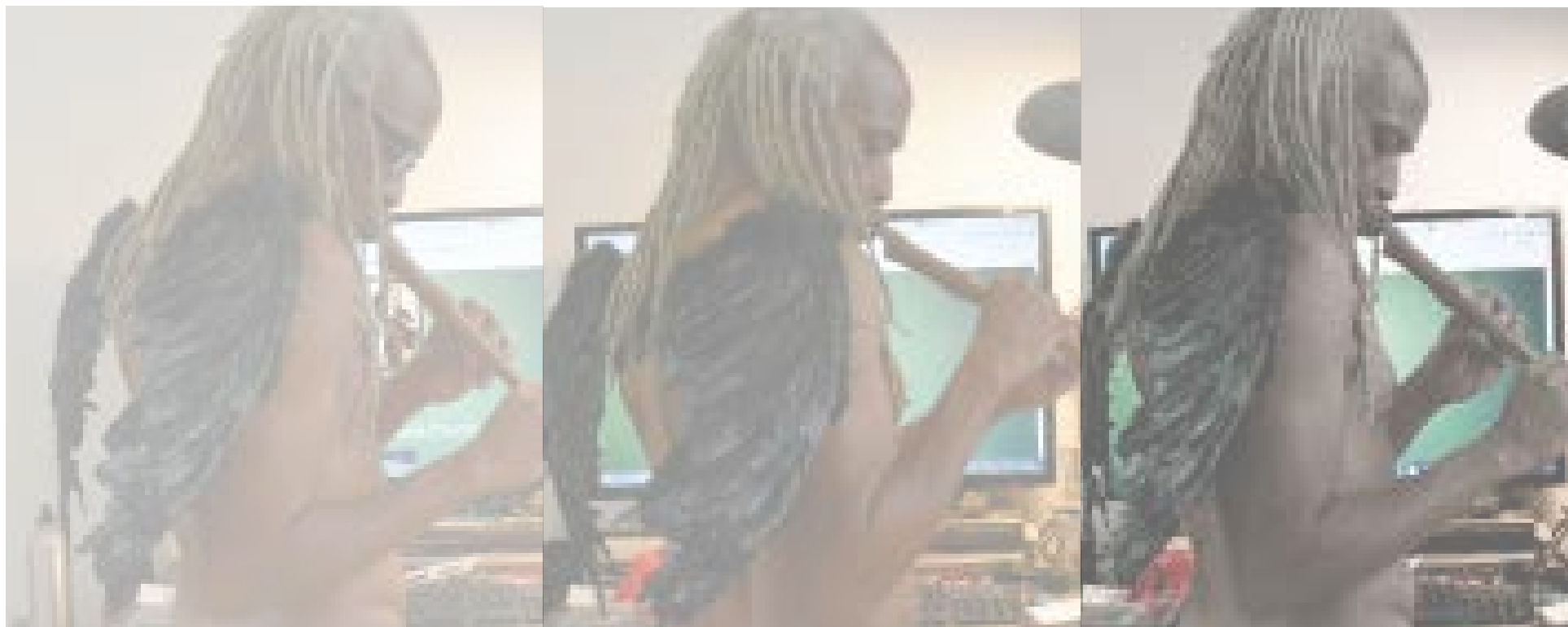
René Peña

YEAR

2018









Erica Moiah James

ON RENÉ PEÑA

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The Black Sublime

I

There are no black angels depicted in the history of Western art.¹ With *Untitled* (archangel) (2018), René Peña inserts a monumental black angel into the void of art history (fig. 1). The work represents a male figure (the artist himself) as a black black-winged angel.² Here, set against an impenetrable black abyss, the figure levitates with his back to the viewer in a triple representation of blackness. He is naked. His body is shown from the upper buttocks to the brows of his face. The torso twists counterclockwise in space to position the head in profile, as if the angel has just become aware of the viewer's presence behind him. His limbs slowly emerge from the darkness, a visual deferment of form that serves to emphasize the glossy pair of black wings anchored to the figure's back, ready to rustle and, if necessary, take flight. The wings cup the angel's upper back, encircling mysterious scars that interrupt his smooth skin surface, archiving violence and the extended life of a body that has seen and experienced *things* that will always remain



Figure 1. René Peña, *Untitled*, 2018; photograph.

unknown. The artist's technical control of light through a subdued tonal range also suggests narrative intent. In places where the black feathers completely reflect light, they *appear* white, pointing to the illusion of whiteness and, through formal inversion, the signifying capacity of blackness.

Untitled (archangel) inserts itself into the totalizing narrative of Western art history and unsettles the claims this history makes through historic black absence. This image objectifies and then disassembles this void by formally asserting the sublime qualities of blackness within a transcendent form. It conceptually disavows any reading of black skin, black surfaces, and blackness itself as signs of moral darkness notably seen in Edmund Burke's eighteenth-century enlightenment story that



Figure 2. Peña creating the Archangel, 2018. Photographs by the artist.

revealed the moral roots of racial determinism embedded in contemporary frames of looking, famously recounted in Paul Gilroy's seminal text *The Black Atlantic*.³ Peña's oeuvre exhibits a profound understanding of the historical stakes of looking for black people and *at* black people. His practice troubles the presumed objectivity and spatial and temporal authority of the colonial eye and imperial art histories to reveal the ways power shapes how one sees (see fig. 2).

This work folds time to examine the historical *presentness* of blackness in Cuba, the greater Caribbean, and the Americas by forcibly fracturing temporally bound, Western frames of looking. Like the absented black bodies in Western art history, in these spaces, far from transcendent, black ontology is experienced as a social affliction, a moral failing in societies such as Cuba's, where social, economic, and political access has been historically over-determined by one's position in hierarchies of color despite the rhetoric of revolution. *Untitled* (archangel) holds in its image, form, and signification the horror *and* transcendent capacity of black skin, black ontology, black being, or what I describe conceptually as *the black sublime*. Drawing on the work of Immanuel Kant, I argue that in a global Caribbean context *the work* enacts epistemic sovereignty through its assertion of blackness as a sublime condition. I will trace an interwoven epistemological thread that links Kant's notion of the sublime to European imaginings of blackness, Cuba, slavery, pseudoscience, art, and criminality in order to position how blackness historically enters Peña's work and is then critically repositioned beyond the dreams of a once aspirational raceless society to speak to matters of race more broadly.

II

In one of the most studied treatises to emerge from the European Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant described the sublime as something possessing the capacity to overwhelm us, an infinite thing or event that pushes one's mind beyond its ability to interpret, comprehend, or contain it.⁴ The sublime describes the quality of immeasurability—God, beauty, and nature; death and evil—things that exist beyond man's control that occupy a physical or conceptual space where the descriptive capacity of language fails. For Peña, this is where blackness lives.

The art historian Paul Neill notes that Kant was an important Enlightenment figure in Cuba.⁵ His ideas helped shaped theories of race during a period when Cubans, basking in the wealth of a burgeoning slave-based plantation economy in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, sought a new moral excuse for the continuation of slavery. Despite revolutions, abolitions, and emancipations happening in territories that encircled the island, to maintain its economy, Cuba kept true to the racial hierarchies that organized slave societies. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, when the island's census indicated that there were far more black and mixed-race persons on the island than those of European descent, Cuba's leaders, fearing a repeat of Haiti and determined to protect its plantation economy, implemented the *blanqueamiento* program. This was a far-reaching policy intended to literally whiten the Cuban population by alleviating asymmetries in population numbers and easing the racial fears of the economic and political minority of European descent that governed the island.⁶

Kant's racial theorization was useful in this context because as a *religious* text it affirmed the prognostications of pseudosciences that equated embodiment and skin color with moral capacity and criminal depravity. The darker the body, the more prone to immorality and criminal behavior one was seen to be. Though these racial theories were later debunked, we grapple with their afterlives and the interdependent and interdisciplinary knot of racial formation to this day. The scientific methods introduced by and fine-tuned in nineteenth-century phrenology to measure and record the physiognomy of races and assign meaning, for example, became foundational to teaching life drawing classes in art academies the world over and continue to do so to this day. Phrenology also laid the groundwork for Western criminology, which depended on the "scientific" assessment of physical traits to determine criminality. This was most famously observed in a suite of commissioned portraits of "criminals" and "mental patients" by the French artist Théodore Géricault in the early nineteenth century. Rather than by the sitter's name, each portrait was labeled according to his or her criminal proclivity, such as *The Kleptomaniac* (1822) or *Woman with a Gambling Mania* (1822).

With the advent of photography, the belief that one's moral failings could be determined by physical traits was transferred to this new media, and the "mug shot" then became the principal *scientific* instrument to determine physical signs of criminality. This is of particular importance in the context of Cuba because, as Kris Juncker has shown, the early work of the renown Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz was heavily dependent on similar methods of *scientific assessment*, and it was this work that helped shape public policies aimed at Afro-Cubans' religious practices, resulting in growing restrictions placed on this population by the state, whether individuals practiced or not. The signification of blackness on the island, as elsewhere, was being driven by factors completely external to black being. While this is an attenuated summary of a deeply complex and interwoven process, it is known that Ortiz completed his studies at the University of Madrid in the area of criminal ethnography, which Juncker describes as "a late Victorian field of study that attempted to predict the criminal dispositions of individuals by means of their race and culture."⁷ While the book based on his thesis, *Los negros brujos* (*The Black Sorcerers*), focused on Afro-Cuban religious practices, it also sought "to determine the visual characteristics of Afro-Cuban criminality."⁸ His typology of the Afro-Cuban sorcerer as criminal was adopted by Cuban police and politicians to support policies aimed at this population. In other words, the state's curtailing of Afro-Cuban religious practices based on Ortiz's research became a surrogate for policing blackness in the twentieth century.⁹

The assignment of morality to race in Cuba deeply rooted in Enlightenment thought was not eradicated by the 1959 revolution. Instead, its historical life demonstrates the degree to which inequality resulting from perceptions of race remain embedded in contemporary Cuban society. Though several hard-won gains have been made on the island, the rhetoric of social and political equality through revolution has served to hide the reality of racial inequality. Uncovering this ideological drag has centered the work of scholars and cultural workers such as Pedro Sarduy, Ann Helg, Jafari Allen, Alejandro de la Fuente, and others notably working in a range of disciplines that points to the epistemic complexity of racial constructions. Their scholarship has illuminated how access to better paying jobs in the tourism industry, better health care, and education are still largely determined by one's visible distance from ontological blackness.¹⁰ More fundamentally, the work of these scholars redress the ways value systems shaped by racialization have impacted national memory by the way historical narratives, particularly those of the visual and performing arts, as well as gender, sexual, and political histories, have been written.¹¹ This is the social and cultural milieu from which Peña's art emerges. *Untitled* (archangel) conceptually examines how access to resources and opportunities is marshaled on the island and how social inequalities emerge from, and become consolidated by, this access.¹² Within the Kafkaesque space of Cuba, black ontology becomes marked as a social affliction through the limiting effects of black skin. Peña's oeuvre interrogates what it means to be raced and gendered, what it means to have one's being framed within a system of reductive signification mapped onto the body one occupies. It explores the possibilities of transcendence within sociopolitical spaces but also art history.

III

Known for his moody black-and-white photographs of ordinary Cuban domestic interiors, René Peña began turning his camera on himself around 1992. In these early photographs, he purposefully reduces the personal space between a nude, black male subject and the audience (see fig. 3). The images lie close to the picture plane to fully dominate the composition, becoming irreducible. Though focused on Peña's body, the images disavow assumptions of autobiography. His manipulation of light and surface allow for a degree of ambiguity that decouples the body from racial and sexual binaries and the social and political associations embedded therein. The intentional directness of these images is in stark contrast to the quietude of his earlier photographic interiors, which were often presented from oblique, unexpected angles (see fig. 4). The photographs provide an unfamiliar visual path into the private spaces of everyday Cubans, in ways akin to Berenice Abbott's engagement of New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century. For Peña, the Cuban home is no less sublime a space than the vastness of Abbott's New York; each frame envisions a world from an unconsidered point of view, its tonal range precisely heightened. In Peña's series, the blacks are blacker, and the whites are grays appear brighter because of their contrasting relationship to the blacks. These tonal relations are both technically and conceptually imagined. In *Untitled* (Madonnas), from the *Hacia Adentro* series (1989–93), the viewer is in intimate association with a female figure whose back is turned toward the picture plane (fig. 5). Her body is rendered in a flat, almost undifferentiated shade of black. It absorbs light like a shadow. Dressed only in a white bra, with

her hair pulled back in a loose bun, the woman appears to be in mid-motion, leaning out of the right side of the compositional frame, the axis of her body echoing that of the metal bar securing the exterior door. Compositionally and conceptually, her body is in direct opposition to the picture of the Madonna hanging on a nail in the groove of a window or door frame that appears perma-



Figure 3. René Peña, *Untitled*, de la serie *Ritos*, 1992; photograph.



Figure 4. René Peña, *Untitled*, de la serie *Hacia Adentro*, 1989-93; photograph.



Figure 5. René Peña, *Untitled*, de la serie *Hacia Adentro*, 1989-93; photograph.

nently shuttered. The emphatic realness of this intimate encounter is juxtaposed against the unknowability of the figure beyond the rubrics of race and gender and the ambiguity of the moment captured, adding greater signification to its heightened tonal range.

Unlike the interiors, the figurative works are immeasurable, with no known markers to ground the viewer. They deny the passive possession afforded the gaze and instead demand contemplation through a crucially limited distance that denies access to the haptic elements of the image; one can look but one cannot touch. These works appear less subtle, more intentional, orchestrated and visually signified as opposed to knowable. However, by the end of the 1990s, Peña's works started to further disassociate elements in his pictures from indexical readings tied to their symbolic life in society. They began to put the constructed aspects of vision, the culturally informed lens through which we see in sharper relief. In the language of light, Peña's images now defamiliarize and unsettle rote readings. During this period, Peña's work pushed against the limits of stereotypical significations of the black body. Works such as *Untitled* (knife; 1994-98) are distilled and direct but address mythologies around black male sexuality-violence and death as well as associations between toxic masculinity and blackness (fig. 6). *Untitled* (lace; 2009) lingers at the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality, to disturb easy readings of the performance of singular and discreet identities (fig. 7).



Figure 6. René Peña, *Untitled*, 1994–98; photograph.



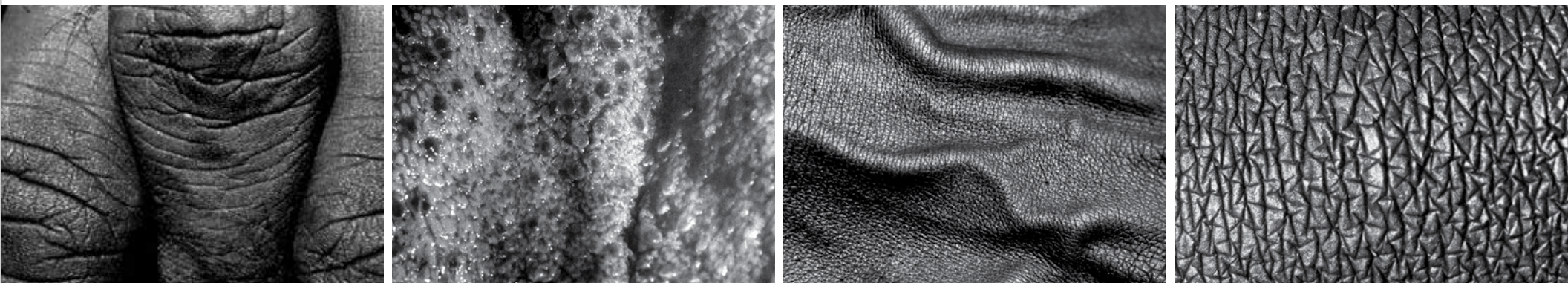
Figure 7. René Peña, *Untitled*, Lace Mantilla, 2009; photograph.

In the series *Man Made Materials* (1998/2001), the artist reaches a level of nuance and play that prefigures the sublime qualities of *Untitled* (archangel). Peña comes in even closer to the surface of his body, abstracting the parts from the whole and disassociating what viewers see from their prior perceptions of the black body (see figs. 8, 9, 10a, and 10b). These works asks viewers to contemplate the critical capacity of the black skin surface in postmodern Cuban society and global Caribbean imaginaries and are purposefully disorienting. The composition and discursive intentions of works such as *Untitled* (fingers), *Untitled* (tongue), and *Untitled* (skin), and later *Untitled* (archangel), turn the implications of Kant's racial theories inside out, unmasking them as chimeras. What was once thought theoretically impossible to achieve through black being, through signifying opacity, now overwhelms us to reveal the persistence of a black imaginary separate from its ontology. Peña has expressed a level of bemusement by the way his work has been seen within labyrinthine constructions of race, not just on the island but beyond its borders. He recounted to me a story from an exhibition in which this series of photographs was first shown.¹³ A white woman came up to him, insisting that *Untitled* (Skin) was an incred-

ible image of an *elefante*. For Peña, who was bemused by the observation, the woman's unquestionable faith in her misrecognition and the ease with which she projected her knowledge onto the artist standing before her, whose skin had been misread as that of an elephant, affirmed the conceptual dimensions of the project.

Untitled (archangel) takes this work a step further. It makes a claim for blackness as a sublime condition rather than a sign of darkness, or of unknowability, by disaggregating the ideology of black skin from the humanity of black being through form. The withdrawal of light and the evocation of darkness emerge as compositional characters in the work, serving to heighten its narrative potential by subduing formal contrasts, thus inverting the affective potential of light and dark in a zero-sum game. Like the ekphrastic image embedded in the memory of Cuban author Antonio Benítez-Rojo—two black women leisurely walking and talking on a late summer day during the Cuban missile crisis when the island was under threat of nuclear annihilation—at this point the descriptive will of language fails, and in “a certain kind of way,” black being enters the sublime.¹⁴

In the years leading up to *Untitled* (archangel), Peña created a series of photographic images using his body, that reinterpreted canonical artworks from Western art history. The series is in conversation with works by a number of black diasporic artists—such as Kerry James Marshall, Mickelene Thomas, Kehinde Wiley, Omar Victor Diop, and Awol



Figures 8a through 8d. René Peña, *Untitled*, from the series *Man Made Materials*, 1998–2001; photograph.

Erizku—interested in disassembling the mythologies of art histories and the intentionality of black absence in it while making a claim to these histories. Peña's interventions are clearly situated in personalized environments or symbolic conditions, as seen in *Marat Negro (after David)* (2009), the artist's take on Jacques David's *Death of Marat* (1796) (see figs. 11a and 11b), or in the figure emerging from blackness in *Samurai (after Donatello)* (2006), a re-dux of Donatello's *David* (1430–40). By taking on the subject of the ultimate heavenly creature in black in *Untitled (archangel)*, Peña brings together the conceptual threads from his oeuvre to form a new discursive plateau and generate a discourse that enunciates fully in the social and political contexts in which the work was conceived as well as in the history and traditions of art making to which he lays claim to, even as he reimagines them. Here, unmoored from the strictures of symbolic regimes of race, the work demands a new accounting. Scarred, yet beautiful and rising, *Untitled (archangel)* lays claim to everlasting life in the face of contemporary challenges to living—in Cuba, in the Caribbean, in the Americas, and in the world—while black.



Figure 11a. Jacques-Louis David, *Death of Marat*, 1796 detail; oil on canvas, 65 x 50 in.



Figure 11b. René Peña, *Marat Negro (after David)*, 2009; photograph.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This statement is based on the known archive. By “Western art,” I mean the historical development and designation of art history as a discipline in Europe and the United States, in concert with what has been described as the project of the West. This established the arts of Europe and later America as the central fulcrum of modernity, the standard bearer in which all other art practices were regarded as being peripheral to. In this history that extends from a non-African Egypt through Greece to Rome, on to Constantinople, into medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and modern Europe, and across the Atlantic to postwar America, there is no record of an angel in the heavenly realm of Christianity taking the form of anything other than a white person. There are examples of black angels in Ethiopian art and early Christian art in West Africa, which in the Ethiopian case predates European Christianity, but not in the art history René Peña was trained in.
- 2 As I discuss later in this essay, Peña is engaged in an ongoing conversation with canonical images from the history of Western art.
- 3 In Gilroy’s recounting, Edmund Burke conveys how the mere sight of an unnamed black woman, with her dark, black skin, produced feelings of terror in a boy whose sight had recently been restored. In the story, Burke views black skin—black ontology—as equivalent to conceptual darkness; darkness (understood explicitly as the absence of light and implicitly as the absence of morality) is not just signified by but embedded in the skin of a black woman. He surmises that for the boy, freed from the darkness of blindness, to look upon dark “things” such as a black rock, or in this case, a dark-skinned black person, initially translated psychologically as a return to the horror of blindness, where the black body performed the blinding effect of light, becoming a type of sublime force. The sublime embodies both beauty and horror, a capacity on full display in, for example, Arthur Jafa’s 2016 film *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 9–10; and Arthur Jafa, *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*, digital color video with sound, 7:30, 2016.
- 4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 45–232.
- 5 Paul Niell, *Urban Space as Heritage in Late Colonial Cuba: Classicism and Dissonance on the Plaza de Armas of Havana, 1754–1828* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 216.
- 6 Ibid., 205, 209–11. Niell discusses the practice of whitening by the Havana society and the philosophy of “social improvement” that couched the fear of a dominant black and mixed-race population that drove it. Europeans were encouraged to migrate to Cuba in response to the promise of free land, no taxes, and the chance of social and economic advancement. Entirely white towns were planned to accommodate the arrivants.
- 7 Kristine Juncker, *Afro-Cuban Religious Arts Popular Expressions of Cultural Inheritance in Espiritismo and Santería* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 13.
- 8 Ibid., 12–40.
- 9 As Miguel Arnedo posits, for all the recognition accorded Ortiz, his work betrays not only an acceptance of the racial hierarchies that placed those of African descent and their seminal contributions to an understanding of modern Cuba at the bottom, but also that how this view undergirded his theoretical position meant that his concept of transculturation worked best when African culture was seen to disappear into what was understood as European culture or whiteness. What Ortiz proposed could be described, one hundred years after the practice was first introduced on the island, as cultural *blanqueamiento*. See Miguel Arnedo, “Arte blanco con motivos negros: Fernando Ortiz’s Concept of Cuban National Culture and Identity,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 20, no. 1 (2001): 88–101.

- 10 Pedro Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).
- 11 In art history, the contributions of black Cuban artists, particularly those drawing on African-derived religious and social practices, were in large part written out of Cuban art history in an concerted effort to align the Cuban story with Western modernism. Art history projects like *Queloides: Race and Racism in Cuban Contemporary Art* (Havana and Pittsburgh, 2010–11) have played a key role in this recovery work, and works such as Sarduy and Stubbs's 2000 *Afro-Cuban Voices* and Jafari Allen's 2011 *¡Venceremos?* are examples of this type of scholarship coming from various disciplines over time. Alejandro de la Fuente, ed., *Queloides: Race and Racism in Cuban Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Sarduy and Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices*; and Jafari S. Allen, *¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 12 René Peña, email communication with the author, 9 July 2018.
- 13 René Peña, in conversation with the author, 2 May 2018, Miami, Florida.
- 14 Benítez-Rojo's story recounts an event from his childhood in Cuba during the October 1962 crisis. Faced with the threat of nuclear annihilation, everyone heeded the government's call to clear the streets and remain inside, windows and doors shut. As one can imagine, there came a point when the boy, feeling trapped and hot, just *had* to open a window to look outside and feel a fresh breeze. As he did this, Rojo recalls seeing two black women on the street below, walking and talking to each other in what he describes as "a certain kind of way." He says that when he saw the women walking in this *certain kind of way*, while the rest of the islanders were holed up in their homes, he instantly knew that there would be no nuclear holocaust. It wasn't that the women had conjured away the apocalypse, but that the language of knowing and peace they performed through their black bodies illuminated a truth he could not articulate in words but fully understood. In an experience that was beyond verbal language, through these black women, in opposition to Burke's horror, Benítez-Rojo encountered the transcendent quality of the black sublime. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James E. Maraniss, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 10.

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ANNA ARABINDAN-KESSON

ANNA ARABINDAN-KESSON is an assistant professor of black diaspora art, jointly appointed in the departments of African American Studies and Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. Born in Sri Lanka, she also trained and practiced as a registered nurse in Australia, New Zealand, and England. Her first book, *Black Bodies, White Gold: Art, Cotton, and Commerce in the Atlantic World*, is under contract with Duke University Press. Along with Mia Bagneris (Tulane University), she was awarded an ACLS Collaborative Research Fellowship for a new book project, “Beyond Recovery: Reframing the Dialogues of Early African Diasporic Art and Visual Culture, 1700–1900.”

MARIELLE BARROW

MARIELLE BARROW is a Fulbright Scholar, social entrepreneur, and visual artist. Her research investigates the formation of countercultural memory and cultural capital across Caribbean artistic practice, which she translates into practical intervention through the 3rd Saturdayz curatorial project in which visual and performance artists intervene in national discussions. She has worked across the Caribbean and in the United States and Africa in cultural programming and as a creative industries consultant. In 2010 she initiated the *Caribbean InTransit* project, an arts education, open-access, peer-reviewed journal of Caribbean arts, and the This Is ME training program for at-risk youth. She holds a PhD in cultural studies.

NIJAH CUNNINGHAM

NIJAH CUNNINGHAM is an assistant professor of English at Hunter College, City University of New York. His teaching and research focus on issues of time and aesthetics in twentieth-century African American and African diasporic literature and culture. He is currently working on a book manuscript titled “Quiet Dawn,” which considers the ambiguous legacies of black and anticolonial revolutionary politics. His work has appeared in *Small Axe*, *Women and Performance*, and the *New Inquiry*. He has also curated exhibitions, such as *Hold: A Meditation on Black Aesthetics* (Princeton University Art Museum, 2018). He is part of the Small Axe Project.

BLUE CURRY

BLUE CURRY was born in Nassau, The Bahamas, and works primarily in sculpture and installation, using an idiosyncratic language of commonplace objects and found materials to engage with themes of exoticism, tourism, and culture. He has exhibited in the Liverpool, SITE Santa Fe, and Jamaica biennials; the Caribbean Triennial; and in galleries and institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Art Museum of the Americas, the Museum of Latin American Art, the Nassauischer Kunstverein, P.P.O.W, Fondation Clément, Studio Voltaire, and Halle 14. He currently lives and works in London.

FLORINE DEMOSTHENE

FLORINE DEMOSTHENE was born in the United States and grew up between Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and New York. She earned her BFA from Parsons the New School for Design, New York, and her MFA from Hunter College, City University of New York. She has exhibited extensively through group and solo exhibitions in the United States, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Africa, with recent solo shows that include *The Stories I Tell Myself* (Gallery 1957, Ghana) and *The Unbecoming* (Semaphore Gallery, Switzerland). She is the recipient of a Tulsa Artist Fellowship, an Arts Moves Africa Grant, and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant. She has participated in residencies in the United States, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, Ghana, and Tanzania. Her work can be seen at the University of South Africa, the Lowe Museum of Art, and the PFF Collection of African American Art, and in various private collections worldwide. She resides between New York, Accra, and Johannesburg.

RICARDO EDWARDS

RICARDO EDWARDS was born in Jamaica in 1994 and brought up in rural St. Ann. He is a self-taught visual artist who has explored and experimented with many different forms of visual communications throughout the years, which has led to him being described in a diverse range of ways: tattoo artist, graphic designer, animator, background artist, character designer, and illustrator.

CHANDRA FRANK

CHANDRA FRANK is an independent curator and a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work interrogates the role of archives, transnational diasporic queer kinship, and the politics of pleasure, with a specific emphasis on the black, migrant, and refugee women's movement in the Netherlands during the 1980s. She has curated and organized public programming for 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning, Framer Framed, the Institute for Creative Arts in Cape Town, the Durban Art Gallery, and Tate Exchange. Her writing has been featured in *Discover Society*, *Africa is a Country*, *Warscapes*, and *Feminist Review*.

ERICA MOIAH JAMES

ERICA MOIAH JAMES is an art historian, a curator, and an assistant professor at the University of Miami. Her research centers on modern and contemporary art of the Caribbean, African, and African American diasporas. Recent publications include "Charles White's J'Accuse! and the Limits of Universal Blackness" (*Archives of American Art Journal*, 2016); "Every Nigger is a Star: Re-imaging Blackness from Post Civil Rights America to the Post-Independence Caribbean" (*Black Camera*, 2016); "Caribbean Art in Space and Time" (Barbados Museum, 2018), and "Decolonizing Time: Nineteenth-Century Haitian Portraiture and the Critique of Anachronism in Caribbean Art" (*NKA*, May 2019). She a 2019 fellow at University of Miami's Humanities Center and is completing a monograph titled "After Caliban: Caribbean Art in the Global Imaginary."

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PATRICIA KAERSENHOUT

PATRICIA KAERSENHOUT was born in the Netherlands to Surinamese parents. She developed an artistic journey in which she investigates her Surinamese background in relation to her upbringing in a European culture. The political thread in her work raises questions about the African diaspora's movements and relations to feminism, sexuality, racism, and the history of slavery. She considers her art practice to be a social one. With her projects she empowers (young) men and women of color and supports undocumented refugee women.

CHRISTINA LEÓN

CHRISTINA A. LEÓN is an assistant professor of English at Princeton University. Her research and teaching center around Latinx/a/o literature and Caribbean literature, in addition to critical engagements with feminist theory, queer theory, and performance studies. In fall 2016, she was a member of the residential research group Queer Hemisphere; América Queer at the Humanities Research Institute at the University of California, Irvine. She is currently at work on her first monograph, titled "Brilliant Opacity: Queer Latinidades and the Ethics of Relation," which theorizes opacity as an ethical reading practice and an artistic praxis for contemporary cultural productions of *latinidad*. She is also a coeditor of a special issue of *Women and Performance* titled "Lingering in Latinidad: Aesthetics, Theory, and Performance in Latina/o Studies" (2015). Her articles have appeared in *Sargasso* and *ASAP/Journal*, and some of her translations will appear in the forthcoming *Havana Reader*, to be published by Duke University Press.

MIGUEL LUCIANO

MIGUEL LUCIANO is a multimedia visual artist whose work explores history, popular culture, social justice, and migration through sculpture, painting, and socially engaged public art projects. His work has been exhibited extensively throughout the United States and elsewhere and is featured in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, and the Museo de Arte y Diseño de Miramar. He is a Socially Engaged Art Fellow with A Blade of Grass and is currently working as an artist in residence within the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Civic Practice Partnership and Residency Program.

ANNA JANE McINTYRE

ANNA JANE McINTYRE was born in London to a Trinidadian father and British mother. Split between a fascination for both the sciences and arts, she began her postsecondary education studying marine biology at University of British Columbia. She earned a BFA from Ontario College of Art and Design and an MFA from Concordia University. Her work exploring cultural negotiations has been made possible through support from the Canada Council for the Arts, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, Studio 303, La Table ronde du Mois de l'histoire des Noirs, and the Montréal, and arts interculturels (MAI). She lives in Montreal.

KANEESHA CHERELLE PARSARD

KANEESHA CHERELLE PARSARD is a Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago, where from 2020 she will be an assistant professor. She is a scholar of gender and sexuality in Caribbean literature and visual arts, particularly their representations of the aftermath of slavery and indenture. Her scholarship has been supported by the Mellon Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies and can be found in *Small Axe*, *American Quarterly*, and *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought*.

RENÉ PEÑA

RENÉ PEÑA was born in Havana and studied English at Havana University. His photographic work has been shown in Cuba and elsewhere in galleries, art fairs, and museums, including the Fototeca de Cuba; Foto Fest, Houston; International Art Fair, Arco, Spain; Havana Biennial, Havana; the Patricia Conde Gallery, Ciudad de México; and KyotoGraphie, Kyoto. His works are also part of private and public collections such as the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana; the Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona; Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; the Farber Collection, Florida; the Beatrice Liaskowski Collection, Zurich; the Contemporary Afrocuban art collection of Chris von Christerson, London; the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh; and the Institute of Latin American Studies, Harvard University. He lives and works in Havana.

MARCEL PINAS

MARCEL PINAS was born in 1971 in the village Pelgrimkondre, in the district of Marowijne, Suriname. As a teenager he moved to the capital, Paramaribo. His art teacher in school recognized his talent and convinced him to enroll at the Nola Hatterman Art Institute, from which he graduated in 1990. He studied at the Edna Manley College for the Visual and Performing Arts in Jamaica and was artist in residence at the Vermont Studio Center in the United States and at the Rijksacademie in Amsterdam. The theme *Kibri a Kulturu* (preserve the culture) is his main driving force and source of inspiration. With his art he aims to create a lasting record of the lifestyle and traditions of the Maroons and hopes to create a worldwide awareness and appreciation for the unique traditional communities in Suriname and the serious threats they are facing today. He is the founder of the Kibii Foundation.

BELKIS RAMÍREZ

BELKIS RAMÍREZ was born in Santiago Rodríguez, Dominican Republic, in 1957. She studied art and architecture at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo and took engraving courses at the University of San José, Costa Rica, and Altos de Chavón, Dominican Republic. She is the recipient of numerous national and international residencies and awards. Her work has been shown in many thematic exhibitions, including *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World*, New York, and *Mover la Roca*, Miami. Her work also appeared at the 55th Venice Biennale; the 11th Havana Biennial; the 1st International Triennial of the Caribbean; Horizontes Insulares; and the 1st Polygraphy Triennial of Latin America and the Caribbean, among many other venues. She died in May 2019.

CONTRIBUTORS

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DAVID SCOTT teaches in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University. He is the author, most recently, of *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* (2017). He is the editor of *Small Axe* and the director of the Small Axe Project.

NICOLE SMYTHE-JOHNSON

NICOLE SMYTHE-JOHNSON is a writer and an independent curator based in Kingston, Jamaica. She has written for *Terremoto*, *Miami Rail*, *Flash Art*, and the *Jamaica Journal*, among other publications. In 2016 she was awarded the inaugural Tilting Axis Curatorial Research Fellowship, on the basis of which she visited Scotland, Grenada, Barbados, Suriname, and Puerto Rico, looking at curatorial practice in alternative and artist-run spaces. Most recently, she was assistant curator on *Neither Day nor Night* (2017), an exhibition of the work of Jamaican painter John Dunkley at the Perez Art Museum in Miami. She is acting editor of the *Caribbean Quarterly*.

KARA SPRINGER

KARA SPRINGER is a visual artist and an industrial designer of Jamaican and Barbadian heritage, born in Barbados and brought up in Southern Ontario. Her interdisciplinary practice explores the intersections of the body and industrial modes of production through sculpture, photography, and designed objects. She completed a BSc in life sciences at the University of Toronto, concurrent to a BDes in industrial design from the Ontario College of Art and Design. She also studied new media and contemporary technology at the École Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle (ENSCI-Les Ateliers), Paris. Her work has been exhibited at the Frankfurt Museum of Applied Arts in Germany, the Politecnico di Torino in Italy, the Cultural Center of Belem in Portugal, and the 2014 Jamaica Biennial.

CLAIRE TANCONS

CLAIRE TANCONS is a curator and scholar invested in the discourse and practice of the postcolonial politics of production and exhibition. For the last decade, she has charted a distinct curatorial and scholarly path in performance, inflecting global art historical genealogies with African diasporic aesthetics, as well as decentering curatorial methodologies as part of a wider reflection on global conditions of cultural production. Her contributions to curatorial practice includes *En Mas': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean* (with Krista Thompson), which received an Emily Hall Tremain Exhibition Award; *Hétéronomonde*, the first edition of the Tout-Monde Caribbean Contemporary Arts Festival (with Johanna Auguiac, Miami, 2018); and a large selection of artists of the Americas for *Look for Me All around You* (Sharjah Biennial 14, Emirate of Sharjah, 2019.) She is the recipient of a 2018 Creative Capital, Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers grant for her book-in-progress, "Roadworks: Processional Performance in the New Millennium."

YOLANDA WOOD

YOLANDA WOOD was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1950. She is professor emerita of the history of art at the University of Havana, where in 1985 she founded the chair in Caribbean Art. She has served as the vice-chancellor of the Instituto Superior de Arte in Cuba (1985–91), the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters at the University of Havana (1994–2000), and as a Cuban cultural advisor in Paris (2000–2005). She was the director of the Caribbean Studies Center and *Anales del Caribe* at Casa de las Americas (2000–2016). Her most recent book is *Islas del Caribe: Naturaleza-arte-sociedad* (2012).

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