A TRAVELING COMMUNITY:
CONTEMPORARY DIASPORIC ART FROM GERMANY AND DETROIT

By

Krsna Santos

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ABSTRACT

This project combines a traditional long form written dissertation on contemporary diasporic art from Germany, Ghana and Detroit with an online exhibition showcasing this art. Through analysis and curation of artworks of eight contemporary artists across the Atlantic this project has two main goals. First, it strives to better understand the multifaceted realities of diasporic people today. Second, it ultimately argues that the work of these artists can help readers and viewers glimpse a world beyond the dehumanizing worldviews embedded by colonialism. Using the lens of decolonial theory, this project explores three themes that link the artworks: visions of the future, representation, and places of belonging. Each chapter and gallery puts artists from Europe and Africa in conversation with artists from Detroit. Chapter/Gallery One takes the work of Theo Eshetu and Matthew Angelo Harrison to analyze how both artists use West African sculptures to help explore the idea of a world beyond and without Europe's exploitation of Africa and its people. Chapter/Gallery Two takes works from Eva Leitolf, Amoako Boafo and Conrad Egyir to focus on how representation can be either a tool of state oppression or a tool for emancipatory, limitless representation. Chapter/Gallery Three centers around the work of Zohra Opoku, Emeka Ogboh and Tiff Massey to reflect on ideas of home for those whose lives are affected by diaspora. The fourth written chapter and the virtual galleries themselves are informed by museum work and curation that aims to center artists and viewers, instead of exhibitions built around the vision of a singular curator. This hybrid, interdisciplinary project also contributes to the growing body of work in German Studies that pulls from multiple disciplines to better understand the realities of minoritized people in the German-speaking world. Taken together, these two branches of the project offer a model for how the Humanities today

can be critical and imaginative tools for scholars and non-scholars to sit with visions of our world where the legacy of colonialism loses its power.

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Introduction: A Traveling Community

Years before I took any Museum Studies courses, interviewed any artists, or knew what this dissertation would be about, I visited an exhibit on Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera's time in Detroit. Rivera, whose *Detroit Industry* mural is one of the crown jewels of the Detroit Institute of Arts, was an artist I was deeply familiar with as a Detroiter. Kahlo, however, was often portrayed as a companion or supporter of her husband during his years painting the mural. What the exhibit equally focused on, however, was that her time in Detroit was both personally devastating due to a miscarriage and also one of the prolific creation of deeply autobiographical and activist-minded artwork. Many of her artworks from this time focused on her miscarriage. While walking to the museum, I heard a woman explaining to her mother how a brutal childhood bus accident gave Kahlo severe injuries that affected her the rest of her life, including injuries to her pelvis, uterus and spine that made her afraid of giving birth. Kahlo's painting of herself lying in a Henry Ford Hospital bed, bleeding and with red threads tied to objects like a pelvic bone and a flower, was the emotional focal point of a multi-gallery exhibit during my visit. I witnessed that this depiction of her miscarriage moved a crowd of people around the painting to tears.[1] This moment, of realizing how art can speak to silences, break taboos, and unite people in a shared

Figure 1. Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit, 1933, Spencer Throckmorton Collection, New York, NY, USA

[1] While the DIA exhibit did not mention it in the exhibition text, Kahlo went to a doctor for an abortion during her time in Detroit. However, it was unsuccessful and sometime later the Mexican painter went to a hospital with a hemorrhage and miscarried. It was likely that scarring in Kahlo's uterus from her childhood accident made it impossible for her to have children, backing up Kahlo's fear of trying to give birth and therefore her desire to get an abortion. See Munoz for more.

experience in a deeply divided city, has been a point of reference for the history of the creation of this dissertation.

My dissertation strives to transpose the successes of thoughtful museum work on marginalized people, as seen in that DIA exhibition, to contemporary artwork that is about or by people in diasporas, in a form that consists of both this more traditional scholarly analysis and a digital exhibition on WordPress. Within these complementary digital and written components, I put artists who work in several different mediums and are from Europe, Africa and Detroit into conversation with an eye towards how they critically analyze and offer alternatives to narrow and often dehumanizing views of the "Other." While informed by many scholarly traditions, from the poetry of Édouard Glissant to the activist curation of Martha Rosler, the foundational critical lens of my work is the decolonial theory of Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Sylvia Wynter. Their work ultimately calls for all of us to use the knowledge and worldviews of marginalized people to imagine and then build a world outside of coloniality: the deadly and still present sexual, racial and epistemological hierarchies established by colonialism. I argue that in the work of contemporary diasporic artists, like Matthew Angelo Harrison and Zohra Opoku, there are off ramps from the narrow confines of coloniality that can lead us toward a more humanizing view of "Others," ourselves and ultimately our world. With the digital exhibition component of my dissertation, complete with labels meant for a general audience, I also aim to create a model of dissertation that has the potential for speaking both to scholars and to non-scholars people.

When powerful art is curated with an eye towards profound human experiences it has the potential to reach people who do often not see their experiences and their humanity expressed in public. The very nature of diasporic art, that it crosses continents and cultures, necessitated being informed by a variety of disciplines and histories of art world activism both to respect the unique

experiences of each artist and, hopefully, to make their work mean something to viewers. From decolonial theory to indigenous curatorial work to scholarship on specific diasporas emerging from unique historical coordinates in both Europe and the Americas, I have turned to work of others to proceed with as much sensitivity and insight as possible.

Framing Coloniality, Decoloniality, and Diaspora

Thoughtful curation requires understanding of all interwoven histories and ideologies that have informed and continue to inform the creation and maintenance of museum collections. To untangle that history, with particular attention to the German context, I turn to thinkers and historians to understand how museums consciously and unconsciously remain weighed down by the influence of colonialism. German scholars such as historian Jürgen Zimmerer have actively worked with the input of Namibian and Nigerian artists and scholars to investigate Germany's colonial history and how it should address issues such as restituting looted art. Zoé Samudzi has painstakingly traced an intellectual, political and scientific history of how the remains of indigenous Africans in the German colony of Southwest Africa were sent to German research institutions and have since around 2019 been the subject of repatriation efforts. Peggy Piesche, a literary and cultural studies scholar, traces the still-present legacy of Kant on fundamental cultural attitudes. Her scholarship focuses on how the whiteness that Kant defined in his writing still has power today through being able to present itself superior and powerful when it wants, while at other times constituting an invisible "raceless" norm.

While Germany had colonies for a relatively short time, from 1884 until 1918, it has a centuries-long history of developing and propagating colonial ideas and ideas that justified colonialism. That intellectual colonialism, or coloniality, is what the field of decolonial studies is based upon; in Nelson Maldonado-Torres' definition, coloniality "refer[s] to long-standing

patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (243). In her groundbreaking monograph, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870*, Susanne Zantop argues that long before the acquisition of physical colonies, German thinkers had fantasies of undertaking colonial conquests similar to their European neighbors. These colonial fantasies emerged alongside conceptualizations of race and racial hierarchies, which were used to justify colonialism. German-language thinkers were central in those conceptualizations: Kant himself introduced the concept of human race into the German language (Zantop 68) and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, along with Christian Wünsch, were among the first figures to use pseudoscientific cranial measurements to classify race (Zantop 77). Despite varying approaches, "all 'anthropologists' in the 1790s seem to share the conviction that the white male is primeval 'man', who possesses the most harmonious countenance and has therefore rightfully achieved cultural superiority" and the German race was, according to these thinkers, the most beautiful and culturally advanced of the white races (Zantop 78). This “German race” according to these race science thinkers reflected a national character as well, one more industrious and peaceful than its European neighbors, making it capable of being a more just colonizer if given the opportunity. One sees in these fantasies a close intermingling of constructions of race and nation, whereby the German nation is composed of a single dominant white race. As generations of scholars like Zantop have shown, with a history of two genocides in Namibia, ethnic “zoos” at home, and the Holocaust, Germany has a haunting legacy of using the ethnic distinctions it helped invent to subjugate, humiliate, and annihilate those who did not fit into its conceptions, and/or its leaders' conceptions, of belonging to the nation.

Maldonado-Torres argues for a link between that corporeal annihilation and epistemic annihilation in colonialism with a play on Descartes' cogito, writing of the coloniality worldview: "I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)'" (252). Existence and the acceptance of thinking and thereby knowledge are linked. The *damnés*, or marginalized people, cannot exist in coloniality unless their thinking is acknowledged. Not recognizing the intellectual production of marginalized peoples means not recognizing their being. The antidote for Maldonado-Torres is the decolonial turn, which "[…] is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves" (262). The decolonial turn also does something else, namely gives presence to the voices of the *damnés*: "The decolonial turn marks the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at before unknown institutional levels" (262). The critique of existing knowledge is not enough for decolonization; the entrance of new, formerly invisible knowledge is also essential. Bringing the marginalized into existence means recognizing their knowledges; the decolonial turn is then about bringing new forms of thinking and consequently new forms of being into reality.

While the very nature of decolonial theory—which is the water that permeates all layers of my analysis and considerations in this dissertation—is that while it always keeps an eye on history, the design of my work, from the artists chosen to how they are grouped together, always looks towards alternative futures. The desire to always ask the question, "what is possible when we turn away from coloniality?" comes both from the artists, who consistently build windows

into more just ways of being, and from two key thinkers from the Caribbean: Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter.

Glissant is a regularly referenced thinker and poet in many circles, including in contemporary art writing and the curating of influential figures like Hans-Ulrich Obrist, because his concept of relation seems to provide a framework for doing truly international museum work. Relation suggests "[…] a world in which one is, quite simply, one agrees to be, with and among others" (Glissant 128 qtd in Last). My turn to Glissant, however, is focused on his writing on what family histories were lost in the Middle Passage and how that, according to Glissant, necessitates a future-centric approach in the artmaking for Black Caribbeans. As John. E Drabinski writes "[n]othing precedes the shoreline" (299.) There is no site to return to, no memorial to create, because the ocean itself is where so many lives were lost. That then necessitates, according to Glissant, constantly looking towards the future, since the past is at the bottom of the ocean. For analyzing the work of the Detroit-based artists in my dissertation, particularly Matthew Angelo Harrison, Glissant's view became the framework for analyzing how in the act of trying to recover a connection to Africa, many Black American artists build alternative futures. Harrison builds sculptures, which he calls prototypes, for alternate timelines where the perpetrators of the slave trade did not ravage Africa and repress African cultures globally. I argue that Glissant helps us understand the tensions in the work of artists like Harrison, where attempts to recover a stolen past and imagine an alternate timeline come from a longing for connection.

From a different discipline, but from a similar impetus to recover a seemingly lost past, sits the work of Sylvia Wynter, a Jamaican novelist, playwright and philosopher. Her work painstakingly combs through centuries of Western imperialist ideas to argue that the standard

conception of "Man," in the grand Enlightenment sense, is narrative that was violently made into a "universal truth" through colonization. As Walter D. Mignolo, a pillar in the field of decolonial theory, puts it, Wynter recognizes that this "universal" concept of man was designed to exclude Black Caribbean women's worldviews and humanity. There is then only one worldview, or epistemic canon, and "[…] if you have been classified in/as difference, then you are required to submit and assimilate to the canon *or* remain outside" (106). Instead of participating in this system that forces assimilation or exclusion, Mignolo argues that Wynter takes up what he calls:

> […] the decolonial option, a practice of rethinking and unraveling dominant worldviews that have been opened up by Indigenous and black and Caribbean thinkers since the sixteenth century in América (with accent) and the Caribbean. The decolonial option does not simply protest the contents of imperial coloniality; it demands a delinking of oneself from the knowledge systems we take for granted (and can profit from) and practicing epistemic disobedience" (106-7).

Wynter's excavation of the history of dehumanizing "universal" Enlightenment views and subsequent call to turn towards non-universal, non-European epistemologies also takes the form, I argue, of being inherently future-centric and at times illegible if we are narrowly wed to only European views on "Man" and humanity. Inspired by Wynter, in each chapter I turn to an artist whose practice embodies both non-European epistemologies and a call to think anew about what being human outside and beyond coloniality looks like. Detroit-based Ghanaian artist Conrad Egyir's work practices the kind of epistemic disobedience that Wynter and Mignolo recognize. Egyir, as an immigrant from Ghana, has regularly been confronted by US views on Black people that both did not align with how his Akan family saw the world and how he himself saw Black

people.[2] The Akan, according to Egyir, have an epistemology that resists the idea of being constrained by geographic and ontological limits (Egyir). As a response to external attempts to limit expressions of Black identity, such as school codes defining what kind of Black hair styles were "acceptable," Egyir's art practice strives to represent Black people in such complex, richly symbolic and multi-faceted ways that they become almost illegible. His paintings often take one model and kaleidoscopically explode their identities into several different figures, some even looking supernatural, that reflect the complexity of the people he chooses to paint. I argue, like Wynter, that Egyir engages in epistemic disobedience by asking viewers to appreciate a depiction of Black identity through an Akan epistemological filter that is boundless.

One of the scholarly undercurrents that critically informs my reading of all of the Black artists featured in this dissertation is Katherine McKittrick's work on Black diasporas. I turned to McKittrick, because I was searching for scholarship that resisted a clichéd or generalized definition of what people in diasporas experience. The very design of the dissertation, which brings artists in Africa, the German-speaking world and the US into conversation in every chapter, inherently defies national boundaries and very often resists any narrow categorization. As McKittrick argues, in trying to define a diaspora we run the very real risk of reinscribing the colonial tendency to define and attempt to know the whole world; this consequently can create maps of diasporas that emphasize borders and "us" and "them" thinking. As an alternative mindset, McKittrick asserts that "[d]iaspora must necessarily welcome and bring into focus those identities that push up against, and fragment, the very material, metaphoric, and representational spaces of diaspora in itself" (20). Therefore, in each chapter of the dissertation, and gallery of the

[2] The Akan live in modern day Ghana and Ivory Coast. When I asked Egyir in conversation how he liked to refer to his community he said he likes the term family. So, throughout this dissertation I have followed Egyir's framing.

digital exhibition, there are always artists who are responding in very different ways to the same issues. For example, Theo Eshetu's *Atlas Fractured* uses African sculpture to push back against the colonial European legacy of defining the world via race, whereas Matthew Angelo Harrison uses West African sculpture to try and represent what was lost in the Middle Passage. They are both part of the Black diaspora—Eshetu is Dutch Ethiopian, Harrison is Black American—and yet their life stories and creative practices reflect two very different lived experiences and relationships with African sculpture outside of Africa. My goal in putting artists like this in conversation is not only to resist the kind of restrictive diasporic geographies McKittrick warns about, but in resisting those restrictive geographies to create a more nuanced representation of all the complex threads of within diasporas.

The International Roots of Black German Studies

Since at least the 1980s German Studies has looked beyond the German-speaking world for guidance and inspiration for how to give voice to and critically think about the experiences of minoritized people. From Audre Lorde being a mentor for a generation of Black, primarily lesbian activists and artists in 1980s West Germany, to contemporary German Studies scholars drawing from Anglo-American intellectuals like Stuart Hall, Christina Sharpe and bell hooks, German Studies has become a field that weaves together its own rich tradition with others from around the world. This project would be impossible without that now decades-old movement within German Studies, since the scholars and activists from the 1980s on have established a movement within German Studies that is fundamentally international and multi-disciplinary.

In many ways German Studies has become disciplinarily porous out of necessity. As Black queer German artist James Gregory Atkinson explained while working in Detroit, "[i]n the US People of Color have developed a discourse and vocabulary to push and embark on issues

regarding race, gender and privilege that in this form is still alien to a German understanding/context" (Furtado). Anglo-American scholarship has then helped German Studies write about minoritized people in the German-speaking world. From Homi Bhabha's conception of hybridity to Audre Lorde's Black feminist writing and teaching, non-German sources have provided theoretical wells for German Studies scholars in Germany and beyond to pull from. Where canonical German Studies thinkers, such as Hegel, Marx, Heidegger and Brecht, either supported or had a limited analysis of how hegemonic powers dehumanize people via race and sex, thinkers like Homi Bhabha, Audre Lorde, Christina Sharpe and—of particular importance in this dissertation—decolonial theorists have provided the critical lenses to understand Germany through the lives of the minoritized.

American writer and scholar Audre Lorde developed a deep connection with Germany beginning in 1984. That year she was invited to teach on Black femme poets at Berlin's Free University by sociologist Dagmar Schultz (Michaels, 22). Lorde quickly became a mentor while teaching in West Berlin. As Tiffany Florvil details in *Mobilizing Black Germany* with many first-hand accounts, Lorde served as a catalyst for Black Germans to develop a collective identity around which to organize and became a kind of maternal figure for those who practically never saw figures of authority who looked like them. While the earliest members of the Black German Women's movement, like Katharina Oguntoye and Katja Kinder, had already met before Lorde came to Berlin, Lorde's mentorship motivated these activists to publish one of the key foundational texts of the Black German Women's Movement: *Farbe bekennen* in 1986, a collection of texts from Black German feminists (Oguntoye et al.). This book was so powerful that it helped spur the establishment of the Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD, the Initiative of

Black Germans) in Berlin and ADEFRA (Afro-DEutsche FRAuen) (Black German Women) in Munich (Oguntoye et al., 167).

Farbe bekennen helped develop the very discipline of Black German Studies. As leading Black German Studies scholar Fatima El-Tayeb puts it, *Farbe bekennen* "[…] contextualised experiences that had been perceived as aberrant and individual, pointing them out as collective traits in the life of a population that up until that point was neither perceived nor had defined itself as a community—black Germans" (*If You Can't* 471). May Ayim, a co-editor of *Farbe bekennen*, developed into a highly influential poet before her early death in 1996.[3] Katharina Oguntoye, Ayim's co-editor along with Dagmar Schultz, has established a career as a historian and activist, winning the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2022 ("Senatorin"). Peggy Piesche, who joined ADEFRA in 1990 and worked with the writers of *Farbe bekennen*, has become a leading scholar in Germany on the Black and lesbian experience in East Germany, as well as writing on topics such as the power of whiteness ("Der 'Fortschritt"′). Maisha Maureen Auma (who has also gone by the last name Eggers), who was active in ADEFRA in the early 90s with Piesche, has also been an activist and scholar in Gender Studies and Critical Whiteness Studies. While inspired and still influenced by scholarship from the US, Black German Studies in Germany has developed into a now decades old discipline that has developed language for and critical perspectives on the Black experience in Germany throughout its history and today.

US academia has also been a key place for the development of Black German Studies. Sara Lennox was an early champion of Black German Studies in the US. Due to her work in the

[3] Ayim had the last name Optiz when *Farbe bekennen* was published. She later changed her last name to Ayim.

1990s, the German and Scandinavian Studies program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst became a nexus for Black German Studies (*Black Lives in Germany).* In 2016 Lennox edited a collection of contemporary scholarship on Blackness in Germany called *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture,* in which *s*cholars based in the US and Germany explore everything from Cameroonians under German colonialism to anti-Blackness in East Germany.

Fatima El-Tayeb, who moved from Hamburg to US academia, established herself as one of the key scholars on minoritized people in modern Europe with *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. That 2011 monograph has become one of the key texts for thinking critically about German and European identity in a Europe that has undeniably been changed by migration, particularly that of people of color and Muslims. In this wide-ranging study she explores many elements of today's Europe for minoritized people, such as importantly arguing that hip-hop culture in European cities formed a kind network of spaces outside of the confines of national identity that allowed youth of color in Europe to connect with one another. Beyond that El-Tayeb also details how the reality of people of color in Europe often clashes with clichés embedded in the common consciousness of what, for example, Muslim women who wear the hijab represent. El-Tayeb argues that, in the European hegemonic consciousness, the reality of a hijabi woman who is queer and socialist is impossible, as the stereotype is that the hijab is a symbol of conservatism and patriarchal oppression. The queering of identity she speaks of is about recognizing that the complexity of minoritized identities in Europe requires thinking beyond traditional European worldviews and even national boundaries.

Today Black German Studies continues to develop with a US-Europe exchange of ideas and influences. US-based historian Tiffany Florvil published the monograph *Mobilizing Black*

Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement in 2020. Through archival work and extensive interviews with the Black German women who began organizations like ADEFRA and ISD in the 1980s, Florvil helps build an authoritative account of the roots of the Black German Studies. Jamele Watkins at the University of Minnesota has focused on contemporary Black German theater, Angela Davis in East Germany and has recently been writing on the German rap duo SXTN.[4] Beyond single scholars, the groups Black German Heritage and Research Association (BGHRA) and Diversity, Decolonization, & the German Curriculum (DDGC) have both organized in North America to support and advocate for those who are often underserved or historically ignored within German Studies. My approach carries on the tradition of the scholars and activists above. The focus is Germany and its minoritized people, but the influences span continents and collectives. Where Lorde mentored the founders on Black German Studies and American scholars championed the discipline, I aim to expand the lexicon for thinking about minoritized people in the German-speaking world today by bringing in decolonial theory and contemporary, critical curatorial work.[5]

Curating for and with Everyone Else

While intellectual histories are crucial lenses of analysis in my dissertation, the very nature of as being hybrid with its inclusion of a digital exhibition, also requires turning to the history and ideologies behind Western curating. It also necessitates understanding histories of activist, non-institutional and indigenous curating that strives to break away from the sole

[4] SXTN were a rap duo of two women, Nura and Juju, who respectively have Eritrean and Moroccan roots. They became famous for their club-ready tracks that poked fun at misogyny in rap, embraced all the excesses of Berlin's club culture, and also directly called out racism in Germany's rap clubs and anti-Black stereotypes within Germany.
[5] For other notable contributions to Black German Studies see Campt, Plumly, Weber, and Weheliye.

authority of a single “all-knowing” curator and the still present legacy of colonialism in how the art of “Others” is collected and displaye

Since at least the 1960s, dedicated curators and artists who curate have been testing the limits of what curating can do and who curating can empower. Swiss curator Harold Szeemann gained fame in the late 1960s by curating thematic and often irreverent shows that mixed everyday objects with cutting edge art (Ulrich and Asad Raza). While his thematics were often focused on reconsideration of art and objects, curators in the 1980s worked to create exhibits around progressive politics. Jean-Hubert Martin and his collaborators at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande halle de la Vilette curated the show “Magiciens de la terre” in 1989 (Friedel). This show was mounted as a response to a 1984 MOMA show on the European artistic movement of “Primitivism,” which featured African and indigenous art as simply inspiration for European artists, rather than as great art on its own. “Magiciens” was intentionally curated to have 50% non-Western and 50% Western artists, with Martin traveling to five continents and working with self-taught and classically trained artists to find the 100 pieces for the exhibit. The catalogue for the exhibit also included discussions of a 1931 colonial exhibition in Paris, to put into bright light the thinking that “Magiciens” tried to move away from (Friedel). While criticized for glossing over the religious and societal weight of many non-Western art objects, “Magiciens” helped shift curating in the West towards a global, rather than Western-centric or Western-dominant stance.

The 1980s also saw artists using curating to let often ignored communities speak. In 1989 Martha Rosler organized “If You Lived Here…” in New York City. She co-curated with everyone from established artists to homeless activists to address housing and homelessness in a gentrifying metropolis. Her facilitation of curating was aimed at furthering the idea of artists

being active and engaged with the politics of their area (Langner). At the same time art collective Group Material began its own political curating in response to the increasing commodification of art. Using everything from billboards to magazine inserts and pop-up exhibits, Group Material took issues such as the AIDS crisis and US interventions in Central America directly to the public. While it included prominent artists such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger and Carrie Mae Weems, the group also produced solely under a group name, opting out of the practice of marketing the solitary "genius" (Thorne).

Moving back to Europe, Nigerian curator and poet Okwui Enwezor consciously built off the global orientation of "Magiciens de la terre" when he was given leadership of *documenta* in 2002, the Venice Biennale in 2015 and Munich's Haus der Kunst from 2011 to 2018. In those roles he decisively incorporated African artists into eye-level conversations with other artists around the globe. His exhibition *"*The Short Century*"* focused on African art and culture from 1945-1999, containing conscious juxtapositions of African Art and music with Western cultural products, weaving African art into a migratory and international exchange of influences (Hoffman). Moving from Munich's Villa von Stuck to MOMA PS, this ambitious exhibit established Enwezor as a curator invested in challenging Eurocentrism. This work earned him a position as the first non-Western director of *documenta* in Kassel, Germany. More than half the art at Enwezor's *documenta* were from non-Western artists, a first for an art event marked by "landmark" curating (Enwezor, *documenta*). His tenure at Haus der Kunst was kicked off with a first-ever exhibition of the Nazi roots of the museum. His last large exhibit before his death, "Post-War" continued this tradition of putting non-Western in serious and complicated conversation with Western art (Bishop).

The selection of the Filipino art collective *ruangrupa* as the directors of the current 2022 documenta—the first ever Asian directors and the first ever artists to curate it—is evidence of how the work of others like Martha Rosler, Group Material, and Enwezor have made room for curating in the West that is far away from the colonial exhibiting that dominated and still dominates many art spaces (Greenberger, *documenta*).[6] My dissertation aims to follow in these collective footsteps to curate with the same critical global consciousness and commitment to ethical, bottom-up community-based work that offers an alternative to the history of exclusionary curating.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One: Decolonial Futures

The first chapter in the dissertation, 'Decolonial Futures," is built around an analysis of the works of Theo Eshetu and Matthew Angelo Harrison. Both artists, in extremely different ways and contexts, aim to abstract, confuse, and alienate us from the associations that are commonly put onto African artwork.

Theo Eshetu, a Berlin-based artist of Ethiopian and Dutch parents, was inspired to create the artwork *Atlas Fractured* while working on a film about Berlin's infamous Humboldt Forum. On a background of banners from the now defunct Ethnographic Museum of Berlin, whose collection was moved to the Humboldt Forum, Eshetu projects centuries of representative art from around the world, often layering artworks and live models via video projection to blur the lines between what is art and what is a living person. Because of this layering confidently

[6] Sadly, one very large work created by the collective Taring Padi, who ruangrupa dispersed *documenta* funding to, contained among many images two figures depicted using antisemitic tropes. The work was taken down and ruangrupa apologized, admitting a clear error on their part for allowing the work to be displayed. See Greenberger, *documenta* for more and ruangrupa for their official apology.

categorizing either the live models or the artworks becomes impossible. Inspired by and pushing back against the long history of categorizing people around the world based on a narrow and dehumanizing racial hierarchy, Eshetu offers the viewers the opportunity to let go of any sense of simple and limiting representation and instead offers a clean slate for us to think anew about how we can see ourselves, one another, and our world.

Matthew Angelo Harrison's artwork comes from a different side of the world, in Detroit, and also a different relationship to Europe. In his sculptures, which combine traditional West African sculpture with modern technologies like CNC machining and 3D printing, Harrison offers prototypes of a different timeline of what African self-representation might look like, had the slave trade not existed or had the descendants of enslaved Africans been able to trace their ancestry back to concrete groups in Africa. Informed by scholarship of Édouard Glissant I see Harrison as being part of an Afro-Atlantic tradition of striving to recover what was lost to the ocean in the Middle Passage. As Glissant puts it, the Caribbean artist's existence begins at the shoreline, that is, that the devastation of Middle Passage means their story begins with arrival on the shore. Harrison's work gives viewers the chance to sit with artefacts of an alternate timeline without the Middle Passage, but also, I argue creates a new abstracted West African visual language that strives to serve as African art for Black people like Harrison who cannot trace back their roots.

Chapter Two: Representation

In the works dealt with in this chapter, representation is at once dehumanizing and deadly, a refuge and ultimately transcendent. That sequence, from brutal reality to transcendence, also organizes the argument here. Perhaps as a spiritual cousin to the Buddhist path to enlightenment, I want readers first to recognize and sit with the suffering caused by

representation, to absorb the peace that can come from self-representation and ultimately to at least consider that abstracted representation can be a path away from restrictive categories and legibility, and thereby help us viewers see a path away from the suffering representation can cause. To establish the systemic harm representation can cause, I begin with Eva Leitolf. She is the only artist in my dissertation who does not strive to represent herself or her community, i.e., white Europeans, but rather aims to foreground the oppressive power behind of all attempts to photographically represent minoritized people in popular media. Beginning her career as a photojournalist in post-unification Germany, Leitolf was initially drawn to photograph the communities that fell victim to far-right, xenophobic violence after the Fall of the Wall. After studying with Allan Sekula—an influential photographer and theorist who wrote critically on how the state uses photography to further things like scientific racism— Leitolf began removing subjects from her work and eventually primarily photographed spaces without people present. Throughout two photographic series, *German Images – Searching and* Evidence (1992-1994/2006-2008) and *Postcards from Europe* (since 2006), the German artist gives viewers people-less scenes in photos along with pamphlets or postcards that describe racist and xenophobic violence that has happened to people of color in Germany and Europe. Leitolf's goal is that when viewers are asked to project their own image of what happened, without any subjects in the photos, they are more readily able to think of marginalized people away from the dehumanizing tropes that dominate mass media (Leitolf). Leitolf's work is then, I argue, the perfect beginning to question how we see others, since she takes a critical approach to the dehumanizing crisis of representation and gives us the tools to literally see beyond it.

The second artist, Amoako Boafo, creates (self-)portraits that serve as a refuge not only from the racism of Europe, but also from the restrictive gender roles of his own Ghana. Having

moved to Vienna to study art and be with his Austrian fiancée (now wife) Sunanda Mesquita, Boafo developed his almost sculptural celebration of Black people in the face of repeated rejection by the European art world (*Studio Visit*). Viennese galleries turned him away because they said they did not show African art (*Studio Visit*). With Mesquita, Boafo then created an art space for Black people in Europe called We Dey and exhibited portraits and self-portraits that focused on the beauty, complexity and vulnerability of Black people using techniques and formats inspired by Viennese modernists like Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt ("Studio Visit").While Boafo in many interviews speaks about “making space” for Black people, I argue his artwork goes further by allowing identities to breathe away from the suffocating rejections and policing of identity that dominates under coloniality. In that space Boafo finds a dignity and beauty that establishment Vienna denied him.

Across the Atlantic, Detroit-based Ghanaian artist Conrad Egyir approaches the challenge of (self-)representation by abstracting Black subjects in his portraits in the hopes of making them almost impossible to categorize. The impetus for this aesthetic is at least in part a response to the external restrictions placed on Black people in the US, shown in harsh realities like the policing of Black hair. Another key inspiration for this approach is a worldview from Egyir’s Akan family where chiefs are literally defined as straddling two worlds.[7] They are neither in one place or the other, or simply one thing (Egyir). It is no surprise then that his works often take a single subject, someone he knows, and present them in many different forms: some representations more realistically drawn and others with otherworldly qualities. He also brings in objects from their lives, references from Christian European painting, things he heard in church in Ghana, and

[7] When I asked him how he refers to the Akan tribe, Egyir said that he prefers the phrase family. So, I have used his phrasing throughout.

even classroom chalkboards. This swirling of identities and symbols both represents the true complexity and kaleidoscopic nature of Black identities, but also aims to withhold from the viewer the possibility of defining Egyir's subjects as any one thing. Informed by what he sees as an immigrant to the US and by his Akan worldview, Egyir gives us representation that is so blown apart that it helps viewers see another reality: where Black people are capable of being anything, including being impossible to define.

In this chapter I establish the deadly power of colonial representation and a path beyond it with Leitolf, show how self-representation can bring dignity and vulnerability with Boafo and ultimately how the Akan worldview-inspired, multi-faceted and otherworldly Black portraiture of Egyir can give viewers a glimpse into a world without limits on Black identity.

Chapter Three: Belonging

Chapter 3, "Creating Places of Belonging," dives into all the complicated and often stereotype-defying ways that three Black artists embody the idea of belonging in their work.

Emeka Ogboh, a Nigerian artist, has made his career around evoking, representing and most recently creating a sense of home and community. From capturing the sounds of Lagos to help himself fall asleep in Berlin, to creating installation works that mirror the kind of community gathering he experienced in Igbo communities in Nigeria, Ogboh always strives to make artwork that evokes the creative potential and joy of bringing people together.

Zohra Opoku, a German Ghanaian artist, has spent a large part of her career using art to fill in gaps in her family history. Having been estranged from her Ghanaian father, who had to leave East Germany after his studies and died before she could truly meet him, Opoku has been for years trying to tell her own story by uncovering that of her father. In a series of artworks that move from self-portraits to multi-media quilts, Opoku not only gives us a fuller sense of all the

threads that connect her German and Ghanaian stories, but also challenges the idea that there is ever a complete return to home or discovery of roots. Instead, I see in her work a constant process of finding and accepting what can and can never be known about our families and ourselves even as many diasporic people thrive to create unbroken genealogies.

The last artist in this chapter, Tiff Massey, is a Detroit-educated and based artist who has spent her career creating art that focuses on all the challenging and beautiful tributaries of the Black American existence. The piece of Massey's that I focus on this chapter deals with the complicated relationship many people in the US have with identifying with the nation. Her work *Ain't No Future in Your Front* is a 3D acrylic version of the American flag, with a mirrored background and the words *THIS IS not for YOU.* While her piece was originally conceived as a response to Trump and attempts to trivialize and ignore Black contributions to the building of the US, Massey sees the work as going beyond that to speak to all minoritized communities in the US. In its literally reflective way, it can also serve as a memorial for the viewers themselves to think about their relationship to the US and how what they see in the mirror changes that relationship (Battista).

Chapter Four: Digital Curation

The last chapter in this dissertation, "Activist Curatorial Practice and Decolonial (Digital) Humanities," turns towards the fields of museum work and digital directions in the humanities, specifically how each discipline aims to respond to the exclusive, Eurocentric legacies in the (Digital) Humanities broadly and in curating. I then detail how the critical work of both disciplines informed the design of the virtual exhibition component of my dissertation.

Beginning with curation I detail the ideologies that informed the creation of what we know in Western museums as curating. Wealthy and well-connected royals in what is today

Southern Germany began amassing and displaying collections of objects throughout the world in the 16th and 17th centuries. They used connections to trade hubs in the Netherlands to collect everything from tortoise shells to taxidermized animals and displayed them informed by the Enlightenment drive to categorize and "know" the world (Beßler). Once these collections were opened to the public in Germany in the early 19th century they were primarily composed of the collections of these same royals and not surprisingly were eventually used to showcase the reach of Germany's colonial empire and curators who were treated as the all-knowing experts on the "Other." This tradition of museum curation being used to showcase power continued into the 20th century with notorious photographic exhibits, especially *Harlem on My Mind* in the late 60s*,* at the MET that took anthropological approaches to curating the artwork and representations of minoritized people and were only faintly informed by their views (Cooks).

Protests by Black artists to *Harlem on My Mind,* can be marked as a turning point where, instead of often white curators curating everyone, museum professionals began to realize that curating must be informed by the needs and views of community members in order to avoid disrespecting those very communities. It is then that I turn to the highly influential work of researchers and practitioners like Beverly Serrell whose work shows that museum work that is centered on legibility to visitors and constantly solicits and responds to the wants and needs of those visitors, can help avoid the pitfalls of traditional curating.

Lastly, I turn to the fields of postcolonial and Black Digital Humanities to find examples of where the digital exhibition side of my dissertation could go. Informed by DH projects that bridge disciplines, are open to anyone on and off campus and can facilitate viewers asking their own questions, I see the digital exhibition side of my project as a model for how German Studies can serve as a home for scholarship that is accessible, takes minoritized and diasporic people

seriously and fosters discovery and intellectual exchange across disciplinary, class and geographic borders.

From the outset, my dissertation was motivated by the drive to give viewers the tools to find connections with diasporic artworks that are meaningful to them. That necessitated digging deeply into a broad range of disciplines, being genuinely curious and sensitive to the work and stories of the artists, and learning from the movements in museum education, curation and the digital side of the humanities. Through the interweaving of all those intellectual traditions and the artwork, I hope viewers and readers can find their own vision of a world where their humanities and those of their neighbors get to be seen in all their complexity and beauty.

Chapter 1: Decolonial Futures

In June 2021, after years of delay, the Humboldt Forum in Berlin opened to the public. The museum is built on the site of a Prussian royal palace, the seat of German imperial power until 1918. The dome of the building even had text from "Prussian King Frederick William IV (1795-1861) [that] calls for the submission of humanity to Christianity" (Dege). It was demolished after WWII by the East German government.[8] The palace was built over hundreds of years, but ultimately embodied the excesses of Germany's relatively brief spell as a colonial power with an over 68ft (21m) tall monument to Kaiser Wilhelm I outside the palace and a gold dome atop the palace.[9]

Figure 2. Photoglob Co. Berlin. Kaiser Wilhelm I. Denkmal, 1905.

Aesthetically the rebuild mimics that old palace, but was built and designed to be a German version of the British Museum, adding another layer of imperial history to an already fraught site. Similar to the British Museum, the Humboldt Forum houses many non-European artefacts that were until 2021 housed in other Berlin museums. While the SARS CoV-2

[8] The original Royal Palace was burnt out during allied bombings in WWII. After some years of partial restoration, the East German government, which controlled the sector of Berlin with the palace, decided to demolish the building, stating its imperialist history, although finance were likely also a factor. The "Palace of the Republic" replaced it in 1976, which housed the East German parliament, and spaces for public events, even containing a bowling alley. Due to also being a public meeting place it held a sentimental value for many East Germans. It was, however, torn down from 2006 to 2008 and replaced with the Humboldt Forum, sparking even more debate over the unified German government's ideologically stepping backwards from an open socialist building to an uncritical embrace of Germany's imperial/royal past. See Bowley for more on the history and debates surrounding the site.

[9] This massive monument features Kaiser Wilhelm I on horseback, with a depiction of victory by his side. There are also four lions with flags that their conquered under their paws. The monument also featured sculptural works from Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg, embodying four points of the German state (even if northwest Germany is excluded). Like many Prussian imperial monuments in Germany, it towers as a symbol of national unity, military conquest and imperial ambition. See "Die Denkmäler" for an extensive history.

pandemic pushed back the physical opening of the space, the conceptualization, design and construction of the museum building alone had set off harsh criticism and protest since at least 2017. Art historian Bénédicte Savoy said of the many looted artefacts in the collection: “Ich will wissen, wie viel Blut von einem Kunstwerk tropft ” (I want to know how much blood drips off an artwork) ("Kritik am Humboldt Forum"). Savoy’s criticism overlapped with a simultaneous debate in Germany over how the nation should diplomatically and legally face its colonial history in Africa, which not only included the perpetration of genocide against the Nama and Herero peoples, but also the looting of artefacts and human remains. As the provenance of the artefacts in the Humboldt Forum is still being researched, it is fitting that German colonial historian Jürgen Zimmerer called the Humboldt Forum an embodiment of the “colonial amnesia” of modern Germany ("Kritik am Humboldt Forum"). As with much of Europe, beneath opulent facades often lie histories of colonial theft and atrocity.

These criticisms also helped bolster the first serious public attempt Germany has made to confront its history of colonialism. In 2019, when the museum was originally set to open, cultural minister Monika Grütters called Germany’s colonial history a “cultural blind-spot” (Brown). While efforts have been made to legally respond to colonial injustices in the arts and culture arena, such as returning looted cultural artefacts and human remains, the intellectual conversation on how Germany should face its colonial history is still in its early stages. The heated “Catechism Debate” set off in the summer of 2021 by genocide historian A. Dirk Moses epitomizes this process. In his article in the scholarly Swiss magazine *Geschichte der Gegenwart* Moses polemically argues that German elites and the German government have created a strict “civic religion” that sees its only path to redemption through supporting Israel and aggressively policing what it defines as antisemitism. This “civic religion,” he argues, excludes facing

atrocities committed by the German government like the Nama and Herero genocide of 1904 to 1908, since they do not fit into a self-image exclusively built around responding to the Shoah as the nation's path to redemption. As a growing body of research from scholars like Jürgen Zimmerer, Zoé Samudzi, Neil Gregor, Jennifer Evans has argued, it is extremely difficult to neatly separate the ideology undergirding Germany's atrocities in Africa during the early 20th century from the ideologies that the Nazis used as they were perpetrating the Holocaust. Indeed, they argue that the ideologies that fueled Germany's colonial endeavors persisted through the Nazi period, and one might add persist into the present where they are embedded in Germany's politics and institutions.

The Ethnological Museum in Berlin is one of the clearest examples of the persistence of colonial thinking and governing in Germany. Founded in 1873 as the Royal Museum for Ethnology, only two years after the founding of the modern German state itself, the museum opened its doors to the public in 1886. Three years later, the German parliament passed a law specifying that federal museums, such as the Ethnological Museum, were to be the central venues for display of natural and cultural objects from German colonies ("Staatliche Museen"*).* Berlin, the colonial capital, was thus meant to have, enshrined by law, museums that showcased the power and reach of Germany's empire. The museums were not simply advertisements for colonial loot, however; the collections were also used to legitimize the violence perpetrated by the German empire and the racist ideologies that were used to legitimize it. Even the Ethnological Museum published a statement on its history saying "[w]ährend das offizielle Ziel darin bestand, für ein besseres Verständnis fremder Kulturen zu werben, stützten die Ausstellungen oftmals stereotypisierende und rassifizierende Vorstellungen" (while the official goal in this law was to promote a better understanding of foreign cultures, the exhibitions often

promoted stereotyped and racialized portrayals) ("Staatliche Museen"). Cementing a racial hierarchy that put European cultures above non-European ones, the Ethnological Museum was a loudspeaker and legitimizer—from its founding to its collecting, to the ideologies it embodied—for a world-order defined by the dehumanizing racial classifications of colonialism. The movement of the collection to the Humboldt Forum, as well as the uncritical conceptualization of the palace-cum-museum, put the blind spots of Germany's knowledge of its own colonizing on display and opened up an opportunity for a reckoning that is a century overdue.

The work of Berlin-based artist Theo Eshetu takes the ideologies behind the Ethnological Museum of Berlin as the basis for examining and exploding ideas of race and representation. His 2017 video and installation piece, *Atlas Fractured,* repurposes large outdoor banners from the recently relocated Ethnological Museum as backdrop, layer and canvas for his new work. Acquired more or less by chance (they were being thrown out as Eshetu was filming at the former location of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin-Dahlem) the banners are a perfect embodiment of how museums have been used to amplify and legitimize the racist ideologies of colonialism. The banner categorizes the world into four regions, each with one single race represented by an art piece depicting a human face. Despite being less than ten years old when Eshetu found them, the banners embody a much older European Enlightenment view that everything in the world, including people, can be categorized and understood in discreet categories.[10] That drive to categorize, as Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant wrote, requires ignoring the complexity of people so they can fit neatly into narrow parameters (194). *Atlas Fractured* is an exploration of how, even with artefacts from museums built by

[10] Eshetu got the banners sometime between 2016 when the old Ethnographic Museum in Berlin started closing and 2017 when he debuted *Atlas Fractured* at documenta.

colonialism, a gentle fracturing of those narrow confines of race can occur. Onto the backdrop of the banners that put the people of the world into four categories, Eshetu projects a psychedelic, unsettling layering of artefacts, archival footage, and models who he had sit in his studio. Onto the faces of these live models, images of artefacts and artworks from around the world are projected, often to the point where it is difficult to separate artefact from person or even identify what race or races the models could be identified as. Through this abstracting method *Atlas Fractured* offers a kind of associative blank slate for viewers where the reductive associations of race that surround us can become less relevant and powerful.

The Detroit-based artist Matthew Angelo Harrison similarly provides a portal to another world outside the devastation of colonialism and the slave trade. While Harrison has used a range of objects to create sculptures, what I focus on here are his works that take figurative depictions of Black people as their main focus. The pieces in this chapter modify, repurpose, and gather information from West African sculptures to create what he calls "prototypes" for a world where the slave trade did not happen. Harrison was inspired by people like his uncle who collected West African sculptures to try and establish a personal connection with Africa, despite having had any concrete knowledge about his African lineage taken away by the violence of slave trade (Noor). From that place of loss, Harrison creates artworks that offer a glimpse into an alternate, possibly more just world, while still remaining firmly anchored in the wake of the Middle Passage.

Eshetu and Harrison take viewers from the ocean to the stars. They have created works fully aware of the histories of the Middle Passage, of colonial looting, of the brutal spread of the conception of race, and then give viewers artworks that allow them to reflect on a world where those histories lose their power. Similar to Barthes' conception of how love can create a *punctum*

that allows new associations and meanings outside of simple binaries to seep through, Eshetu and Harrison offer viewers the materials to sit with a fantastical and possibly liberatory story of a world where race stops being important and where even the transatlantic slave trade never happened. Neither do this is a rosy-eyed way—Eshetu routinely reminds viewers of on-going racist violence, and Harrison grounds his work in a Black American longing for a lost connection to Africa—and still both create spaces for a gentle drifting toward the possibility of a world where coloniality loosens its grip.

Utopian Visions in Black Art

In order to contextualize the reality-defying work of these artists, it is important to place them within a tradition that strives to understand how colonialism and the slave trade re-ordered our world and changed the very nature of being for marginalized people. While certain thinkers more deeply inform the analysis of one artist over the other, my approach is to utilize to the work of theorists as lenses that color all the readings of this chapter. There is not a hierarchy of thinkers, but rather they all provide foundations and at times illuminations for placing the artworks in historical and intellectual contexts. Ultimately these theoretical foundations are used to identify why the works are meaningful contributions to the long history of understanding, criticizing and thinking beyond coloniality.

For this chapter, and the entire dissertation, one of the foundational thinkers is Jamaican writer and theorist Sylvia Wynter. In her scholarly work she traces the intellectual history of the racialized world order we have today: from Columbus to the present. She argues that the European notion of a "universal" definition of "Man" is in fact an ethnographic form of knowledge that is not universal at all. As an alternative she suggests we turn to other ethnographic views on what it is to be human, views that were violently suppressed by European

colonialism. This turn to new worldviews outside of the legacy of "universal" European thinking is key to my reading of Theo Eshetu's *Atlas Fractured*, a work that also covers centuries of colonial influence and strives to think beyond it. I also draw from John E. Drabinski's writing on Martinican poet and thinker Édouard Glissant. Drabinski finds in Glissant the understanding that because of the African histories lost in the Atlantic during the Middle Passage, Black diasporic artists and thinkers have to look to the future. To bring it back to art-focused scholarship, I turn to Alex Zamalin's writing on Black utopia. Zamalin traces a long history of Black utopian and dystopian writing, analyzing the work of figures like Octavia Butler, arguing that theory often struggles to fully conceptualize utopias, because the past and present of Black people have so often been dystopian. Critically for this project, Zamalin argues that artworks, not theory, often offer the most fleshed out conceptualizations of the utopian and should therefore be considered a key source for scholars to understand what other possible worlds could look like.

The most historically ambitious and thorough scholar on the impact of colonialism is Sylvia Wynter. While many scholars on things related to race contextualize their writings against the backdrop of the Enlightenment invention and codification of race, Wynter goes all the way back to 1492 with the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean.[11] She details the intellectual context of Columbus' time, in which she argues Europeans defined the "Other" as that which was non-Christian. The kingdom of Spain, which funded Columbus' expedition, had just been reunited in 1492 under a Christian banner after fighting against a Muslim government that had ruled the Iberian Peninsula since 719 (Hobson). Wynter argues that what began as a war primarily defined

[11] Wynter is not the only one to go back to Columbus, but she does stand in contrast to other thinkers, like Zantop. Thinkers like Zantop center their scholarship on race on figures like Linnaeus, Kant and Blumenbach who helped codify scientific racist thinking with the idea of a racial hierarchy with white people on top and other races of the world below them. As scientific racism was key to colonialism, slavery and Nazi ideology, it is the natural focus for scholars on modern racism.

by religion morphed into one defined by race and racial hierarchies. That critical turn, according to Wynter, then allowed a previously religiously based warring state of affairs to be perpetually sustained through a war of the self-defined white race against all others. The eventual global reach of colonialism spread this racially defined warring state to the entire world, so that anyone who is non-white can to this day be considered an ever-present threat to white people. One can look at the indifference, and at times downright hostility, towards Middle Eastern and African refugees drowning in the Mediterranean or the overwhelming Black and brown victims of police brutality in places like the US and Brazil to see how this racialized state of war remains with us today.

Wynter, however, details not only how European thinking has become the worldwide norm, but that we have become unaware that European conceptions of what is "universal" are in fact ethnographically based worldviews. What emerged from a distinctly historical and intellectual European context—the Spanish Christians vs Muslims, Copernicus' views on astronomy, Davinci's *Vitruvian Man,* Darwin's theory of evolution—became through centuries of colonial conquest and subjugation unquestioned "universals." As foundational decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo explains in his analysis of Wynter's work, Davinci's *Vitruvian Man* is a key example of false universals. The *Vitruvian Man* was conceptualized by Davinci as a rational, perfected and complete depiction of "Man," yet only follows a Greco-Roman conception and understanding of what "Man" should be. Mignolo succinctly describes this process: " […] Human and Humanity were created as the enunciated *that projects and propels to universality the local image* of the enunciator" (109). Consequently, such "universals" that were born from local histories end up excluding Africans, Indigenous people and eventually anyone who is not white (Mignolo 108-09). What Wynter demands we consider is not only that there

was a massive range of ethnographically-based worldviews before Columbus, such as the centuries-old philosophical and spiritual traditions that began in the Indian subcontinent, Eastern medicine, Maya and Ancient Egyptian astronomy, to name a few, but that in order to move away from the dehumanizing consequences of the Europeanization of our worldviews, all of us need to de-universalize our thinking in order to embrace many different worldviews. Most critically, in taking seriously those different worldviews we can move away from the European conception of what Man is and instead turn towards what being human is, de-linked from the assumed and enforced "universality" of European thinking.

While Wynter's and other decolonial theorists' writings and analyses have a truly global scope, the work of Glissant focuses on intimate and personal grapplings in the wake of colonialism. He gained prominence and influence through his writings on the nature of being after the devastation of colonialism and how we can relate to ourselves and one another in ways that let the full uniqueness of our identities ring out. As Drabinski notes, through his analysis of Glissant's writing, Black artists in the Caribbean must point their work toward the future, because there is no past to return to. The Middle Passage meant losing ancestors to the bottom of the ocean, and with them much of their family histories. Because of the killings perpetrated by the slavers it is impossible for many today to identify an ancestral home to return to or a family tree to identify ancestors or even to have a place to mourn the loss of ancestors. So, Glissant argues, the Afro-Caribbean artist needs an imagination to tell their stories; they need to create despite losing easy access to their own history. For some this means sci-fi or fantasy storytelling of Black ancestors surviving and building societies elsewhere—underwater, as in Rivers Solomon's novel *The Deep*—for others like artist Matthew Angelo Harrison, it means creating artefacts that explore a history without the slave trade.

When thinking of the challenge of scholars exploring the concept of a better future, Alex Zamalin points out, "[p]erhaps the reason scholars have inadequately explored the concept of utopia in the black American tradition is because much of black American life has been nothing short of dystopian" (6). We have the very difficult task of striving to know all the stories of the people in the graveyard of colonialism, while also dreaming of a world where there will not be another graveyard. This is where art can recuperate our imaginative vocabulary. As Zamalin writes on the approach he takes, "[t]he first reason *Black Utopia*'s focus is primarily on cultural texts rather than political treatises is because this is where utopia was given its fullest expression" (16). Cultural work possesses within it the things that decolonial theorists demand of us, that we dream of and move towards a world beyond coloniality. I argue that thinking of a world beyond the European "universal" Man, taking a decolonial turn or dreaming of a utopia while being in the long shadow of colonialism, requires us to rehabilitate our imaginations, our perceptions, our worldviews through visual art. Whereas theory and scholarship have described the facts and realities of colonialism, from its material to psychic devastation, the struggle and demand remains to think out a freer, more humane way of being and a world that supports it. Eshetu's and Harrison's works intentionally avoid any conclusive interpretations or extractive definitions; instead, they give us portals to see into a different world, as if the weight of racism, colonialism and the Middle Passage did not powerfully define what is possible now.

Theo Eshetu: Drifting into Common Humanity

Theo Eshetu's artistic career has had a significant influence on the development of video art, and crucially for this chapter his artwork explores many questions relevant to diasporic histories and ways of being. He made a film on the repatriation of a stolen Ethiopian obelisk (*Return of the Axium Obelisk 2010)* and his 2015 work *The Slave Ship* explores everything from Hamburg's history as a port city connected to slavery, to drexciya, a sci-fi story of an underwater city made by enslaved Africans thrown over the side of ships.[12] His work traces the global ripples of coloniality as this dissertation does. Crucially, for the future-oriented trajectory of this chapter, Eshetu's work took a decisive turn after a trip to Nepal, where he was inspired by Buddhist philosophy to take a less teleological approach, like documenting repatriation, and moved to simply capturing images for the sake of it (Eshetu). A key component of Buddhist teaching is learning to let go of certainty and want, and to instead embrace impermanence and the transient nature of all things. A natural consequence of both taking an interest in diasporic subject matters and approaching those matters in a way that intentionally avoids any firm conclusions, is that Eshetu has made art that is more about creating an environment for viewers to feel, see and hopefully think differently than

Figure 3. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Kassel version), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

[12] The concept of drexciya comes from the Detroit Techno duo of the same name, whose 1992 album *Journey of the Deep Sea Dweller* is about this very concept. See Scales for a history of this Afrofuturist concept and how it has been explored in many different artforms.

about pinning down any subject matter for conclusive analysis. Following a survey of his work sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), he took on a commission to create a video artwork grappling with the Humboldt Forum project to remain in Berlin.[13] That commission led him into the middle of a heated debate on what Western museums should do with their substantially looted collections of non-European art.

Heavily influenced by the improvised absolute (i.e., non-representational) music of innovators like John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk, as well the Buddhist philosophical view on letting go of attachment due to the transient nature of our world, Eshetu has strived to create art without a concrete goal, but which sets an environment for viewers and listeners to be enveloped and taken along with moods that the art itself facilitates (Eshetu). [14] It is no surprise then that the first survey of Eshetu's work in Berlin described his videos as having "[…] a dreamlike quality in which gestures, fragmented actions, and the mirroring and multiplying of images into kaleidoscopic patterns question the very reality of what an image can reveal" ("Theo Eshetu"). This psychedelic quality is part of Eshetu's commitment to creating a sensory environment that allows realization and reflection to emerge, and that makes *Atlas Fractured* harmonize with the demands of decolonial theory, particularly the call for non-colonial cosmologies from Sylvia Wynter. With *Atlas Fractured*, Eshetu creates an environment for these non-colonial cosmologies to emerge.

Atlas Fractured

[13] The German Academic Exchange Service funds cultural and scholarly exchanges between Germany and other countries. In Berlin it funds an artists-in-residence program, which Eshetu was part of. Emeka Ogboh has also worked with the DAAD.

[14] For a primer on the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy see "Graham Priest."

While the collections of the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin were being moved to the Humboldt Forum, workers were cutting down banners that had hung outside the museum to make them easier to throw away. Eshetu initially only wanted the banner representing Africa, as it was the only of the four continent/banners that was intact, but one of the workers said, poetically, "you can take the whole world if you want to" (Eshetu). That phrase helps embody the history and set of preconceptions that Eshetu has spent a career exploring, reflecting on and questioning. Among a literal backdrop of banners that aim to represent the world solely through the categories of Europe, Africa, Asia and America with an image associated with each, Eshetu asks: what if we stopped desiring to associate people with a particular place or history? Not simply that, what if we were unable to even do that? What thoughts, desires and dreams could emerge if the Ethnographic Museum's goal of categorizing the cultures and peoples of the world was no longer possible? It may sound simple; however, given the long history of racism and colonialism that fueled the creation of Berlin's ethnographic museum and even our everyday perceptions of each other, *Atlas Fractured* requires both the deconstruction of the world we know it to lay the foundation for something different.

The nature of *Atlas Fractured* is by design resistant to any definitive, total reading. From its three different realizations for different venues at different times (one in Kassel, one in Athens and one that is a sound work made for radio) to its intentionally loose and improvisational structure, to the artist's own assertion that he approaches his practice without desiring to make any firm associations with the images and sounds he weaves together, means that the work is as

malleable in form as it is open to a multitude of readings (Eshetu).[15] A highly consequential trip to Nepal, and intensive reading on Nepalese philosophy, led him toward approaching his artmaking without a desire for an outcome. As one would in Buddhist meditation, Eshetu strives to let meaning and associations emerge from reflecting on images and sounds. I then come to this work, and experienced it at *documenta*, as one that is structured around themes, but avoids any clear arc or didactics. Given this structure my analysis is organized around themes that emerge in the sequence I analyze them: the representation of race, Berlin museums' relationship to race and colonialism, and the crumbling of modern European society. This analysis takes three segments from the work and focuses on elements of those segments, such what a famous figure says or a distinct shift in visual language, to get a sense of what direction the work points toward even as it resists conclusions.

Roughly five minutes into the Athens version of *Atlas Fractured,* which is in total about 20 minutes long, the work begins with a simple soothing vocal melody that is mirrored by a plucked string instrument playing the same melody.[16] Within a minute this melody gives way to ambient, uneasy sounding and slow-moving musical textures. At about two minutes, we hear the first voice, Carl Jung speaking about the indescribable personality of man, over images of live models with images of artistic artefacts projected onto their faces.

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[15] The version I primarily analyze was initially screened in Athens during documenta in 2017. It is 20 minutes long and the only version available online. The Kassel version included the Ethnographic Museum banners as the screen for the video work and is over 30 minutes long. I saw this Kassel version in person. There is another version made in a sound-only format that is over 2 hours long, but is currently unpublished online.

[16] Eshetu also told me the Athens version is his preferred edit of the work. By chance or by design the Athens version was also projected onto a cave wall, creating an unavoidable connection with Plato's allegory of the cave: a fitting connection for a work that questions what we can truly know of our world.

We see, among many images, African masks with glowing blue eyes, an image of the God Vishnu with a live third eye on his forehead. The layered, constantly moving projections images create a blurry boundary between representations and live models. Like a painting whose eyes seem to follow you, there is a haunting quality in representation being simultaneously still and alive. Very early in *Atlas Fractured* Eshetu is taking a free and malleable approach to representation, undermining viewers' confidence about what they are seeing. As he gives us these uneasy images, the score is slowly pulsing, slightly abrasive and dissonant, further building a feeling of discomfort. After establishing this unease and gentle disorientation, Eshetu brings in the voice of James Baldwin, one of the most frequent narrators in *Atlas Fractured.* Here there is a convergence of themes that recur throughout the work: the collapse of the West, a disorientation on being able to use race as a defining category and lastly a call for different ways to see, organize and dream about our world and each other. Baldwin speaks: "[t]he second proposition is what I really want to get at tonight, and it sounds mystical, I think, in a country like ours and in a time like this. When something awful is happening to a civilization, when it ceases to produce poets and—when it's even more crucial—when it ceases in any way whatever to believe in the report that only poets can make."

Figure 4. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

First, Baldwin clearly establishes a societal decline or collapse with "something awful happening to a civilization," presumably the US or the West in general. That "something awful" in this case is an abandonment of artists and art. It is not awful simply because art is enriching or pleasant, but instead, Baldwin the narrator says, not supporting artists is also connected to not

listening to the truths that they can uniquely bring to light. At Baldwin's last sentence Eshetu shows us a face with only its eyes clearly visible, staring at us angrily. This is all while the same haunting music pulses in the background. Then a series of cracked or broken faces sculpted in stone look lifelessly at us. There is prophetic warning narrated by Baldwin and punctuated by the music and images that Eshetu layers upon one another. Eshetu creates an elegiac atmosphere for the West and challenges viewers not to look away from the ruins projected on the screen.

Eshetu shows us ancient and at times damaged artistic artefacts, the same mood in the musical composition, but introduces scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell saying "[p]eople say that what we are all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive." The contrast is impossible to avoid between a scholar talking about life and the ghostly, funereal quality of the images. Serious and shadowy human faces and grey, seemingly classical sculptures could not be further from "an experience of being alive." Eshetu quickly brings Campbell back on the nature of life saying: "It's the edge, the interface between what can be known and what isn't. Never to be discovered, because it's a mystery, transcendent of all human research. The source of life! What is it? No one knows!" This traces one of the key thematic progressions in *Atlas Fractured,* from crumbling, necrotic images to an embrace of mystery and life. Eshetu does not provide a visual release—the image in Figure 5 happens simultaneously with Campbell

Figure 5. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens version), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

joyously talking about the mystery of life—but rather he adds an element of lightness after the grave words of Baldwin on the death of poetry.

This pivot to the positive continues with another of the key guiding voices in *Atlas Fractured,* that of Maya Angelou. Over the image of Figure 6—five floating heads with one emerging in the center from the shadows and staring directly at us—Angelou says: "[s]ay now sister, you know what's right. Just do right. You don't really have to ask anybody, the truth is right may not be expedient, it may not be profitable, but it will satisfy your soul." The full context of this quote is Angelou speaking on a painting that she turned to when she had to do something. The scene of the painting, women sitting together, brought forth for Angelou the voice of her grandmother at a prayer meeting (*Maya Angelou*). Angelou's evocation of her grandmother's wisdom and moral clarity carries with it the tone of a loving correction many of us have heard from elders, mentors and friends. In this part of *Atlas Fractured* it also brings a certainty after the mystery of Campbell. What is right, Angelou reminds us, is something we only need to remind ourselves of. The layer Eshetu adds with the five heads is urgency. They are not warm and caring as a grandmother would be, but direct and unflinching. While Angelou's embodied words bring a warm ray of sunshine to the experience, Eshetu keeps the ruins at our feet. This constant tension between the past and the present carries throughout this section, like a reckoning not only with our present world, but with our place within it.

Figure 6. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

Our next narrator is Welsh philosopher Bertrand Russell explaining matter-of-factly why he does not believe in Christianity, explaining: "I've examined all the stock arguments in favour [of the existence of God, and none of them seem to me to be logically valid." Russell's speech, superimposed on images and sounds with the same haunting quality discussed earlier, does not easily harmonize with Campbell's celebration of myth or Baldwin's speaking of the truth only poets can express. Russell not only dismisses faith, but he is also confidently doing so. In terms of tone, it is like sharp blast of horns in an otherwise ambient song. At this point, Eshetu brings back Baldwin who this time speaks of his/our present as the "[…] final act of the white Christian European industrial drama." The connection Baldwin draws to Christianity is that of a world order, rather than of faith. Over Baldwin's voice we now see a series of layered images that superimpose live models with projections of artistic representations of Madonna and child. In Figure 7, for example, we see a live model, with shiny black hair, looking down at her breastfeeding child, mirroring the gaze of the mother in the painting projected onto the model. A sense of care, but also concern permeates this section. It is not simply that the West is in its final act, but that there is a reason to mourn that we have destruction instead of nurturing. What is normally an artwork that aims to embody the holiness of Mary and Christ gets, with Eshetu's layering, a distorted, almost Cubist quality. The score follows this turn to a gentler appraisal of the fall of the West by removing most of the dissonant layers and highlighting solemn cellos. Echoing Angelou's statement of what is right being obvious, Baldwin continues on the West: "[…] and let's speak plainly. We know, everybody knows that we are not bombing people out of existence in the

Figure 7. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

name of freedom. We are concerned with power, nothing more than that." This reference to the West's anti-democratic, global aggressions, the collides with images of mother and child. It is not polemic or matter of fact, like Russell's declaration against faith, but rather a reminder of the human cost of this violence. The voices of Baldwin and Angelou allow the humanity repressed by the reductionist impact of ethnography, war, colonialism and at times even our own attitudes and perceptions, to shine through again. In a full spectrum decolonial gesture, Eshetu is not satisfied with criticizing what is embodied in the ethnographic museums or coloniality more broadly, but reaches past to what he calls call the "healthy disorientation" of being unable to identify race (Eshetu). Through the moral clarity of Baldwin and Angelou, he reminds us that we can walk other paths—paths that have always been there.

The second section to be analyzed here goes from Nazi-era Germany to the present. The main tension in this section is between the beautiful dreams many people possess and the horrific fantasies that came to fruition in the 20th century. While this section, like the video artwork in total, resists conclusions, it functions like a museum exhibit of the powerful ideas of our times and how they have shaped and often destroyed our world. The Nazi campaign against Modern art and what Homi Bhabha calls "our dream of difference and diversity" scrape against each other in a portrait of influential ideologies.

This section roughly begins with a sonic reset. The score goes from whale-like, mournful notes from a cello to mid-tempo sonar pulses on one slightly modulated note. The first image given to us is a series of sculptures from antiquity, like the bearded face of what appears to be Laocoön in the upper column in the middle. However, only two tiles over from Laocoön we see

the eye of a live, likely Black model gazing directly at us. Within a few seconds we get a glimpse of the tension in this section: classical artistic beauty and the unflinching stare of someone excluded by dominant European thinking. Quickly we are introduced to the guiding voice and authority in this section, Carl Jung. Over video of a Black man, eyes closed with long locks, a Black marathon runner is projected onto his face, Jung says: "But when you observe yourself within, you see moving images – a world of images, generally known as fantasies."

Figure 8. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

We have little time to linger on this fantasy, however, as the next image is another Black man with his eyes closed, this time with black and white footage of an athletic figure holding a torch. This projected footage is likely from Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938), a documentary propaganda film made about the 1936 Berlin Olympics. To leave little doubt in our minds about this shift in sporting fantasies, the second half of Jung's narration ominously continues: "[yet] these fantasies are facts. You see, it is a fact that a man has such a fantasy, and it is such a tangible fact—for instance—that when a man has a certain fantasy, another man may lose his life." What begins as an intimate personal fantasy is taken over by world destroying ideology. With a swift pivot Eshetu turns to how the Nazis weaponized art to further their dreams of both meaningful racial

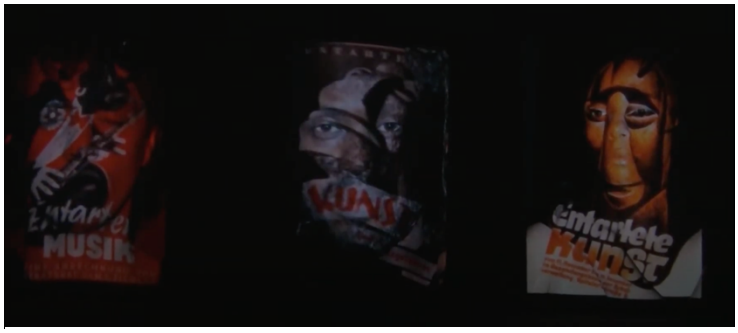

Figure 9. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens Version), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

difference and “Aryan superiority.” We see posters from the 1937 Nazi exhibition of “Entartete Kunst” (degenerate art) projected onto human faces, central among them another Black man in Figure 9. This art exhibition was designed to portray Modern art as “degenerate,” because, according to the Nazis, it portrayed the human form in a “deformed” way. The fact that Modern European art was heavily influenced by African artefacts and that Jewish artists, collectors and gallerists also made the art popular, made these works condemnable in the Nazi worldview. The unvarnished racism of this exhibit and its posters can also be seen on the infamous poster on the left in Figure 9, which was created for the related Nazi exhibition a year later devoted to ”degenerate music” and portrays a monkey playing jazz. Rather than historicize these ideologies as something in the past, Eshetu reminds us up front that Black people, among the many who did not fit the Nazi worldview, were targets of Nazi persecution.

Across the street from the Degenerate Art exhibition, the Nazis built the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (the House of German Art) to showcase their visions of ideal human forms reflected in neo-Realist art.[17] With a church bell-like steady rhythm Eshetu then shows us footage of Nazi officials in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst selecting paintings they preferred. Unlike most of *Atlas Fractured,* Eshetu is firm in showing viewers that art museums were tools used by the Nazis to propagate their worldview and embed their racial fantasies onto the public sphere. With the reductionist banners from the

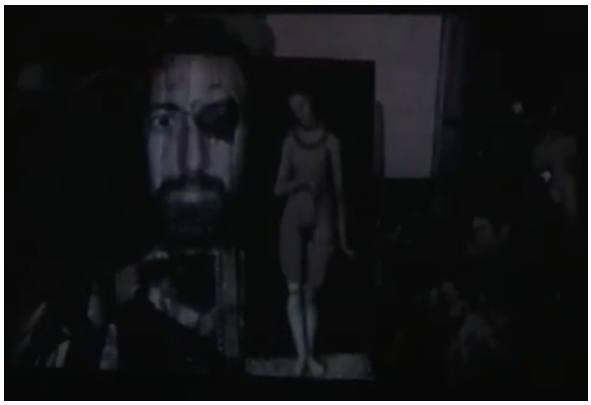

Figure 10. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens version), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

[17] For an example of this aesthetic style of art on the Michigan State University campus, look at the Spartan Statue between the Red Cedar River and Demonstration Field. While I cannot speak to the ideology of the original sculptor, the aesthetic of the statue has likely been making those familiar with Nazi art uncomfortable for decades.

Ethnographic Museum as a background, with the intentional inclusion of looted artefacts from that very museum in *Atlas Fractured,* Eshetu places viewers in a space to reflect on the persistence of dehumanizing ideologies in museums: from the 19th century, through the Nazi era to the present.

In the final section of Eshetu's *Atlas Fractured* we are guided into the Winter of the post-Columbus world order. The work sends out a rapid-fire series of evocations of downfall and death, like the orange figure in the middle of Figure 11 looking like an angel or Icarus falling from the heavens. Like a Hermes guiding us between the lands of the living and the dead, Baldwin returns to describe the crossroads our modern world has reached: "[a]nd one has got to decide, I think, that the actual and the moral bases on which the world we now know rests, are obsolete, must be changed […] but freedom is what one's after. And as it cannot, I suppose, be given, then it obviously must be taken." Figure 11 also brings us back to the power dynamic in the museums of our times, with Benin bronzes placed next to sculptures of European antiquity. As Baldwin speaks, Eshetu underlines his message that the present order is morally indefensible and revolution is necessary, if not inevitable. We then see a series of glam rock faces, sometimes literally and other times visually citing David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust persona. Meanwhile we hear rolling, loose drums as Mary Clayton's famous, on the verge of breaking, singing on The Rolling Stones' "Gimme Shelter" plays. That song, from 1969, repeats the Vietnam War-referencing refrain of "[w]ar children / it's just a shot away." Then a gong hits as footage of

Figure 11. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens version), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

atomic bomb explosions is projected on the faces and shoulders of models, one seemingly Eshetu himself. Perhaps the narration that most epitomizes this final section of *Atlas Fractured* is from Carl Jung, this work's Cassandra, proclaiming that "[t]here is no such thing as an H-bomb. That is all mind's doing. We are the great danger. The psyche is the great danger. What if something goes wrong with the psyche?" Jung's question of "what if?" does not really need an answer, since we know, Baldwin knew and Eshetu knows. Fantasies of conquest, domination and superiority irreversibly altered and reordered our world. Genocide, the looting of generations of artefacts, the destruction of our climate was all fueled by small group of people who answered Jung's question of "[w]hat if something goes wrong with the psyche?"

The last voice and human image layered together by Eshetu are Medusa and Maya Angelou. Angelou reads her poem "Human Family" as the camera slowly zooms in on Medusa, mouth agape and eyes open in horror, perhaps in the moment she was decapitated by Theseus. Over this haunting image the reassuring voice of Angelou reads aloud "I note the obvious differences / between each sort and type, / but we are more alike , my friends, / than we are unalike." Then the Medusa quickly springs forward at us, like a horror film jump scare, and we see the tops of waves glistening in golden sunset light. Eshetu here avoids any soothing conclusion, but rather presents the turn to a common humanity as going hand-in-hand with brutal death. Maybe it is the West dying, maybe it is the Ethnographic museum's ordering of the world, maybe it is the way that we use race to attempt to categorize each other; it is never clear. Nonetheless after death we have a primordial soup-like

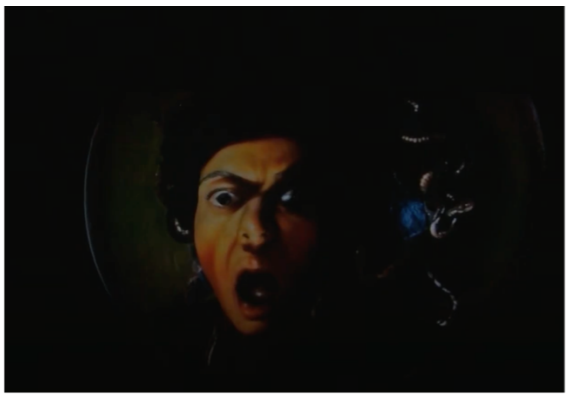

Figure 12. Eshetu, Theo. Atlas Fractured (Athens version), 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

image of a new beginning. Here and throughout the work, I argue, Eshetu fulfills the calls of finding new ways of seeing and being with one another that Sylvia Wynter and Maldonado-Torres called for. The history is undeniably given to us, from colonial theft to Nazi genocide to the H-bomb, but Eshetu creates in *Atlas Fractured*, a moment to literally see and sit with a different way of being. Not naively, as his dissonant pairing of Medusa and Angelou makes clear, but with a fantastical glimpse into a world where the layering of images, histories, mediums and messages creates what Eshetu described to me as a "healthy disorientation." This does not mean (and how could it?) that this disorientation could lead to a more humane, more just world, but as Baldwin says in the work "[…] the moral basis on which the world we now know rests, are obsolete, must be changed." Eshetu in *Atlas Fractured* gives us an opening to build a new basis for one another.

Matthew Angelo Harrison: Prototypes of a Recovered Future

Harrison began his formal artistic career working in product development at Ford in his hometown of Detroit. After completing his BFA at the Art Institute of Chicago he landed a job as a clay modeler. Ford would prove to be the perfect place, since Harrison became captivated by tinkering, building and discovering with machines as part of his artistic practice. He was so inspired by machines, he said, that "I lived at home, with my mom, because I took all the money I made at Ford and spent it on aluminum motors, stepper motors, and sensors. I was really sacrificing everything to do this, instead of just making paintings" (*Future Perfect*). Harrison even would call food industry manufacturers and concrete suppliers, on "official" Ford business, to ask how their machines worked (*Future Perfect*). It was not simply the machine methods of creation that Harrison discovered while at Ford, but he also was excited by the very idea of prototypes. While helping create prototype models, Harrison wondered what might have become

of all the prototypes that were made in the process of finalizing a design. He imagined what each of these prototypes could be and what realities they might have made possible, had they been fully realized. He explained: "I'm fascinated with manufacturing prototypes because of the idea that an object can exist in an in-between state as both a reality and a possibility," and the realities those prototypes could have made he called "prototypical possibilities" (*Future Perfect*). In a very material sense one could stay in Detroit to think of the impact of prototypes come to life. The Cadillac Type 53 was the first automobile to have the layout of a gear shifter and handbrake between the driver and passenger seats, a key-start ignition and the brake, accelerator and gear shift pedals in the order that is ubiquitous over 100 years later. This embodies Harrison's belief that the impacts of design decisions, if given a life beyond a prototype, can literally be world changing.

The powerful move that Harrison makes in his art is using the concept of "prototypical possibilities" to imagine how the lives of African Americans and Africans may be different if the devastating and also world-changing impact of the transatlantic slave trade had been different. As Kim Beil says of Harrison, his "[p]rototypes represent a way for Harrison to create possible pasts […] each of these past models might have resulted in an alternate future" (*Future Perfect*).). The possibility of the prototypes and Harrison's machine-aided practice is that he can tinker with what possible pasts he can work with. Change one component, alter the instructions that he gives to one of his 3D-printers and a new past, and future, can be considered.

While Harrison's work is balanced between the past and future, the inspiration comes from a shared present reality for many Black people like him. Harrison thinks of his uncle, who collected West African sculptures in an attempt to claim some kind of African identity after coming of age during the Civil Rights movement. There is no reliable way, however, to recover

the family legacy that was lost to the Atlantic Ocean. Through collecting, people like Harrison's uncle created an idea of homeland through curating statues. For Harrison's this offers an artistic freedom, "[b]eing African American and being *freed up from the specifics of place*, I don't have direct lineage or a pedigree that extends to Africa. That's totally severed" (*Future Perfect*, emphasis mine). That state of being, of being "freed up from the specifics of place," resonates with the state of the Caribbean artist described by Glissant. For Glissant the deaths and traumas of the Middle Passage and then the plantation transformed those who survived, specifically creating a distinct relationship to mourning, and, just as important, to history and time. This, argues Drabinski, is distinct from how other man-made catastrophes altered conceptions of history. He turns to critical theorist Walter Benjamin, stating how the later argued for an altered conception of history, where it is *not* the Enlightenment dream of continual progress, but only "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" (Drabinski 295). The living, the people who survived, have the wreckage to deal with; they contend with the things and people who did not survive. Adorno, in a similar vein, focuses on what the living are called to do in the shadow of catastrophes. He famously said there can be no (beautiful) poetry after Auschwitz, which Drabinski argues commands intellectuals to always consider the ashes of the Holocaust in their work. Drabinski writes on the work of those who survive "[h]e survives. She survives. They survive. We survive. In Celan's disastrous turn of phrase, 'the world is gone, I must carry you'" (294). This means, according to this distinctly Frankfurt School and Celan perspective on the Holocaust, that the lives lost in the past inescapably frame how the intellectual and artist must understand the present and the future. The key distinction for Drabinski's reading of Glissant is that the Black Caribbean artist is this relationship to the dead. For the Caribbean thinker there is the unknowable placelessness, the

massive gap in history lost to the bottom of Atlantic, with Drabinski writing of the Africans thrown overboard in the Middle Passage '[o]nly the shackles—gone green—remain. Drown at the sea's bottom" (300).

If one takes Germany as the pivot point for different histories of colonialism, then this is the branch where financially powerful families like the Fuggers and the Welsers of Augsburg funded and profited from the early 16th century Portuguese slave trade (Raphael-Hernandez and Wiegmink 422). Do to the connections these Southern German families had with the Habsburg royal family, who controlled Austria and Spain in the 16th century, the Welser family in particular played a major role in financing and running Spain's colonization of the Americas. Welser companies controlled "Little Venice" (Venezuela) from 1528 until 1556 and founded cities like Bogotá. Additionally, the Welsers were granted exclusive rights by the Spanish crown to control the Spanish slave trade, trading at least 4,000 enslaved Africans within a few years (Roth 439-441).[18] While the Spanish eventually moved away from private investors running their colonial endeavors, the Fugger and Welser families gained almost mythical status in the late 18th and early 19th century.[19] Roth, informed by Zantop, writes how during this time many German intellectuals dreamed of a unified German nation that could colonize like their European neighbors, and saw what they perceived to be a heroic heritage of German colonization in the Welser and Fugger families. During the Nazi period this 16th century German colonial history was again lionized and seen as a source for the legitimacy of new (although unsuccessful)

[19] Roth notes that Heinrich Heine, a German Jewish romantic-era poet, was one of the notable figures who wrote critically about colonization in his poem "Vitzliputzli" in 1848 (446). The poem focused on the atrocities committed by Columbus and Cortez, as well as the Aztec god Huītzilōpōchtli, whose name in Latin is Vitzliputzli.

German colonialism in the Caribbean and Americans (Roth 446-57). As Roth argues, and one sees today in official narratives on the Fugger and Welser families, their central roles in colonization and the slave trade are often treated as footnotes and their wealth and philanthropy are instead highlighted (448-49).[20] The ever-rippling consequences of the foundational German-funded and facilitated colonization and slave trade helped create the chasms in family histories that Matthew Angelo Harrison has focused much of his art practice on.

Those who survived in the belly of the ship then have an entirely different relationship to the dead. They cannot carry them; they cannot look at the wreckage. That leads to a powerfully different relationship to the past and time and it leads to a different relationship with trauma. Whereas Adorno thought through the ashes of Auschwitz, thinkers like Christina Sharpe and Glissant face how one can think of Black existence and mourning when so many ancestors were lost to the bottom of the ocean. Sharpe confronts this difficulty when thinking through NourbeSe Philip's work *Zong![21],* writing "[w]hat is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a 'liquid grave'? (qtd in Sharpe 201). The word that Philip arrives at is *exaqua*. There is no bringing the bodies from the Zong and so many other ships up from the water. There are, as Philip knows, no bones to recover (38). It is that relationship to the past that marks a key difference between the European critical theorists like Adorno and Benjamin and Glissant. The trauma of the present for the Caribbean thinker is to have a dematerialized, almost impossible to recover past, while constantly being reminded of how the past marks the present of Black people.[22]

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[20] The parallels to our ultra-wealthy contemporaries are hard to miss.

[21] As Sharpe explains, the ship *Zong* was originally a Dutch ship called *Zorgue*, or care (50). One is reminded of the German word *Sorge,* or worry.

Figure 13. Angelo Harrison, Matthew. Dark Silhouette: Couple Transfigured, 2018. Photographed by Tim Johnson. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

Harrison faces the same issue that Philip saw, and Sharpe recognized that there is no *exaqua*. There may be traces, such as the residence time of salt that Sharpe writes of or Harrison saying "[t]here are some elements [from African ancestors] that come through music or dance […]," but as he says " […]it's not really clear; it's murky" *(Future Perfect)*.[23] Harrison's work is in many ways about inventing ways to alter a relationship to the past by constructing artworks of an imagined past (or imagined pasts). The composition and construction of Harrison's work has direct ties to his life and work in Detroit, combining his work in the auto industry with his uncle's collecting of African statues. That family connection is mixed with machines Harrison often makes himself to create artworks like *Dark Silhouette: Couple Transfigured*. The statues are often embedded in an acrylic resin. Harrison then carves the resin and sometimes even the statues with a computerized numerically controlled (CNC) machine. CNC machines work by removing material from an object, say a block of aluminum, by carving away. The shape the machine carves away is determined by parameters fed into a computer that controls the machine. In contrast to 3D-printing, CNC machining is an entirely subtractive process, carving away at a block of material to reveal a design in the same way sculptors have been carving away at stone and wood for

[23] Residence time is, according to the OED, "[t]he average length of time during which a substance, a portion of material, an object, etc., is in a given location or condition (esp. a state of solution or suspension)." Sharpe is talking about the residence time of the people who were tossed into the sea by European slavers. The residence time of salt in water is millions of years, meaning the salt in [from?] the bodies of the people who were consumed by the ocean is very much still with us.

millennia. *Dark Silhouette: Couple Transfigured* reads very differently from your traditionally carved sculptures, however. A large part of this is the embedded, almost fossilized nature of Harrison's block of material. It feels preserved and thereby possibly part of a timeframe far removed from our present. Yet the CNC carving of the sculptures, the posing of them, the way they are placed to face one another, feels like the work of a craftsperson, an artist, or even a researcher who strove to measure and study the preserved objects.

One could imagine aliens, thousands of years in the future, digging up these resin and statue blocks, mounting them to machines, and drilling away at them for study. We see on the head of the figure on the left four holes drilled in a square shape, as though the holes are there to allow the object to be gripped and moved. At the hips of both figures are two anchors that seem functional: two cylinders carved into the wood that could be used to slide the blocks around.[24] But when the rest of the CNC carvings into the sculpture are looked at the piece takes on a much less functional and more artistic or decorative nature. The mirrored M-like shapes carved into both figures create a symmetry and continuous lines that unite both blocks. The two thinner lines that begin in the heads of the figures also strengthen an impression of both being in communication with one another.

The dissection of each couple, with both missing an arm and one missing a leg, also has visual resonance with Aristophanes' story in Plato's *Symposium* of lovers longing for their literal other half after being split apart by the jealous Gods. In this case through the artist's hand and the carving of machines, the alterations of the statues in resin could allow them to physically link with one another after pivoting the carved sides of the blocks to touch one another. Where the

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[24] CNC carving does require that the block of material to be carved to have an anchor point, so the material can be firmly fixed to say a table while the machine carves away. Usually this is a hole made for an anchoring pin to fit into. Harrison may have incorporated those anchor points into the holes of this sculpture.

statues on their own may have not been a couple or connected to one another, and those intentionally undefined origins are central to the effect of Harrison's work, through mechanized alternation and excavation, we see a gaze and bodies that can merge with one another. Two statues that may have been identical in their unaltered state—notice the similar line running down the back to the feet—could in this presentation be two people in love.

The aluminum pedestal also literally and symbolically elevates the work, taking the work closer to a deliberate artefact rather than simply a specimen for investigation. Even the title *Couple Transfigured* suggests the work becoming something greater and more noble through its alterations. Thinking back to Kim Beil's article on Harrison, writing that "each of these past models might have resulted in an alternate future," imagine the possible future embodied in *Couple Transfigured,* one of future archaeologists finding these preserved statues and through examination seeing two people literally being part of one another.

Harrison's method of creating his sculptures also makes room to have interpretations that are abstracted away from the mark of the artist's hand or identifiers of their unique style. In all of his artwork, machines, which the artist himself often constructs, play a role in realizing the resulting artworks. In some works, it is computers making amalgamations of many 3D scans, in others it is machines that have an almost statue-like appearance themselves that set the parameters for how a work looks. In great contrast to an artist like Amoako Boafo, whose fingers provide the depth and texture to his portraits' skin tones (see Chapter Two), Harrison has mechanical and computational intermediaries that allow him to distance himself from his own work. It is that very deliberate act of abstracting a clearly human style out of his work that creates the space for viewers to imagine them as artefacts, as archaeological curiosities, as objects for dreaming.

Harrison again uses computer as tools to make the work *Bareness of the Physical Model - (Dogon).* For this sculpture he did 3D scans of West African sculptures he has collected over the years. From those 3D scans he creates an amalgamation of all the artworks into one 3D model. The end result are works that seem African, are "inspired" by African sculpture, but also have no geographic origin. Through digital means they embody the process of imagining African identity that people like Harrison's uncle have done for generations. These sculptures represent loss, but they also make real a different kind of Black diasporic representation. Instead of being Ghanaian or Cameroonian, Igbo or Chokwe, they are a blend of many different African cultures, looking familiar, but not being from a concrete place.

John E. Drabinski asked, when thinking about how to represent events like the Holocaust, "[w]hat does it mean to relate to the unrepresentable?" (293). Harrison tackles this question by trying to represent it. His prototypes, produced by machines, created by amalgams, represent Black Americans' process of creating an African connection that was lost in the Middle passage. While his works are bursting with imagination, they are also rooted in the creative process that writers like Glissant spoke of. Faced with a severing of connection, Harrison creates artefacts of a future that might have been, but also shows us how identity and histories are built even after something as devastating as slavery. His science fiction-like prototypes are fundamentally diasporic in their yearning for connection, their desire to recover lost histories and are part of the

Figure 14. Angelo Harrison, Matthew. Bareness of the Physical Model - (Dogon), 2018. 2018 Triennial: "Songs for Sabotage," 2018. Exhibition view: New Museum, New York. Photo: Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio. Courtesy of New Museum.

unavoidable future-centered stance of the Caribbean and Black American artist who even must invent the future, even if through a reimagined past.

Eshetu and Harrison are two artists who reflect on the inconceivable: a world without the Middle Passage, without an ability to recognize race, a door that opens to a fundamental reordering of our world. Through his layering of art and models, Eshetu disabuses viewers of the ability to confidently recognize race. Through 3D scanning, CNC machining and 3D printing, Harrison creates practices that recontextualize West African sculpture, making them into artefacts that embody an African American longing for an unbroken connection to Africa. Together, from opposite sides of the Atlantic, they created artworks that allow for a rehabilitation of our imaginations.

Chapter 2: Representation: Abstract, Intimate, Transcendent

The (Oppressive) Power of Representation

The first artist in this chapter, Eva Leitolf, trained under influential photographer and scholar Allan Sekula. Sekula spent a career critically approaching photography both in his art and in his writing as a tool routinely exploited by oppressive state and global structures. In his influential essay, "The Body and the Archive," Sekula painstakingly provides a history of how early photography was legitimized as a scientific tool by being used to build archives of photos that supported scientific racism. Sekula details, for example, how Alphonse Bertillon, a Parisian police officer and biometrics researcher, helped invent the mugshot in the late 19th century. Bertillon was inspired by phrenology and initially included cranial measurements alongside mugshots. This is also why mugshots include a side profile photo to this day, since that perspective shows head shape, size and so on. As Sekula argues, and as we know through the ubiquity of mugshots, photography as a tool for state-sponsored oppression is far from an abstract danger. Since Bertillon, police photographic archives around the world have been built on a phrenological worldview.

The final story in Sekula's essay turns to the artist's position when using photography in their practice. Sekula writes of South African photographer Ernest Cole, who photographed Black South Africans being arrested by police for being outside of permitted zones. The police initially harassed Cole, but then seeing the promise in his photographs for police purposes, asked him to work for them. Cole left the country soon after. The lesson to be learned from Cole's experience is that:

> [i]f we are to listen to, and act in solidarity with, the polyphonic testimony of the oppressed and exploited, we should recognize that some of this testimony, like Cole's,

> will take the ambiguous form of visual documents, documents of the 'microphysics' of barbarism […] Our problem, as artists and intellectuals living near but not at the center of a global system of power, will be to help prevent the cancellation of that testimony by more authoritative and official texts (Sekula 64).

In sum, Sekula argued that photography, even when made by artists aiming to depict the mechanics of oppression, has from its inception been used by the powerful to further oppression. The artist then has to always be cognizant of the risk of being co-opted by hegemonic powers. The risk is too great to be neutral, impartial or uncritical. The political power of photography has to be faced head on. It is never enough to simply photograph, according to Sekula; one must also always be conscious of the powerful forces that are eager to instrumentalize photography for their own aims.

When Representation Is Not Enough

This struggle to strive for non-hegemonic representation when faced with state and global power exists in all fields of life, from the classroom to political office. Representation of minoritized people has been such a hot topic in the past few years that it has become in many spheres an expectation for exemplifying progress or a critical consciousness. TV shows, films, novels, panels and even course syllabi are expected to be composed of more than just white men or to offer apologies if they do not meet that standard. Yet as we see Black women CEOs, disabled protagonists and TV shows focused on queer people, the idea of representation in itself as a way to combat historic exclusion and injustices is coming under increased criticism. Minoritized people being represented or visibly occupying positions of power is never a guarantee that they will use that power to uplift or protect people like them. As a range of thinkers such as Homi Bhabha have argued, often doing what it takes to climb in an oppressive

system involves coopting and reproducing oppression itself.[25] What looks like progress may in fact be oppression with a different face.

The pitfalls of representation can go beyond minoritized people working in service of entrenched powers, however. Representation can also be used in the service of controlling people through the often-violent restriction of what forms of expression and (self-)representation are acceptable. Increasingly we are seeing these restrictions on identity in politics and media: passing laws to limit or ban discussing non-normative sexuality and gender identity in schools in the US, demonizing immigrants as economic and sexual threats in German mainstream media, or regulations on what is "respectable" Black hair is at work and in schools. We are surrounded by implicit and explicit messages that ask all of us to express and represent ourselves in ways that are comfortable to the powerful. Liberation is not permissible in this state of affairs, but rather a constant negotiation of how much risk can be taken on with expressions and representations of ourselves and others, particularly in the public sphere.

These pitfalls of representation are also endemic to museums. While many museums mention caring deeply about minoritized communities in their mission statements, many of those same museums disrespect or harm those very communities through their actions. From powerful institutions like MoMA and the MET, to more regional players like the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit and the Detroit Institute of Arts, there have been instances of museums underpaying artists, mistreating local communities, tokenization, cronyism, and abuse of minoritized staff. All this has happened while museums have been putting out press releases

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[25] Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" is a powerful tool to understand this dynamic. Bhabha argues that under colonialism, the colonized are asked to do everything to make the colonizers comfortable: speak their language, wear their clothes, eat their food and so on. They need to mimic the way the colonizers live. The key tragedy of this for Bhabha is that no matter how well the colonized mimics their oppressors, they will always be betrayed by their non-whiteness and be rejected any full inclusion. See Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man" for more.

for shows that signal caring about the minoritized, while supporting organizations like the police that oppress them (Greenberger, Pogrebin, Small, Voon). Like the wealthy using charity to burnish their image, museums often use representation to deflect criticism. Simply put, it is not enough to talk about minoritized people or even display their art. From the mugshot to the museum, we can see how surface-level representation can be a quick path to injustice and abuse. For institutional representation to be meaningful, it must also be followed by a shift in thinking that truly absorbs the work that art by or about minoritized people often performs, which is offering alternative ways of seeing the world and each other.

Through markedly different artistic approaches and worldviews—from the subject-less "portrait" photography of Eva Leitolf on migration, to the intimate Black Viennese modernism of Amoako Boafo, to the celestial, abstracted and philosophically West African portraiture of Conrad Egyir—viewers are given the tools to see others and possibly ourselves freed from imposed constraints on identity. These analytical and imaginative tools given to viewers by the artists provide the chance to see beyond the dehumanizing depictions of the Other in mainstream media: for instance, the chance to see Black masculinity as malleable and vulnerable and a window into what Black identity could look like without any externally imposed limits. These artists then give viewers the chance to experience what representation can be outside the marginalizing, reductive gaze we often see in representation of the Other and instead can gain a critical consciousness of how that gaze functions, just and as importantly, what models of liberatory representation can look like.

Eva Leitolf: Seeing without Subjects

The challenge to which Eva Leitolf's work reacts is how representations of migrants both create and support two dehumanizing stereotypes: the migrant who "needs to be saved" by the

white West and the Black and/or brown migrant who is a "threat." Straightforward representation of migrants, no matter if well-intentioned, can easily fall into the trap of referring to these dehumanizing stereotypes. While Leitolf focuses on 20th and 21st century photography as her reference to understanding representation, the reality of centuries of colonial conquest and indoctrination is that many of us complete an internal portrait of the "Other" via references we absorb, often unconsciously, in all aspects of life from the home to the political arena. We may not know the man waiting for the bus, or the woman asking for money on the street, but we have been bombarded by dehumanizing stereotypes of them that constitute, even if in part, the palette by which we complete our internal portrait of them.[26]

Following intensive engagement with and study of a more critical approach to photojournalism, Leitolf eventually concluded that portraiture of minoritized people, especially coming from a white European perspective like hers, has the real potential to be harmful. In light of that recognition, her work consciously does away with portraiture in any conventional sense. Instead, she gives viewers empty scenes on the wall and then postcards to carry through the gallery with descriptions of what happened to migrants and minorities in those very scenes. This means asking viewers to complete their internal portraits of those migrants without ever seeing the people her work is about, and, ideally, results in viewers gaining a critical consciousness of how harmful representation of the "Other" can be. It is, of course, not a guarantee of

[26] While he did not write directly about issues of minority representations, my perspective on how we internalize, and replicate stereotypes created in media is heavily influenced by Sudipta Kaviraj's scholarship on ancient Kashmiri philosophy on representation in the theater. Kaviraj writes about how ancient Kashmiri philosophers thought we understood actors on stage as say Gods or villians, since we all have a common reference for what those figures look like. We know a radiant, beautiful figure may likely be a God, for example. I see it the same dynamic occurring with minorities, but instead of understanding who an artistic figure is, many of us often jump to conclusion on who someone else is, because of the common references fed to us through media.

humanization in the face of dehumanization (what could be?), but an experiment in what moving away from dehumanizing representation can look like.

Deutsche Bilder (German Images)

Leitolf's career began in the early 1990s, after the Berlin Wall came down and Germany quickly reunited. She had studied *Fotojournalistik,* a critical approach to photojournalism that stands in explicit opposition to the legacy of practice of *National Geographic* magazine, which was seen as extractive and aligned with colonialist views of non-Europeans as merely objects of study (Leitolf). That approach informed her earliest work, in which she focused on photographing the people and places where far-right violence against people of color occurred after the fall of the Wall. Iconic images of celebrations and hammers chipping away at the Wall dominate the narrative around this historical moment, but that wave of national euphoria also sparked a wave of nationalism and xenophobic violence. In several places throughout Germany far-right mobs attacked thousands of migrants at their homes, businesses and shelters. Perhaps the most infamous of these was the firebombing of a Turkish family's home in Solingen, resulting in the deaths of five people and injuries to 14 others, including children (Jäger).

Leitolf's photography at this time explored this violence head on with images of burnt buildings, homes with Nazi memorabilia in display cabinets, mourning families, mothers with their children and so on. As we see in the two images in Figure 15, which were part of the first of two iterations of *German Images,* there is a mother holding a child with an Imperial German flag in the background.[27] The mother is lovingly gazing down at a baby that grips one of her fingers,

[27] The old German Imperial Flag, from when Germany had colonies around 1900, functions now as a symbol for neo-Nazis. This is likely in part because the Nazis reworked the German Imperial Flag by replacing an eagle with a Swastika during the Nazi era. Since German law bans Nazi symbols, using the old pre-Nazi imperial flag is a way to avoid the law and still show far-right allegiance. See "Origins of Neo-Nazi and White Supremacist Terms and Symbols" for more.

a juxtaposition of a violent symbol with domestic tranquility in a working-class home. In a similar setting we see a portrait of an Asian woman looking down at her plump baby, with a cardboard box with Chinese characters and "rice sticks" written on it. A crib stands to the right. It is a similarly tranquil and working-class scene, but without any nationalist, far-right symbols. While showing an eye for striking compositions, these images could also fall into the trap of reproducing harmful clichés or supporting uncritical readings of these photos. The neo-Nazi could be read as gentle and caring, softening their image, while the Asian woman and baby could be read as deserving of Western charity.

In the mid-90s Leitolf moved to California to earn an MFA at the California Institute of the Arts under the tutelage of Allan Sekula. Leitolf's time with Sekula markedly changed the second iteration of *German Images*, which took a clear formal shift to documenting the racist violence in German society. In a 2019 interview, Leitolf explains her motivations for restarting the project in 2006. She both had a desire to ask more of the audience and was motivated to show how far-right violence was not a unique consequence of the many failures of the reunified German government, but that one permeates all of German society (Sturm 34). In the early 1990s version of *German Images* the artist felt that viewers were quick to see only perpetrators and

Figure 15. Leitolf, Eva. Deutsche Bilder – Eine Spurensuche (German Images – Looking for Evidence), 1992-1994/2006-2008. Courtesy of the artist.

victims/survivors, and often did not grasp any social or political elements, particularly not related to themselves (Sturm 36). Leitolf's aim then became to ask the viewers to be active participants in building a critical consciousness about Germany, and ideally viewers could then imagine less clichéd versions of people in Germany today.[28] To accomplish this Leitolf made a significant formal change to the work. The new iteration, from 2006 to 2008, contains images of mostly people-less scenes throughout Germany where xenophobic violence or gatherings had occurred. Viewers are given image-less text postcards or pamphlets with descriptions of what occurred at the scenes in the photographs. Speaking of her photographic work as a whole she says: "Ich verstehe meine Arbeit als Angebot: Das Weglassen der Personen schafft einen größeren Vorstellungsraum" ("I understand my work as an offer to the viewer: the omission of human subjects creates a larger space for the imagination") (Sturm 36). *Vorstellungsraum* is a somewhat difficult term to translate. It is related to a viewer's or reader's ability to imagine something that an artwork suggests. Leitolf wants that open space for the imagination, or what she has also called an empty stage, for the viewer to project their own thoughts.

Figure 16. Leitolf, Eva. 2007.

Decoding the Crime Scene

The images and texts in this section are from the 2006 to 2008 rethinking of *German Images: Looking for Evidence*. As the project's subtitle suggests, the project is intended to echo the work

[28] I would highly encourage readers to see Heinkelmann-Wild, Beck & Spencer, and Frazer Rath and Weber for scholarship on how xenophobia and racism is perpetuated by German media. All these scholars do excellent work on how German media creates impossible standards for migrants to integrate, while simultaneously dehumanizing them as a threat or in need of paternal care through racist tropes.

of a detective on a crime scene. That is not only because crimes often occurred in these scenes, but because Leitolf is guiding viewers to dig beyond an initial glance at her photographs. To aid with that detective work, we can see in Figure 16 how Leitolf asks viewers to carry pamphlets of texts she wrote for each photograph that describes xenophobic violence or gatherings that occurred in the location depicted. The atmosphere in the gallery is reminiscent of a school fieldtrip where the visitors are asked to discover something in the art. While this iteration of *German Images* has a gallery full of photographs and accompanying texts from Leitolf, in this chapter I focus on just two photographs and texts to give viewers a sense of the process of discovery that occurs with these multi-media works.

Figure 17. Leitolf, Eva. Deutsche Bilder, 2006-08. Courtesy of the artist.

Staatsstraße, Weihenlinden, 2007
Am 16. Mai 1999 ereignet sich auf der Staatsstraße 2078 ein schwerer Verkehrsunfall, bei dem alle fünf türkischen Fahrzeuginsassen ums Leben kommen. Zwei Tage später entdeckt ein Autofahrer ein Plakat am Unfallort, auf dem neben einem Hakenkreuz unter anderem steht: »Die Moral von der Geschicht – Tote Türken stören nicht«. Das Plakat wird sichergestellt und spurentechnisch untersucht. Die kriminalpolizeilichen Ermittlungen verlaufen ergebnislos.

State road,
Weihenlinden
2007
On 16 May 1999 there was a serious road accident on state road 2078, where all five Turkish occupants of the car were killed. Two days later a driver discovered a poster at the scene of the accident bearing a swastika and the words 'the moral of the story – dead Turks don't bother us'. The poster was secured by the police and examined forensically, but the investigation remained inconclusive.

If you take in the image on its own, it gives very few indications of where it is. It could, at first glance, be a highway nearly anywhere that is not a desert. The one indication that it might be Germany are the small onion domes of the church in the distance, common in Bavarian religious architecture. Apart from that easily overlooked detail

in these poster-sized photos there is nothing unusual about the image. It is more or less bisected horizontally by the metal barrier. It could be a evoke a snapshot taken by someone taking a break during a long drive on a clear sunny day. It is only by reading Leitolf's caption that viewers can realize how powerfully charged this place is, when they learn that in 2007 five Turkish people died in a serious traffic accident here. Two days later a driver saw a sign with a swastika on it at the spot of the deadly accident that read: "Die Moral von der Geschicht –Tote Türken stören nicht" (The moral of the story / Dead Turks don't bother us). In the original German there is an AA rhyme and meter that is reminiscent of nursery rhymes. We are then left to imagine not only the traffic deaths of five Turkish people, which were likely brutal, but also the people who were inspired to celebrate their deaths. We cannot see either the victims or the perpetrators, and so as viewers we are given the possibility to imagine both outside of established narratives. This moment of revelation, of recognizing the cruelty that exists in even seemingly innocuous places, can help viewers disabuse themselves of any simple notions of the ability to place evil, either in Germany or more broadly in our world. Instead of only associating, say, a piece of Nazi architecture or a skinhead bar with places of the far-right, the process Leitolf's work asks viewers to undertake shows that hateful elements of German society can mark the landscape anywhere. If one were to read about this event in mainstream media, it could fall into established narratives of trying to understand the motives of the racist who celebrates such deaths. By weakening this link to established narratives through her formal choices, Leitolf also creates room for viewers to sympathize with the victims or their loved ones. The quiet reflection for

which Leitolf makes space could, if briefly, allow a more human response to tragedy to emerge.[29]

Hirschgarten, Munich, 2007

Figure 18. Leitolf, Eva. Deutsche Bilder - Eine Spurensuche, 2006-2008. Hirschgarten. Courtesy of the artist.

On 10 August 2000 the Green group on Munich city council organized a minibus tour of the city's 'centers of right-wing extremist activity' for the press. The itinerary included the headquarters of a rightwing student fraternity, the offices of a right-wing intellectual magazine and the home of the leader of the DVU party. According to the press release, right-wing extremist structures in eastern Germany had been built and funded from Munich and Upper Bavaria. Hirschgarten was identified as a meeting place for right-wing extremists where many violent attacks had occurred. ©Eva Leitolf

This photo by itself could be pulled straight from the cheery ads often commissioned by Munich-based breweries. The beer garden, an undeniable symbol of Munich culture, has tall trees that dapple the tables with sunlight. The Hirschgarten beer garden is within the grounds of the summer estate of the Wittelsbach family, an opulent, sprawling estate with Rococo huts tucked into the surrounding forest. But the rosy mental image of royal gardens filled with swans and friends sharing drinks is quickly brought back down to earth by Leitolf's caption.

[29] Leitolf herself has said to me in correspondence that while she does not disagree with my analysis of her work, in that it can invite viewers to sympathize with victims of racist violence, she also wants viewers of this work "[…] to understand the involvement of all of us and that there is no safe 'outside' for a viewer[…]." I do not have adequate space here to fully explore that element of this work, but even minoritized people can be, whether consciously or not, involved in oppressive structures of power. Therefore Leitolf's work can truly ask us all to engage with our own culpability.

The Hirschgarten is also a meeting point for far-right extremists, the caption tells us, and has been the site of regular violence. Leitolf's caption also mentions how monied people in Munich and its surrounding region, Upper Bavaria, support and fund far-right extremist groups in eastern Germany. Often eastern Germany is singled out as the epicenter of the far-right in Germany, and electoral successes for the far-right there seem to support this view, but Leitolf's structural lens highlights how one cannot single out the East as unique in its support of extremism.[30]

It is also crucial for this dissertation to consider not only the viewer who is unaware of the far-right presence in even the most beautiful parts of Germany, but the viewer who is hyper-aware of how the public spaces can be dangerous. The mental map many marginalized people make of no-go places due to the risk of harassment and violence is also reflected here. The sad realization that joy is constricted or impossible in certain spaces is a body blow to many who visit touristic Europe, and perhaps Leitolf's empty scenes can let even the marginalized have their pain recognized.

Postcards from Europe: Exploitation and Death at the Margins

After *German Images*, Leitolf shifted her attention beyond Germany and to Europe's borders at the onset of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. Similar in format to *German Images,* this more recent installation, *Postcards from Europe: Work from an ongoing archive*, strives to shed light on how Europe defines and violently enforces its borders to limit and often entirely stop refugees. Leitolf wants viewers of her work to see how Europe's construction and policing

[30] For example, in 2019 the far-right, and at times neo-Nazi aligned, AfD party got the second most votes in the northeastern state surrounding Berlin and the most votes in the eastern German state of Saxony. As Leitolf makes clear, Bavaria is hardly immune to similar sentiments, particular as Bavaria's long dominant party, the CSU, is against making things easier for migrants. For example, in 2019 the party's interior minister celebrated border police arresting more migrants and said controlling migration was an anti-crime measure. See Brandenburg, Saxony and CSU for more.

of its borders is meant to exploit, fail, and far too often leave refugees to die. It is not lone vigilantes, certain parties or even certain countries, but a continent-wide intentional system of violence. By broadening her scope to Europe, Leitolf also takes up a decolonial project in photographically building an archive of how Europe not only sees itself as whites-only, but also enforces a racial hierarchy by simultaneously economically exploiting Black and brown migrants. This continent-wide scope moves even further into decoloniality by showing how consistently coloniality is embodied at borders and at the highest forms of government not only in Germany, but through the entirety of Europe.

Orange Grove, Rosarno, Italy 2010
In January 2010 the price obtained by Calabrian citrus growers for their Moro and Navel oranges was five euro cents per kilogram. They paid their mostly illegally employed and undocumented African and Eastern European seasonal workers between €20 and €25 for a day's work. Depending on the variety and the state of the trees a worker can pick between four and seven hundred kilograms of oranges in a day. The business was no longer profitable and many farmers left the fruit to rot.
During the 2009–2010 harvest there were between four and five thousand migrants living in and around Rosarno, most of them in abandoned buildings or plastic shelters, without running water or toilets.
On 7 January 2010 local youths fired an air-gun at African orange-pickers returning from work and injured two of them. The ensuing demonstration by migrant workers ended in severe clashes with parts of the local population, during which cars were set on fire and shop windows broken. Accommodation used by seasonal workers was burned and hundreds fled, fearing the local citizens or deportation by the authorities.
On 9 January, under police protection from jeering onlookers, about eight hundred Africans were bussed out to emergency accommodation in Crotone and Bari.
A Season in Hell: MSF Report on the Conditions of Migrants Employed in the Agricultural Sector in Southern Italy, January 2008; Tagesschau, 10 January 2010; interviews with orange farmers and seasonal labourers, Rosarno, 27–29 January 2010

Eva Leitolf, Postcards from Europe, *work from the ongoing archive*

Figure 19. Leitolf, Eva. Postcards from Europe: Orange Grove, since 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

Orange Grove centers an orange tree, ripe with fruit, with many left on the ground or even floating in muddy water. The trees look healthy, the ground has a track most likely cut into it by a car tire, but yet fruits are left to rot. A viewer may wonder what happened. There are no signs of a natural disaster, nor was Italy a site of war in 2010, so why is there a scene that looks like it was left in a rush? Reading the caption helps us understand why this abundant grove is not being harvested. These trees were left unpicked by farmers who stopped paying largely undocumented migrants once the profit margins fell. Even worse than that, according to Leitolf, the locals harassed the African migrant workers, burning their make-shift housing and forcing them to flee. The location of the photo in Rosnaro, Italy is

only 200 or miles from Tunisia, placing it near the southernmost edge of Europe. Despite helping prop up the European economy, these workers are given no legal protection, are forced to find their own accommodation, and then after being tossed aside by the owners of the orange groves are harassed and attacked by locals. The story shared by Leitolf and the photo offer a vignette of how coloniality creates and then exploits with many overlapping layers of oppression and dehumanization. While Europe needs the hard work of these workers to provide food, they are tossed aside by an entire village once their exploitation stops being profitable. Viewers can see how even what is in their grocery stores and kitchens is made possible by organized, society-wide violence. From the beer garden to the breakfast table, the presence of coloniality reverberates.

Hunting Hide, between Beregsurany and Tarpa, Hungary 2009
According to the commander of Beregsurany border post, cooperation with the population is superb: regular meetings are held with local mayors, and citizens are well-informed and keen to help the border police. As this is a hunting region, he said, certain areas are completely covered by hunters' night scopes during the hunting season.
Interview, Beregsurany border post, 3 November 2009

Figure 20. Leitolf, Eva. Postcards from Europe: Hunting Hide, since 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

Hunting Hide, a photo from the Eastern border of Hungary to Ukraine, could be nearly anywhere in Central and Eastern Europe.[31] Take a drive from Berlin eastwards towards Poland and you are likely to see similar landscapes and seemingly abandoned hunting perches. The photo evokes the kind of uneventful stillness of a field off a country road, that

[31] When possible, I tried to include Leitolf's original German text and her English translations. When the English translation could not be found, I translated the German myself. When there was only English from Leitolf, I only included that, such as *Hunting Hide.*

in-between place of not quite developed and not quite rural. Maybe grain is harvested here in the fall, maybe neighborhood kids fly kites here on sunny days. While there is a beauty to the composition, with the sun setting in the distance of the upper left of the photo and the curving line from the grass and bushes drawing your eye up to the hunting perch, it looks like it could have been taken in any temperate place. With her text, however, Leitolf helps us realize that this place is far darker and in fact bears witness to brutal politics and ideologies. This hunting hide, as the text reveals, is now used to literally put migrants in hunting rifle scopes. Not only that, but the military, government, and police condone the vigilante border policing done by locals. As Leitolf writes: "certain areas are completely covered by hunters' night scopes during the hunting season." We are left with the uneasy image of locals hunting migrants who are trying to cross the border. Not killed by neglect or economic exploitation as in the previous image, which is heartbreaking enough, but searched out and hunted with the support of local mayors and police. There is a trivialization of human life turned into objects for sport. It is not an aberration, but rather, as Leitolf would want us to see, a society-wide dehumanization that is embodied by actions at this border. Even seemingly unextraordinary scenes can be places where the worst of society is reflected. Similar to the way in which *German Images* builds a map of everyday violence, *Hunting Hide* reveals the state sanctioning of this brutality as sport.

Figure 21. Leitolf, Eva. Postcards from Europe, since 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

Vendicari Nature Reserve, Italy 2010

On 27 October 2007 two walkers came across several shoes washed up on a beach in the nature reserve of Vendicari. During the following days seventeen corpses were found there.
On their own initiative the couple obtained a list of the names of the dead from the authorities,

contacted the relatives in Egypt and Palestine and arranged for a Muslim funeral to be held. About one hundred people attended the ceremony officiated by the imam of Catania on 1 November 2008, including relatives of the dead and local police. The events led to the founding of Borderline Sicilia.

RagusaNews.com, 24 October 2008; interview with journalist Roman Herzog, Noto, 23 January 2010 © Eva Leitolf

As the Vendicari Nature Reserve's own website states, this reserve in Sicily was founded in 1984 in the province of Syracuse. It is a great spot for birdwatching as birds stop in the reserve on the way south for North Africa, which is 350km (217 miles) away. After 20 years the Caretta turtles have also returned to nest on the island due to ecological rehabilitation ("Vendicari"). Like Leitolf's other photos, this one also presents us with undisturbed natural scenes. The water is a bright, jewel-like green in the distance; the jagged rocks surrounded by foaming water look difficult to navigate. Clouds in the distance may be dropping rain into the ocean. The visual language could easily be part of the nature reserve's website, showing potential outdoorsy visitors the vistas across the Mediterranean water they could hike to see. As the provided caption tells us, two such outdoorsy people discovered shoes washed up onto the shore on October 27, 2007. Seventeen bodies were discovered among the jagged rocks, their retrieval likely requiring grueling work by local rescue workers. Among the turtles and birds, water and plant life, the bodies of deceased Egyptians and Palestinians, likely in search of relative peace and prosperity, were found. In contrast to the other scenes I have analyzed, this scene resulted in the modest blessing of the dignity of a Muslim funeral for the departed refugees, with family and locals in attendance. Unlike thousands of other refugees who drowned attempting to reach European shores, these victims of Europe's both antagonistic and indifferent refugee policy found some dignity after their death.

As the website of a pro-refugee organization founded after the discovery of these dead Egyptians and Palestinians shows, the Italian legal process is set up to make justice near impossible (Borderline Sicilia). While the scene Leitolf offers to our imagination and analysis shows the humanity of the locals near the nature reserve, the political process behind the refugees deaths is as dehumanizing as anywhere else. We see in this photo and caption the two ends of Europe's response to migrants. One side strives for dignity and justice for migrants and refugees, while on the other side the state apparatus is what contributed to the death of those refugees in the first place. We are left with the uneasy reality that while good people exist, they are often countered by the violence of the state.

Leitolf illuminates the structural problem of representation; it can be easily exploited by hegemonic powers and fall into harmful stereotypes about the "Other." Through that insight alone her work would serve as a critical foundation for the problem other artists in this chapter address. Yet Leitolf goes a step further in her empty scenes by providing viewers a chance to project, ideally with a structural consciousness, more human images of the "Other." It is then with this understanding of the problem of representation, and a peak into what humanizing representation can look like, that I turn to Amoako Boafo, whose work embodies how migrants can create their own, intimate paths to humanizing representation.

Amoako Boafo and Intimate Black Portraiture

Upon moving to Vienna, Ghanaian painter Amoako Boafo quickly became aware of the reality that people like him were not welcome. He was harassed by police, seen through the stereotypes of being a drug dealer or violent and ultimately rejected by Viennese galleries (Sturm). Latoya Jefferson-James explains this reality for Black men visiting places like Europe, saying: "[Fanon] posits that the Black man is predetermined. The Black man is made through

hegemonic discourse using anecdotes, stories, tales, lies, stereotypes, and even laws. Fanon summarizes: 'And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me'" (xxiv). Even several decades after Fanon wrote those words, Boafo encountered the same pre-existing hegemonic fantasy that buffeted Fanon, but perhaps more importantly robbed him of his ability to define himself. As is the reality of coloniality, everyone's humanity is attenuated by invented, but enforced hierarchies. Fanon was a psychiatrist and philosopher, Boafo is a painter; both men could very well also be people who love a cool evening breeze or the sound of their grandmother's laugh, but the ontological reality they face is their entire story being written for them by how white Europe sees the world.

Figure 22. Boafo, Amoako. Reflection 2, 2018. Roberts Projects, Los Angeles.

As an artist, however, Boafo has the unique ability to tell his own story, to define himself through his painting. That is exactly the approach he has taken and that is embodied by *Reflection 2*.[32] The very design of the self-portrait draws our eyes towards the skin and hair of the subject, which Boafo paints himself with the utmost depth, texture and variation. The walls, furnace and window have an intentionally unfinished, sketchy quality. Beyond that, he has even

[32] Boafo's formal and stylistic choices also reflect a Modernist turn to self-portraiture that reflected the subject's psychological state. In Vienna Egon Schiele used his fingers to leave traces of his emotional state while painting himself, with fingerprints and scratches on the canvas. Gabrielle Münter, a key figure in Munich Modernism, turned to painting young women while studying in Sweden. Her work *Sinnende* (the ponderer), portrays a young woman reflecting like Boafo, but with what looks like a bouquet of thoughts emerging from her head. In a time when even Münter could not study art at any academies, she used her painting to portray the dreams and creative potential of women. See *Münter* for more.

painted himself twice, therefore occupying even more space in the canvas. Since the mirror gives us another angle on Boafo's face, one could even argue for a Cubist-like approach to self-depiction. Like the Cubists he is giving us multiple angles in a 2D work providing a fuller representation of a single subject, or in this case a fuller representation of an African man appreciating himself. Moving beyond convention in his technique, the Ghanaian artist leaves the portions of the canvas that are skin entirely blank as he is creating portraits, with no preparatory pencil drawings to guide him (Studio Visit).[33] He also paints these parts of the canvas with his fingers, taking an approach of carving out thick layers of paint to create his signature style. Through that finger carving technique, he reveals a kaleidoscopic, sculptural landscape of browns, golds, blues and greens. One of the main stories told by Boafo's work is the beauty of Black people and particularly of their skin. When we think of how he wants to portray himself, how he sees himself, we have a Black man who sees the beauty in layers of color that radiate from his skin. We see the cherry red of his lips, his strong brows and jaw, a certain calmness in his eyes. He is a sight to behold while he is appreciating himself.

Sitting in the chair, hand under his chin in a gesture that evokes Rodin's *Thinker*, a young Black man reflects on his nude form and his own striking face. While representation of the beauty of minoritized people has a power that has been as appreciated as it has been commercialized, it is important not to forget the ontological component of what Boafo is doing. Rather than telling a counter-story, as he mentioned in an interview, he explicitly chose not to directly go against the hegemonic view of Black men that awaited him in Vienna (Sturm). Instead, he wanted to portray himself as he wanted to be seen, in all his beauty, dignity, and

[33] You can watch a video of his painting process through the link at *Studio Visit.*

complexity. In taking time to dwell upon himself, to see himself, he is regaining, if even in a private space in the work, his humanity. This resonates with a moment from a work by filmmaker Marlon Riggs, who himself strove to portray the lived reality of queer Black men. In Riggs' film *Black Is Black Ain't,* Elting Smalls says after hearing Stokely Carmichael speak: "[o]ne guy came along ... and said that 'Black is Beautiful' and then we realized that Black is beautiful. This kinky hair could go all kinds of ways. This brown chocolate skin looked so nice and could be all kinds of color. And then we began to realize: I am somebody" (Young 252). A recognition of one's own beauty here leads to the recognition of the fullness of one's being. It is not simply that Smalls saw the richness of his own beauty, but that in absorbing that, saw a fuller extent of his own humanity, the shift to being somebody. Here, representation clears a path to embracing the vibrancy of one's own being.

Ghana Must Go

The nude in Figure 23 carries many of the stylistic hallmarks of Boafo's style, like the sculpted and richly colored skin, a flattened Modernist perspective and the calm and confident demeanor. Equally remarkable here is how Boafo is working with different notions of gender, both in terms of Ghanaian and West African views on masculinity and also hegemonic views of Black men. As he said in an interview: "[w]hen I came to Vienna there was this stereotype of a black person; either you are doing or selling drugs or they hypersexualized your body" (Schwind). While the piece

Figure 23. Figure 7 Boafo, Amoako, Ghana Must Go, 2017. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

embraces male beauty and attractiveness, as with *Reflection 2*, Boafo has control over how he wants his form and his character to be seen. His Black male self-portraiture can embrace, bend, or counter any categories it wants.

The brightly painted nails and the novel by a famous female Ghanaian author hint towards a malleable take on masculinity. Boafo here has painted himself as incomplete, perhaps in line with upper-class Ghanaian notions, that once a young man has entered the professional working sphere he has to leave behind any feminine-coded ways of self-representation (Geoffrian 423). From above his left ear down to his neck, the paint is faded to the point of looking transparent, as though the subject has not fully formed. A similar not yet complete visual quality is seen in the locks of his hair, yet it would be hard to read this piece as anything other than self-assured. The subject is steadily reclined, at ease, seemingly chewing on something while absorbed in a book. Beneath him is a green floor, perhaps a rug, with a pattern almost entirely full of brown winged creatures, one in the subject's shadow having purple and white accents. The green rug also seems dramatically tilted forward, in Modernist play on perspective, as though it is rising to better support the figure's upper body. One could even imagine the rug fluttering off the ground to lift the reclining nude.

The book Boafo is reading, Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go,* tells the story of a Ghanaian family as they emigrate and try to succeed in the US and UK. Boafo has stated himself that he intentionally features female authors in his portraits in an effort to highlight how women were historically excluded from education in Ghana (Schwind). All these elements signaling or embodying femininity in this piece could then be read as Boafo embracing a less restrictive expression of his identity that includes things marked as feminine. Instead of rejecting femininity as he becomes more educated, as Geoffrian saw (423), Boafo in this piece is instead presenting

someone who is self-assured, mature and beautiful, while embracing feminine modes of expression and work by women.

Furthermore, there is an attempt by Boafo to counter stricter gender roles imposed during colonialism. Sociologist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí describes the history of how European colonization in West Africa fundamentally changed the definition of male and female, and also created a strict power hierarchy related to those definitions that took the most power away from women (1997). Even if in a gentle way, Boafo here attempts to push back against the colonial gender hierarchy and restrictions that remains. In Vienna, while turning to self-portraiture to reclaim his own dignity and agency, Boafo also found ways to even carve out more freedom for himself in a Ghanaian context. He even presented works like *Ghana Must* Go in Ghana in an exhibition about "de-masculinity" (Sturm). While the shadow of coloniality may be long, moves to counter coloniality can also reverberate across continents.

Fashion and Self-Expression

In 2020, artistic director Kim Jones made a collection with Dior Homme that was inspired by and also incorporated Boafo's art. The Ghanaian portraitist said of his desire to work with Dior and Jones: "[i]n many ways, the fashion and art worlds are similar […] [t]hey convey

Figure 24. Boafo, Amoako. Black and White, 2018. Roberts Projects, Los Angeles.

genuine messages about being and self-worth, much of which aligns with why I create—to elevate individuals and to define oneself" (Waddoups). It is easy to see a connection between Boafo's interest in fashion and his desire to want to be perceived as he is. Fashion is here another tool for discovering and defining one's own identity and self-worth.

Black and White contains Boafo's signature valleys of color representing Black skin, as well as a gentle, thoughtful expression. Unique to his more fashion-centric pieces, there are also bold, simple patterns of color that stand out from the background as much as the subject's hand and face. The nonchalant pop of the collar brings to mind a rock-n-roll or motorcycle riding spirit that makes it hard to read the subject as simply shy or reflective. The attention to the garment also adds tension; figure could be someone who wants to stand out or wants to hide themselves. Again, the Modernist technique of unrealistic flatness defines expectations, with the checkboard pattern of

the garment having no undulations or movement, drawing a sharp contrast with the depth of the painted skin, thereby elevating both.

Figure 25. Boafo, Amoako. Cobalt Earing, 2019. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

Cobalt Blue Earring, one of Boafo's many works to feature a bold yellow, similarly shows how fashion can add depth to one's self-expression. If the model in this portrait had plainly colored clothes and jewelry, it would be easy to see them as calm, perhaps even distant, but the vivid yellow of their clothes and blue of their earrings is so powerful that it even makes the fern-like explosion of strokes of green in the background seem tame in comparison. Boafo's fashion portraiture functions to not only showcase the beauty and striking self-expression of his subjects, but also to show how fashion can bring to light the complexity of those who embrace it.

Boafo's unique style was born out of a response to external denials of his identity, whether as a painter or a gentle Black man who does not shy away from femininity. His response was to use his artistry to portray the man he saw in the mirror: dignified, beautiful, confident, and difficult to stereotype, not only by the white Viennese art world, but even by his fellow Ghanaians who support restrictive views of masculinity. This move to portray himself as he wanted to be seen expanded to portraying other Black people in Austria and Germany with sensitivity, complexity, and dignity. While consciously avoiding directly expressing his political views, it is clear that his (self-)portraiture is meant to shift perspectives, even if only those of the subject. Boafo speaks frequently about "making space" for Black people, but I argue that his

artwork goes even further by allowing identities to breathe away from the suffocating rejections and policing of identity that dominates under coloniality (*Studio Visit*).

Conrad Egyir: Transcending with the Akan Mothership

If Leitolf's work is firmly rooted in brutal realities and Boafo found refuge from those same realities, Conrad Egyir attempts to transcend them.[34] In an interview, Egyir explained how much of the inspiration for his artwork of the past few years came from observing and experiencing America as a Ghanaian immigrant. As of 2022, he has lived in the US for 14 years. While earning his MFA outside of Detroit at the Cranbrook Academy of Art he noticed how many immigrants were not eligible for scholarships, an initial point for asking questions about exclusion. He also saw the ongoing trauma experienced by Black girls in schools, where wearing their hair naturally is regularly seen as "inappropriate" and necessitating punishment (Egyir). Furthermore, when he then attended a naturalization ceremony, he was uncomfortable with the oath of exclusive allegiance he had to swear to the US. His Akan family, a word Egyir prefers over tribe, and its worldviews were difficult to reconcile with any narrowly defined national allegiance. Egyir wrote of a solo show of his at the Library Street Collective in Detroit of people like him, "[w]e are 'Amantramanmienu' […] a royal title from the Ashanti Kingdom in Ghana which means 'He (or they) that bestride two worlds'" (*Library Street Collective*). A study of Akan palace language and how that language reflects roles by Kofi Agyekum mirrors what Egyir says; many roles are those of intermediaries between the living and the dead, the royal and

[34] While I wish I had the space to meaningfully integrate a critical trans-focused perspective to the topic of representation, writer Jules Gill-Peterson articulates that viewpoint well: "[b]lack trans critics have made overwhelmingly persuasive arguments that visibility is a technology of subjection. The rise in trans visibility coincides with increased policing, regulation, violence, and immiseration that hits trans people unevenly by race, class, and gender." See Gill-Peterson for her entire thread on this topic.

common, the offender and offended and so on.[35] This Akan philosophy, along with the racial and nationality-based segregation and discrimination he saw in the US, inspired the Ghanian artist to make artwork that abstracted the identity of the subjects in his work to such an extent that he hopes they are difficult to define as being part of any country, tribe or race. His subjects, who are people he has met throughout his life, become according to Egyir "heirs of a new abstract country" (Library Street Collective).

Figure 26. Egyir, Conrad. Primogenitors of the Potentate, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

His work creates a limitless mode of representation. Through his kaleidoscopic portraits Egyir provides an entryway into absorbing the idea that Black people, and the philosophy behind Egyir's work could extend to all people, can drift free from the identity silos that coloniality places people in. He sees ownership, colonial categorizations of people and even skin tone as transitory "vessels," spiritual bodies that we have, which can pass and be transcended (Egyir).

While Egyir's portraits often have an intentionally otherworldly quality, his subjects are people he has met during his studies and artistic career. His process involves visiting his subjects where they live and incorporating items from their wardrobes and homes in his work (Egyir). So, while his portraits may seem mystical or fantasy-like, most if not all elements come from the subjects themselves. *Primogenitors of the Potentate* is a key example of

[35] I could not find the exact title Egyir spoke of, but that may simply be a product of non-standardized spellings of Akan words when spoken/written about in English. The philosophy, however, aligns with not just Akan societal roles, but also roles seen in the scholarship of Oyěwùmí on gender in Nigeria.

that earthly-to-otherworldly shift in Egyir's work. This painting is also in part inspired by the different conversations on gender and race Egyir has experienced in the US that he did not come across in Ghana (Egyir). One part of that difference is reflected in the title itself, which Egyir uses to help guide viewers (Egyir). *Primogenitors of the Potentate*—that is, ancestors of royalty—ushers us toward Egyir's interest in the worldview about kings in his Akan family. As he wrote about his naturalization, Akan kings are defined as freely crossing between two worlds. The reality of colonial borders also means that the ancestral territory of the Akan people expands across the borders of present-day Ghana and the Ivory Coast. With the title itself then we have a hint that the piece is informed by an Akan worldview that the highest members of society are not constricted to one place geographically and socially and perhaps even spiritually. Beyond that the text on the border is another element Egyir incorporates to help guide viewers (Egyir). Starting from the bottom, *Negus* is an Ethiopian word meaning ruler or king. On the top edge of the painting is the word *paracletes*, which as Merriam-Webster defines it is "an epithet of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John (as John 14:26)" (*Paracletes*). Here there is a mixing of indigenous West African religious traditions and Christianity. These bits of text suggest transcendence beyond any singular, received context; free travel between worlds is a recurring theme that suggests that Egyir sees his subjects as interdimensional travelers as well. The last quarter of the text on the right-hand side of the painting—"and finds bona fide pills"—is a mystery and given the semi-opaque nature of the rest of the border text is meant to leave the viewer asking questions. Egyir, like many artists, is happy to have viewers dwell with some mystery and a lack of easy legibility (Egyir).

The subjects wardrobe also seems, at first, to reflect different personalities and people, but they are in fact from the model's own collection (Egyir). Elements from the wardrobe reflect the range of identities present in one woman: bookish, African, American, formal and informal.

Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Pink Towel)*, 2014, acrylic on PVC panel, 23 5/8 × 20 7/8" (60 × 53 cm), private collection, © Kerry James Marshall, courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Figure 27. Marshall, Kerry James. Untitled (Pink Towel), 2014. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

The fur coat, points toward a strong Detroit tradition of wearing opulent furs, like those from famous furrier Dittrich Furs. Furs became a luxury available to Black Detroiters who fought their way into the middle class, Aretha Franklin being perhaps the most famous Detroiter to have routinely flaunted furs in her public appearances. The figure on the lower right, in the green dress and chunky shoes, is reading a book with artwork by Kerry James Marshall. As seen in the Marshall painting (Figure 27), his color choices and combinations of colors emphasize contrast.[36] The pink towel and lime green nails, already boldly colored, pop even more in contrast with the deep black skin of the subject. Marshall emphasizes difference by pushing color and contrast to the limit.

Egyir's work, while using some of the extreme contrasts of Marshall, does not dwell in difference, but pushes Black portraiture past the point of being categorizable. For example, while Egyir is Akan, the upper-left version of his subject is wearing clothes and a headpiece that is, as Egyir told me, typically of East African people in Kenya and Tanzania. The two figures in the

[36] Petra Frank-Witt wrote on aspects of Kerry James Marshall's work that exist in tension and in harmony with Egyir's approach. Frank-Witt quotes Marshall as saying "'There exists a constant pressure to reject consciousness of blackness as difference,' he says, 'I use blackness to amplify difference as an oppositional force both aesthetically and philosophically'" (390).

back also have gray skin, giving them a mythical, almost alien-like appearance. The two figures in the front also have different shades of skin, making it even harder to recognize they are all different instantiations of the same model. His portraits reveal the almost unknowable range of identities within a single Black subject.

Building off *Primogenitors,* Egyir expands his abstracted and kaleidoscopic representation of Black subjects in *Qhristine, Me'usa*. With the title, Egyir uses the letter Q to serve to mark a space for a multitude of identities, much as as as X is often used, as with Latinx or Malcolm X (Egyir). Me'usa is an altered form of Medusa containing the union of "me + usa", a hint towards the US context (Egyir). The classroom setting in this work ties into Egyir's inspiration, the policing of "acceptable" Black hair in US classrooms. As with the four-fold portrait above, here glitter is used to not only emphasize the hair of the subject, but to make it look like a photograph of a galaxy with gold and green streaks running along some of her locks.[37] The hoodie also belonged to the subject, and is from South America, but reminded Egyir of Zulu fabrics and Kente cloth (Egyir). The words on the chalkboard were inspired by what Egyir saw in churches in Ghana (Egyir). Within this portrait there are artistic and religious traditions from Europe,

Figure 28. Egyir, Conrad. Qhristine, Me'usa, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

[37] In our conversation Egyir agreed that there are visual similarities between the Botticelli and his own *Qhristine,* however, it was not at the forefront is his mind while painting.

South America and Africa woven together via the travels of the subject and the African references of Egyir. The stamp-like border gives the peace a feeling of being a memorial stamp for another civilization, a sci-fi setting where metallic skinned people with stars glistening in their hair are idolized.

One visual reference to idolization also comes in the placement and gesture of the hands. It echoes Christian paintings of Christ. As one can see in figure 29, Botticelli's Christ has a very similar hand placement, the only key difference being that Egyir's Qhristine is not showing stigmata. Nonetheless with the format, the Christian writing on the chalkboard, the celestial hair and skin there is a spiritual and cosmic ascension of a person who outside of this artwork may have their humanity constricted, if it were seen at all. Egyir's portraiture then embodies not restrictive difference, but liberatory otherness that still has roots in the lives of people around us. One person can have multiple identities and exist on multiple planes of existence, from a hoodie bought during travels to becoming a holy icon. Perhaps it is then fitting that Egyir calls our bodies vessels, because in his artwork people can exist and travel to wherever and whatever feels like home for them. Representation for Egyir is then a portrayal of the freest possible movement. His subjects can exist among us and in places we never imagined, while being entirely themselves.

Figure 29. Botticelli, Sandro. Christ Crowned with Thorns, circa 1500. Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.

The failures of representation linger over this chapter: the mugshot, the refugees washed up on the shore and the Black person who cannot express themselves freely in public without the threat of violence. As Sekula said, even the most well-meaning representation can be exploited

by the powerful to further oppression. What connects all these artists, however, is that they provide tools to pull representation out of the quicksand. Leitolf's person-less photography and text provides us with a blank screen to project more complex and human image of the "Other." Boafo's (self-)portraiture takes European Modernist techniques, a movement that often saw Black people like him as "primitive," to celebrate Black beauty and humanity. Finally, Egyir explodes the identities of his Black subjects, and the worldviews behind his work suggests any subject, into so many layers that they take on an abstracted, other-worldly and even holy quality. With these three artists representation can open up new worlds, for how we see ourselves, each other and even the cosmos.

Chapter 3: Creating Places of Belonging

"Identity can be as limiting and isolating as it is infinite […] it is through art that I push my limitations of my own identities" – Zohra Opoku ("Handmade Photography Today″)

The longing for home is likely at least 10,000 years old among humans. *The Odyssey,* a fundamental part of the Western canon, is after all about the hero's commitment to returning home after being away at war. Similarly, the story of the Hindu God Kṛṣṇa is centered around returning home. After being miraculously saved from being murdered by his uncle Kamsa, who wanted to avoid a prophecy that a child of his sister would kill him, a young adult Kṛṣṇa returns from exile, after surviving several assassination attempts, to storm Kamsa's castle and kill his uncle, thereby fulfilling the prophecy and restoring peace to his home.[38] While these classic stories focus on a triumphant homecoming, fitting for warrior-heroes like Odysseus and Kṛṣṇa, the complex reality of returning to, coming to terms with or creating a home are at the core the artworks of this chapter. The works are much less about satisfying conclusions and more how people with identities that cross borders and continents can create homes that encompass their expansive stories.

In our current reality shaped by the components and consequences of colonialism, defining home very often requires contesting with alienation, erasure and even forceful expulsion. Figueroa-Vásquez defines this as *destierro* for women and femmes of the Afro-

[38] See this print from 1590 for a depiction of Kṛṣṇa, at the top with black skin and marigold-colored clothes, at the moment of him striking down Kamsa after storming the castle. You can also see at the bottom a battle elephant that was also slain by the Hindu deity. Deities in Hinduism were often portrayed with dark black or blue skin. Kṛṣṇa name even means dark or black. While my knowledge of Indian religious art is limited, it seems like after British colonialism these deities' skin got lighter and lighter in artwork. This artwork is from the era of Mughal rule in India. (Krishna Kills His Uncle).

Atlantic diaspora, Kafka poetically described it as being like an animal with its forelegs being pulled toward home and its hindlegs being rooted in assimilation, German Turkish poet Zafer Şenocak said in his poem *Doppelmann* that his was body split in two with each side on different coasts.

It is not war, exile or a curse from the Gods that alienates these modern figures from their own stories and homes, but the reshaping of our world through coloniality, where multifaceted identities are often seen as a threat or problem to solve rather than as a component of human life in a world of mass migration. The artists of this chapter, Emeka Ogboh, Zohra Opoku and Tiff Massey, all have life stories that show family and personal histories scattered across the world. Due to these breaks, gaps and a simple desire to be in community after migration, all three of these artists strive to create, uncover or stake a claim to a home that is denied to them. These artists together reflect a spectrum of diasporic homemaking. While informed by decolonial scholarship, like the work of Maldonado-Torres and Sylvia Wynter, this chapter is primarily focused on how the ideas of the artists themselves evolved over time and also how their work can resonate with potential viewers. On an intellectual and ideally emotional level each artist gives viewers a path towards reconsidering, writing the story of and ultimately making homes.

Emeka Ogboh: From Public Enemy to Igbo Community

Emeka Ogboh's artistic practice, since he moved from Nigeria, has been about evoking and creating home. Initially, Ogboh gained fame with sound-pieces built from things heard in Lagos. He said what excited him about sound is "[…] its ability to take you to places. It transports you to places where you are not physically present. It's captivating. It's powerful. The reaction goes right into your bones" (tate). One example is that of Nigerian friends in New York who would have their laptops open listening to Ogboh's sounds from Nigeria to deal with their homesickness (tate). Ogboh's works throughout his career have turned to evoking what is not there, what's missing in the life of immigrants and also what migrants use and create to feel at ease in new homes.

Figure 30. Ogboh, Emeka. Sufferhead. Munich Edition, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

His *Sufferhead* series of works takes ingredients typical in immigrant cuisines and incorporates them into locally brewed beer. In Germany, Ogboh also did a series of photos with African immigrants as though they were in clichéd German beer advertisements, such as a Bavarian beer hall-inspired photo from the 2017-18 Baden-Baden version of *Sufferhead* (Fig. 2). With a tongue-in-cheek approach the Nigerian artist "spoils" the "purity" of German ingredients by adding ingredients that do not conform to the

Figure 31. Ogboh, Emeka. Sufferhead. Munich Edition, 2019. Photo by Cohan. Courtesy of the artist.

(now defunct) German Purity Law. That law only allowed hops, malt and yeast (water is implied) as ingredients in beer. Even more proactively he adds "foreign" ingredients like chilis that say Nigerian immigrants would cook with. Not surprisingly the beer brewed for this artwork is Schwarzbier, a traditional German beer that is literally called black beer (i.e., dark beer). Ogboh's perspective with *Sufferhead* embodies a youthful, almost hip-hop like confrontational approach to Africans in Europe. For example, in the Munich version of *Sufferhead,* situated in what is arguably the beer brewing capital of Germany and a city known for its relatively straight-laced attitude, Ogboh used the slogan "Wer hat Angst vor Schwarz?" ("Who's afraid of black?"). Apart from being another pun on black beer, it feels like a beer brewing version of Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet (*yesterdaytomorrow). [39]

While there is a sense of humor and playfulness about *Sufferhead*, there's also the intentionally imposing presence of Blackness, both as a color and race. There is a feeling of cultural mixing, but also playing with the anxiety (Angst) of a Black takeover. In the Berlin version of the work there's a video of a man collecting glass bottles who says, "there used to be green, white, and brown ones [bottles], but now there is only black." The video even ends with a sensuous close up of brown beer foam flowing over the edges of a traditional dimpled beer glass. Blackness is in this work at once playful and powerful, alluring and anxiety-inducing. What we see

Figure 32. Ogboh, Emeka. Sufferhead. Frankfurt Edition, 2019. Photo by Cohan. Courtesy of the artist.

[39] Public Enemy was one of the key 80s rap groups who took on an overtly political message. Their militant aesthetic and message, as well as their abrasive samples of jazz music was a distinct shift away from the more party-oriented style of rap of the late 70s and early 80s. Their song "Fight the Power" was also commissioned by Spike Lee for the film *Do the Right Thing.* See Dukes for more.

here is *not* an Ogboh who is trying to imagine, capture or evoke different ways of being, but is instead making a multi-media commentary on the realities of and fears about Africans in Europe. Home in this work has not been found yet, but rather Europe is a place of Black creativity and also hegemonic denial. The beer culture, a source of pride for Germans, also reflects a strong current in the country that is resistant to otherness and change. The common cultural mixing that comes with migration then becomes in this Ogboh work not a joyous mixing, but a point of friction. It is not that the Africans are antagonistic, it is rather that their day-to-day existence is countered by a German self-identity that has no room to adapt.

Emeka Ogboh has increasingly also created work that embodies the latter part of Avery Gordon's quote, "[w]e need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there" (5). Decolonial work requires dreaming about what different ways of being and associating with another are possible. Scholars such as Sylvia Wynter and Maldonado-Torres have called for the necessity of including worldviews that were buried by colonialism as a central part of the process of decoloniality. As Maldonado-Torres explains, "[t]he decolonial turn marks the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at before unknown institutional levels" (262). The critique of existing knowledge is not enough for decolonization; the entrance of new, formerly invisible knowledge is also essential. By portraying how African communities in Germany often inventively build a sense of community with traditionally exclusionary elements of German society, Ogboh is showing exactly how decoloniality can work. Ogboh has also done a series of cooking events where he tries to recreate West African dishes with ingredients in Berlin. Working with the studio of Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, Ogboh sought to explore longing and connecting with home through Nigerian food. Instead of sound, Ogboh is trying to evoke the tastes and smells that he calls "triggers for memory, for space, for time"

(Eliasson).

Perhaps Ogboh's work that most directly addresses the promise of cultural mixing is his sound installation *Deutschlandlied - Song of the Germans.* With this piece he invites us into a space where the voices of migrants constantly create their own sense of belonging through the harmony of their voices. Instead of trying to recreate the sound or taste of home, *Deutschlandlied* takes the German national anthem and entirely reworks it by having it sung in 10 West and Central African languages. While the German national anthem has a history that extends all the way from 18th century Austria, into German colonization, through the many false starts at democracy in a united, divided and then reunited Germany, it has in recent years been used in sports as a litmus test for national allegiance. Players on the German men's national team with family outside of Germany often abstained from singing the anthem before games to avoid alienating family members: notably Sami Khedira with Tunisian family and Mesut Özil with Turkish family. This led to harsh condemnations from conservative figures in Germany, who barely disguised their view that people of color were not really welcome in German spaces, with one former politician saying of Black German defender Jerome Boateng that people may like him on their team, but they would not want him as a neighbor (*Umfrage*).[40] With *Deutschlandlied* Ogboh takes something as harshly exclusive as the German national anthem and finds a way in his art practice to make it into something malleable, flexible and part of a space for joyous belonging among immigrants. Beyond that, immigrants are the ones who can transform exclusion into belonging with their creativity and desire for a space of gathering. What started in *Sufferhead* as provocation, becomes a celebration of the inclusive spaces that the

[40] This article cites a pole that says 82% would want Jerome Boateng, an Afro German soccer player as a neighbor. It was in respond to far-right politician Alexander Gauland saying people may want Boateng on the national soccer team, but not as their neighbor. I'm not sure polling how not racist people want to seem is useful.

cultural mixing of immigrations often creates.

Deutschlandlied itself is, at first sight, an unassuming piece. In its various installations one walks into a semi-circle shaped room with ten speakers along a curved wall. In the middle there is a bench for people to sit. There is also a book containing documentation of how the work was made. The real allure of the piece, however, is sound. As mentioned earlier, Ogboh first started creating sound pieces, because he missed Lagos. While in Berlin through a grant from the DAAD Ogboh could not sleep (tate).[41] Despite being a sprawling city of over three million, many, if not most, corners of Berlin are fairly quiet. The Nigerian artist realized that he needed the noise of Lagos to sleep, like a white noise machine that sounded like home. Given this initial entry into the evocative and calming power of sound, it is no surprise that *Deutschlandlied* uses sound in a similarly welcoming way.

The work is performed by a choir of African migrants in Berlin. The 10 singers in the artwork sing the German national anthem translated into 10 different African languages: Igbo, Yoruba, Bamoun, More, Twi, Ewondo, Sango, Douala, Kikongo and Lingala. While these languages are from Central and West Africa, they are not mutually intelligible.[42] We hear these 10 voices from 10 speakers installed along the wall at the height of each singer. Composer and designer Arthur Carabott, who programmed the audio for the work, designed it so new versions of the song would be created randomly each time it is played. The work was additionally programmed to have one voice gradually joined by another until all 10 singers were singing together (Carabott). Even in the programming of the work there exists a constant creation and

[41] The same DAAD grant brought Theo Eshetu to Berlin.

[42] I want to thank Professor of Linguistics and African Languages Galen Sibanda for sharing his expertise on this issue.

renewal. This mimics the kind of spontaneous community building among migrants that is seen throughout Ogboh's work. Instead of community being a static landing place or refuge from the harsher realities of life as a migrant, it is instead like a chameleon that takes on the colors and patterns of those who interact with it. This ever-changing community making is also light-hearted in Ogboh's work since you can hear the singers laughing throughout, likely in part because they cannot know exactly what each other are singing. They may have some idea based on the original German, but the particulars of each translation, let alone 10 of them, is more or less impossible for any one person to know.

The unifying element connecting the 10 singers is then an abstracted melody. The instrumental work written by canonical composer Franz Joseph Haydn serves as the raw material that helps create a sense of belonging. Despite the anthem's elite and exclusionary history, the removal of meaning from the lyrics by Ogboh and the choir allows the melody to gently drift away from the dark history of the usage of the anthem to something playful and even silly. The power of Ogboh, as he has evolved as an artist, lies in how he initially used his practice to shed light on the often "whites-only" way many in Europe define home, which is an essential part of the decolonization process, and more recently moved toward creating spaces with his art that allow recently arrived immigrants to build their own communities. His practice has shifted from commentary, provocation and evocation (of home) towards showing viewers how within pockets of the diaspora there exists the powerful creative potential to create inclusion, community and belonging out of anything, even cultural symbols with deeps ties to hegemonic power.

More recently Ogboh has created installations that push the community-making element of his practice even further. Similar to Conrad Egyir in the second chapter, whose Akan culture inspired his desire to move past narrow national and identity boundaries, Ogboh has been

inspired by his Igbo culture and its emphasis on gathering. A 2019 work of his that was installed in Cleveland and Berlin is called *Ámà - The Gathering Place*. Ámà is an Igbo word for gathering and that concept anchored an installation by Ogboh that featured an artificial tree, seating upholstered in West African fabrics, a chili beer brewed by local craft brewers, Nigerian food cooked by local chefs and a 12-channel choral composition ("Emeka Ogboh: Ámà"). Ogboh, however, is not simply interested in recreating an atmosphere from Nigeria, he is also very intentionally interested in how longing often creates something markedly new. *Ámà* for example is a work where the American craft beer tradition that has taken root in Berlin allows someone like Ogboh to make a chili beer despite the strict German beer tradition.[43] Of course German culture places a high value on beer as a key part of gathering, like in beer gardens and beer halls. Add Nigerian food and the African choirs Ogboh often uses, and you have in his artwork a celebration of how cultures intersecting can be welcoming and exciting, rather than a clash of cultures. Ogboh's maturation as an artist shows his insight and ability to recognize and confront the racism in Germany (and Europe), while also seeing in the everyday practices of immigrants, and the ways the Igbo people gather, paths towards an almost utopian mixing of cultures. One could categorize it as an act of decolonial love, the sharing and embracing of difference that Glissant speaks of, or through the focus on Igbo cultural practices, one could identify a move towards pre-Colombian worldviews that Sylvia Wynter has written about. Ultimately one could say Ogboh's work embodies what immigrants have always done, sustaining and mixing cultures

[43] The beer brewing Purity Law may have been first adopted in Bavaria in 1516, a German-speaking region with a celebrated beer tradition, and finally throughout Germany in 1906. It was likely first adopted to make sure baking grains, like wheat and rye, were not used by brewers. The law has since taken on the mythical status of being what "real" brewers follow, since good beer requires good ingredients and technique. German-speaking regions however have a long tradition of adding spices to their beers, since at least the Middle Ages, and since 2015 even the state of Bavaria allows any natural ingredients to be used in beer (Esslinger and Ludwig Narciss, Smale).

to feel at home in the diaspora. Sometimes that holds a joyously revolutionary potential.

Zohra Opoku: A Spiritual Traveling Community

Zohra Opoku's artistic career embodies one of the key experiences of people of any diaspora: there is never just finding or returning to home, or simply excavating one's own family story, there is instead a process of unraveling and tracing all the threads that weave together to create the stories of each diasporic person. As Jaqueline Massey Brown wrote about Black Liverpool, "there is no actual space that one could call 'the African diaspora,' despite how commonly it is mapped onto particular locales" (Brown 291). There are instead people and communities who have to piece together their own identities and histories, similar to Emeka Ogboh exploring the perpetual creation of new homes by immigrants. Opoku's more clearly autobiographical practice is one that not only resists the idea of "the diaspora," or "going home," but instead shows how piecing together and making sense of one's own story is what finding home can look like. As the opening quote to the chapter highlights, Opoku is also aware of the power her editorial voice as an artist/autobiographer.[44] The further her career has gone, the more she has embraced keeping parts of her identity opaque. Knowing oneself and one's home can also mean embracing not being known to others.

[44] The quote from the opening of the chapter: "[i]dentity can be as limiting and isolating as it is infinite […] it is through art that I push my limitations of my own identities" – Zohra Opoku (*Handmade Photography Today*)

Opoku's story begins in Halle in 1975, where her parents met while studying in the then East German city. A year later in 1976 Opoku was born, but sadly her father then had to return to Ghana. Due to Eastern German laws, which severely restricted travel outside of the country, Opoku's mother and of course Opoku herself could not travel to Ghana. As the artist said, "[t]he governmental decision that separated my parents became a defining moment in my life. It is what led me to become an artist and it is why I explore belonging and identity in my practice" (Larsen). Her earliest explorations into her own identity are a series of full-color photographic self-portraits. In these the German Ghanian artist is immersed in a natural environment and always hiding her face behind plant life, camouflaging herself. She said of her self-portraits in nature that each one"[…] stands for an identity constantly changing, adapting, and searching to fit in" (Friedman). The work shows how uncertainty and also intentional refuge can be part of that process of finding identity. Rather than classic self-portraits where the gaze of the artist is direct, and often confident, this self-portrait is composed to deny the viewer direct access to the subject (one could note a clear contrast to Egyir's or Boafo's portraits). The plant she is using to obscure her face is a Pyracantha, an evergreen thorny plant which can be found from Europe all the way to Southeast Asia. It is often used as an impenetrable shrub, because of its thorns (Missouri Botanical Garden). In German it is called Feuerdorn, or fire thorn, because of the orange color of its mildly poisonous fruit (Dominguez). Even with this botanical shield Opoku gives us glimpses of her identity. An elaborate silver-colored earring cascades over her right

Figure 33. Opoku, Zohra. Pyracantha, 2015. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

shoulder onto her richly colored dark blue velvet outfit. Her green rings connected by a chain peek out from the bottom of the frame and her hair, parted, gathered and yet still falling down to her shoulders, reveals a woman who not-surprisingly earned a degree in fashion before becoming an artist. Even while she shrouds herself behind a green and bright orange barrier her carefully considered and sophisticated self-expression shines through. One of the most striking parts of this self-portrait is her left eye closely framed by the orange fruit. She looks directly at us, giving us a sense that she is in command of how much access we as viewers get. There is visually limited window into her full identity, perhaps from a self-awareness of not yet having a fully formed connection to her Ghanaian father, while simultaneously having a carefully considered and sophisticated style and direct stare. There is not here the typical anguish or longing that is common in diasporic self-representation, but the juxtaposition of Opoku's formed and still-forming identities. Rather than an identity being half-cloaked, I read this as an identity half-revealed. We even see the warm tones of Opoku's cheeks glowing in the natural light. While showing a very intentional decision to hide and reveal parts of her identity, what is not yet here are the clear connections to Ghana. Even the plants, while not being strictly European, are not West African either. Her family ties to Ghana could only be guessed by the viewer due to her skin and textured hair.

In contrast this self-portrait from 2015 (before the self-portrait above) is overflowing with the plants, colors and patterns that feel anything but traditionally German. The plant in the forefront is a fig tree heavy with plump fruit.[45] Figs, unlike Feuerdorn, thrive in the warm, dry climates surrounding the Mediterranean, including North Africa and Egypt. They can also be found throughout the Southern United States. They can only survive in colder climates through considerable efforts to keep them alive in winter (Vinson & Himelrick).[46] Furthermore her clothes have a bright, colorful camo pattern which resonates with the bold Kente fabrics common in West Africa. Her chunky, bead-adorned necklace with its fuchsia band, along with her pink lipstick, also cannot be ignored.

Figure 34. Opoku, Zohra. Ficus Carica, 2015. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

The lighting, however, is much cooler than the *Feuerdorn* self-portrait. Opoku's skin shines with blue and gray tones. While light shines onto her shoulder and neck, the cool coloring reads more as dusk than the mid-day of previously discussed "German" self-portrait. Although filled with elements that suggest warm weather and perhaps even Africa, Opoku is far more shrouded and camouflaged, and in the case of her clothes literally so. Here she is not only intentionally restricting access to the viewer, but also suggests not being fully at home away from Germany. If the sun is hitting her face, we do not see it. Her face and hair are hidden

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[45] For those who do not know, the leaves of fig trees smell divine. Sadly, this dissertation does not come with smell-o-vision.

[46] I'm reminded of family who left Michigan and never wanted to return in Winter.

behind the abundant fig tree.

Taking the two photographic self-portraits together we see a story not of a German Ghanaian woman arriving in the "homeland," but rather a person who is illuminated in colder climates and shrouded and in a cool evening light in warmer climates. Whereas her "European" self-portrait has her eye meeting us directly, her warmer weather self-portrait covers her eyes completely. I read between these two photographs that her German self-identity is in this series something she is more firmly rooted in, it is in the warm daylight, but her African identity is something she is still trying to feel confident about. While she stands out from nature in blue velvet in the *Feuerdorn* work, she almost blends into the shadowed leaves of the fig tree photograph. Even her hair, a clear visual sign of her African family, is entirely out of view.

During an artist talk Opoku revealed that nature in her life and self-portraits are not only shroud, but also serve a community building function. While in the Bay Area in California Opoku noticed how the plant life there was a mixture of plants from around the world that had created their own community. This led to a revelation where she "[…] embraced the idea of how these plants have created their own communities […] Since I grew up in Germany with my Ghanaian father and now live in Ghana without my mother, I feel there is always the search for a connection to something spiritual, to be able to identify as part of the place, as part of the community" ("Handmade Photography Today"). Putting two self-portraits in conversation there is also a layer of being part of something nurturing. As plants put down roots in the right kind of soil, with the right amount of sunlight, Opoku is also in seemingly many spaces finding a place to spread her roots and be an integrated part of a community. Opoku found the language for this spiritual connection to nature in Ashanti culture. Speaking of a 2016 exhibition of Opoku's work, curator Nana Oforiatta Ayim writes that Opoku was inspired by "[…] the Ashanti concept of

sassa – described by art historian Ladislas Segy as 'the soul that can also lie outside of the body and that flows through all things.'" Nature then provides the connection and embrace that politics and family history denied. In this spiritual community Opoku has the freedom and time to be neither one thing nor the other. Her identity can drift, relocate, hide or shine in different turns. It can adapt to different environments and be enveloped by different communities while still letting the identity of the artist peak through the foliage. Whether German, Ghanaian or something in between, Opoku finds in nature a space to exist in a spiritual community and to decide how much sunlight she wants to seek.

Malisa and Bob

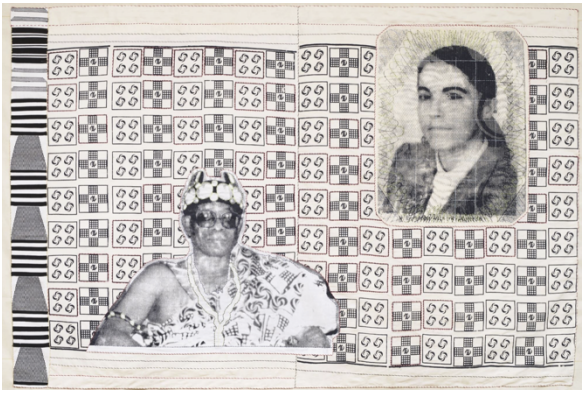

Figure 3. Opoku, Zohra. Brigitte Gerda Marlies Thiede & Dr. George Bob Kwabena Opoku (Marlies & Bob), 2017. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

In a series started only a year after the *Self-Portraits,* we see a dramatic shift in content, style, medium and self-presentation from Opoku. Through her time in Accra, Opoku was eventually able to not only connect with relatives, including much younger siblings, but was also able to collect photographs of her father. Her younger siblings were too young to really know their father Bob Opoku before his passing, so collecting photographs and integrating them into art has become a way to piece together a shared family history (Elis). With the artist's unique position of knowing, through her mother about Bob Opoku's time in East Germany, and her desire and artistic ability to literally weave together a family history, Opoku is solidifying a family history and as a consequence giving fuller shape to her own story. As she said about her series *Unraveled Thread*s, of which the artworks in this section are part, "[i]t provides the opportunity

to unravel what needs to be made visible, in order to be in a position of confidence to appreciate and identify with our common family space where we live today. Therefore, I am rebuilding a new narrative for all of us" (Elis). Even in Opoku's language there is the argument that not only is she building her own confidence and narrative, but also doing that work for her family. There is a shift from not yet confidently self-representing as Ghanaian to becoming the creator of a much more complete Ghanaian family history.

A key element of this history is of course her parents, Malisa and Bob. In an artwork reminiscent of a national flag, with its rectangular shape and sun-like figure on the upper-right, Opoku's mother and father are literally woven together. In a way it is the reunion they could never have. In the case of Opoku, perhaps because of her training in fashion, the part of her father's culture that she incorporates into her art is textiles, specifically Asante Kente cloth.[47] The artist in fact searched for the clothes she found in old photos of her father and also had some recreated for her artworks (Elis). Perhaps because the materials listed for this piece include "original Asante Kente application," this may be a case where the artist had a cloth from a photograph recreated. As you can see when you compare the cloth her father in the lower left is wearing to the background fabric of the artwork, they look very similar. Her father, wearing a bold headpiece and oversized glasses, evokes the playful and confident studio portraits of one of the pillars of African photography, Samuel Fosso. While the artist may very well have photographs of her father in more traditional Western dress, the man we see here is undeniably a West African man of the 1970s, a time not long after he was forced to leave East Germany.

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[47] The Asante people belong to the larger Akan group, which Conrad Egyir, discussed in chapter 1, is part of and whose worldviews are central to his art. This is also the same group as the Ashanti, it is simply different spellings. I am using Asante here, since that is what Opoku uses.

As with Opoku's *Self-Portrait* series, however, there is still an undeniable presence of her German story. Her mother, who is affectionately called Malisa in the title of the work, is in the upper-right almost like the sun or stars in a national flag.[48] The photo, both formal in terms of dress and complete with an anti-counterfeit halo of waves around Malisa is likely from a government identification document. It may even be, with bitter irony, a photo for a passport, something which her mother could never use to leave East Germany to see Bob. While her father hardly has a minimal presence in this work, the placement of this photo of her mother is literally and symbolically elevated. Her mother, with radiant lines surrounding her head, is visually reminiscent of a shining sun. Due to the green thread woven around her mother, which mimics the anti-counterfeit pattern, she also gets to share adornment with her lost lover. In fact, the headpiece Bob Opoku wears is also decorated with bright green thread. Apart from being connected by being in one artwork, they are both also visually adorned by a shared bright green thread applied by their daughter. While the background is an Asante cloth, perhaps betraying Zohra Opoku feeling more rooted in Ghana while making this work, there is also a celebration of her German mother. Instead of one identity being camouflaged and the other in daylight, here the two exist and are given space to shine side by side. Through helping tell the full story of her father the artist also built a foundation for telling her own story. Opoku here memorializes a love

Figure 36. Fosso, Samuel. Self Portrait. 70s Lifestyle Series, 1977.

[48] As you can see in the title of the work, Marlies is her mother's formal name.

story that brought her to life, brought her to Ghana and ultimately put here in a position to be the Opoku family storyteller. Opoku said of her German and Ghanian identities, “[m]y experience growing up in a very white Germany and then coming to a very Black Africa is already like a symbol, you can be anywhere, but you have to understand yourself. The self is the start and from there you have this thread in your hands” ("Handmade Photography Today"). Here her thread weaves the story of the love split apart by politics and brought back together by a daughter finding herself.

Opoku’s Opaque Self-Portrait

The last and most recent work from Zohra Opoku in this chapter marks a decisive shift away from quieter self-representation of her earlier self-portraits and towards a full and label-defying exaltation of her identity. Perhaps most importantly it also shows Opoku exercising the most agency and self-awareness when approaching her autobiographical work. Speaking during an artist talk, Opoku touched on how agency is key to her practice:

> You can choose, you know, how much you want to share and you can choose what you want to keep for yourself […] my disguised pictures, where I always play with the identity, what is visible, what do we want to reveal, what do we want to keep for ourselves. It is definitely in our own power and that’s very important that we can choose it in real life. We have the power to make our own decisions and be that person with the brown color, with the Black skin color and so on” ("Handmade Photography Today").

Opoku in *One of Me* is an artist who embraces that agency to freely mix the different elements of her identity, different mediums and even to distort reality to make her creative hand known. Where her autobiographical work began with seemingly straight to film self-portrait

photographs, with this work Opoku is molding the medium of her identity as she wishes. She is also, through revealing the alternations and distortions in this self-portrait, easing into being hard to categorize, thereby echoing Glissant's call for embracing an opaque identity in a world where the hegemonic West strives to neatly categorize people.

In line with this decisive shift to confident self-portrayal, this work is grand in scale. It is 227 x 173 centimeters (89.37 x 68.11 inches). Among the largest works in the *Unraveled Threads* series, it already difficult to ignore. The four cloth panels that form the center of this work are connected by a bright green thread, reminiscent of the green thread used to visually link her mother and father in *Malisa & Bob*.[49] The photograph at the center of the piece is not only four parts sewn together, but the four parts do not quite fit together. Some are sharper than others, some have a blurry, digitally artifacted quality and some simply do not neatly connect at the borders. For example, the seam between the two panels in the lower half has no clear visual continuity. The tree trunk does not continue into the panel where Opoku is, and even if it does, the continuity is obscured by the colorful Kente cloth application. In fact, if one looks closely at the lower left panel, one can see that it is in fact a photograph turned upside down. Not only that,

[49] The photograph has to be printed on four different pieces of cloth, because the printer in Accra that Opoku used did not have printers that could print the photograph on one large piece of cloth. That technical limit then became a key part of the design of the artwork (*Handmade Photography Today*).

it is also a mirrored and slightly cropped version of the panel above it. Upon noticing this then one is naturally led to ask how much of this self-portrait is reality. While the earlier self-portraits in pure photographic form did not betray any obvious doctoring by the artist, this multi-media self-portrait makes it clear that Opoku is not trying to document reality. Opoku in *One of Me* is intentionally blurring the line between familial documentarian and an artist with a free hand who is staging, creating and constructing elements of her story and identity.

Figure 37. Opoku, Zohra. One of Me I, 2017. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

For example, look at the bright, almost amateurish flash of light that illuminates Opoku and her surroundings. It evokes the kind of photograph a biologist would hastily take when chancing upon some rare species in the forest or maybe, and perhaps more fittingly, the work of an untrained family member who had a photo tucked away in an album for years. But, of course, this is not only intentional, but part of the construct the German Ghanaian artist is making. *One of Me* is far from the polished, romantic, glamorous self-portraits of Samuel Fosso, but instead mimics the rough, aged, often tattered quality of not only Opoku's own family photographs, but the family photographs most of us have. While not having grown up in Ghana or with a strong connection to her Asante father, Opoku in works like this, and even in *Malisa & Bob*, is creating a story where she may have always there. While migration and the vicissitudes

of Cold War politics alienated Opoku from the African branch of her story, as an artist she can create documents to create a kind of self-archivilization, and have a historical place in the Asante branch of her story.

Opoku, in contrast to the purely photographic self-portraits, also commands our attention in this multi-media work through her almost entirely uncovered and brightly lit face, as well as the Kente cloth she has draped over her body. The mostly unbroken continuity between the two right panels also leads our eyes downwards towards the most eye-catching part of the work, the sewn on bold swath of Kente cloth. If you look closely, you can see that the cloth Opoku is wearing is the same as the cloth sewn onto the work, as the distinctive patterns are the same. The photo and the two versions of the Kente cloth confidently announce her African identity. Yet even here the traces of her Western upbringing remain, such as black denim forming the border of the piece. In a self-portrait where her West African identity is front and center, the border and backdrop point towards Europe and the US. Again, there is agency of having a thread in her hand to piece together her identity as she pleases.

There is no satisfying, tidy conclusion for the viewer and perhaps for Opoku herself. While draping herself in vintage Kente cloth she also lets us know in many ways that this work is not made of found photographs and family documents like in *Malisa & Bob*. Authenticity is denied through the clear trace of the artist's hand, instead the work calls to mind an almost American story of reinvention. Instead of running away from a dark past or the limits of race and class, Opoku is instead trying to firmly plant herself into a family history much larger than her, while acknowledging she is a latecomer. Perhaps this is another reality of being part of a diaspora, particularly with two branches of identity, one has to continually weave together unraveled threads and fill in the squares of a family quilt to establish continuity and coherence.

There are also traces of Glissant's call for opacity in the face of the West's centuries-long drive to categorize people. Speaking of the West he wrote:

> If we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements. I have to reduce" (189-90).

Considering an artist like Opoku, the Western desire for "understanding" through solidly defining people and ideas, does not work without reducing her identity. Her art, with its deeply autobiographical nature, can only be misread if one considers only her Ghanaian or German identity. *Malisa & Bob* is the most obvious example of how Opoku's story is impossible to fit into neat categories as it celebrates the stories of both her white German mother and Black Ghanaian father. It is also clear that Opoku is not simply a documentarian. She freely admits in interviews and in the traces of her artistic hand in her works that she is keeping parts of her identity to herself and denying viewers a transparent view into who she is or even how she sees herself. Her face is always at least partially hidden, she combines photographs from different time frames, combines fabrics from the West and Ghana, she alters and distorts her works to deny viewers any confident sense that her works reflect reality, even while they are clearly autobiographical. While Opoku said in her "Handmade Photography Today" talk that her work has helped her better understand herself, as her career has progressed her self-portraits have moved further into illegibility. As Glissant beautifully puts it:

> "[a]s far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to be corned in any essence; I shall pay attention to not mixing it into any

> amalgam. Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places in my identity that are obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it. Human behaviors are fractal in nature" (192-93).

Opoku, in process of better knowing herself through her practice, also embraces the opacity and obscurity that Glissant writes of. The thoughtfulness and honesty of Opoku is in giving the viewer a sense that diasporic identity can also necessitate creation and finding peace in not being known to others and perhaps even oneself. Migration, even to a place where one has roots, is never as simple as finding one's people. Instead, it is often about constructing a place where one can belong. Like ruins that are preserved with intentional marks of reconstruction, with dazzling white plaster next to aged stone, Opoku lets us know she is the architect of her own belonging. It may come from longing for a reunion of her parents, a desire to not feel like a "foreigner" having grown up in Europe with a white mother, perhaps even for continuity in a family story full of gaps and ruptures, but it reflects a diasporic reality. There is rarely a warm embrace when "going home," there is instead a continual process of reinvention as stories become deeper and more complicated. Throughout her work we see the Opoku who is an artist and fashion designer, we see someone who feels both community and refuge in nature, we see a German and Ghanaian woman. Even while eventually feeling more confident within the Asante history her father gave her, Zohra Opoku still makes clear that even being part of a diaspora often means striving to find peace with the gaps in one's own story. Instead, somewhere between the dreams of an unbroken family history and the story Opoku is creating in the present lies the push and pull of being from two places. A longing that can never be truly fulfilled is part of diasporic life, but that does not exclude the Opoku from being the archivist and genealogist for her Ghanaian family and ultimately from a self-assured crafter of her own identity. This is her contribution to representing

the diasporic experience. One does not have to fully arrive, to be fully accepted, to fully commit to one place or another to be entirely oneself. It is also hard to deny that as a Black woman who is read as foreign in Ghana, due to her paler skin, and foreign in Germany due to her Blackness, that seizing authority over her family's history and her own goes against the grain of coloniality's attempts to deny Black women autonomy, agency and authority. Through all that she still creates the last word on her family's identity and her own.

Tiff Massey: THIS IS not for YOU

Detroit-based artist Tiff Massey's practice brings us firmly back onto US shores. Whereas Ogboh's work centers on building new homes abroad and Opoku's work tells the story of crafting one's own story when returning "back home", Massey's art practice follows in the footsteps of many who strive to tell the overlooked and suppressed stories and contributions of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Her whole career has been about bringing to light what is often missing in public conversation. From the impossible to ignore jewelry and adornments seen in Africa (for example in Opoku's photos of her father) and in the hip-hop cultural tradition of loud jewelry, to the Black and queer roots of Techno music, Massey is invested in doing justice to the manifestations of Black and African culture in Detroit and the US. The reality of coloniality in the US, and beyond, is that the contributions of enslaved Africans and their descendants are intentionally omitted from or trivialized in national histories.

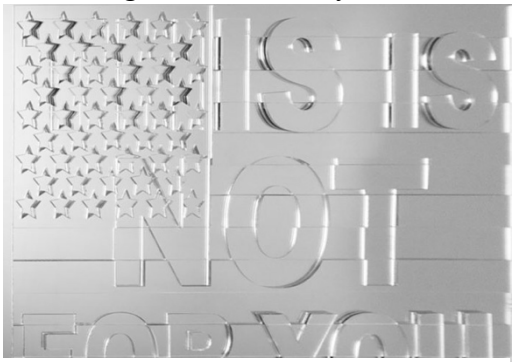

Figure 38. Massey, Tiff. Ain't No Future In Your Front, 2016.

As decolonial theorists from Quijano to Wynter to Nelson Maldonado-Torres have detailed, this is a consequence of a worldview where the contributions of everyone who is not a

wealthy, white, cisgender heterosexual male is not taken seriously, if those contributions are considered at all. Not recognizing the thought of people oppressed under coloniality leads to also not recognizing the humanity of those very oppressed peoples, argues Nelson Maldonado-Torres.[50] The path out of this brutal process of dehumanization involves, argued Maldonado-Torres, in recognizing the thought of marginalized people at institutional levels. This could be in government, in universities and in the case of Massey's work in exploring the unrecognized history of a nation. In the US, as in many if not all nations built in large part by enslaved peoples, the history of those enslaved people, the buildings constructed by them, the wealth created by and then stolen from them, melts away through an intentional process of trivialization and anonymization. Buildings were erected, fortunes appeared, neighborhoods came and went and yet the people who created all of it are intentionally forgotten or their histories are at best a footnote.[51]

It was the election of Donald Trump in 2016, with his explicitly xenophobic and

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[51] One of the most humbling examples near me is a historic plaque recognizing the first recorded landing of a British ship with enslaved Africans in Virginia in 1619. It is on Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia. It has been moved around a few times, as old photos on Google Maps show, but currently stands on a thin strip of grass between parking spots and a walkway near the water. Despite being the beginning of an incomprehensible history of violence, it is very easy to miss for anyone not looking for it, yet even the Fort where this plaque stands was also built by thousands of enslaved people, including a 23-year-old man named Amos Henley (Sparks). What Amos helped build was also a key site during the Civil War, including being where Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, was imprisoned and where the first people who fled from slavery gained refuge with the Union army (Sanchez).

consistently white supremacist rhetoric and actions, that inspired Massey to create the piece *Ain't No Future in Your Front.*[52] The artwork, which is carved acrylic over a mirrored background, embodies Massey's training as a sculptor. While at first glance it looks like an American flag with the text "this is not for you," the multiple dimensions of the work reveal another message. If you look closely the words "this is you" extend further out towards the viewer than the other words. As Massey said "[y]ou've created this. This is actually what you're projecting and yes, you helped create this, regardless if you think you did or not" (Rahgeb). There is at first the kind of rejection, a statement that America is an exclusive place, which is a reality Black Americans are routinely reminded of. At the same time there is no America without the labor, knowledge, creativity, community and activism of Black people. Everything from the Constitution, the natural and built environment and culture would be different. Massey's work is, I argue, akin to making a new memorial of America. It literally and symbolically reflects the bitter reality of a country built by oppressed people that also rejects them.

The work, however, can be taken in by an audience and their reflection can create a personalized work on every viewing. What does it mean for a Vietnam War veteran who lost a limb or Black person who had their home or business demolished for highway expansion in the 60s? While national symbols by definition have to characterize a nation via broad brushstrokes, Massey has created an intimate work that allows each viewer to have their own literal and emotional reflections and realizations on what it means to be part of the story of America. Similar to Ogboh and his inclusive use of national symbols, Massey creates a work that lets a

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[52] It is possible that the title of this artwork was inspired by the track 1991 "Ain't No Future in Yo' Frontin' by Flint musicians MC Breed and the duo DFC. The lines "If I was the president, then I would state facts / You leave it up to me, I paint the white house black" feels especially fitting for Massey's work.

national symbol hold the pain and accomplishments of everyone, even those who often are pushed to the margins of mainstream US history.

While initially conceived as a work embodying the Black American experience, Massey noted on the rightward turn post 2016 that, "it's more than blacks now. People are starting to understand that this is a larger issue than a black and white situation" (Battista). One can think of the preservation and protection of nature by Indigenous people, or the railroads built by Chinese migrants or the tenuous shifts towards equality won by feminist, femme and queer activists. Perhaps Massey shows us a way towards a new kind of national symbol, a symbol that holds within it enough space for every story.

While Ogboh offers us a model for building truly inclusive communities and Opoku shows us feeling at home is a constant process of negotiation for people in diasporas, Massey shows us the present reality that has to be contended with. They collectively embody how home in the diaspora is never a static thing, but something being constantly made, remade, negotiated and invented. Home for diasporic people is a swirling mixture of longing, discovery, heartache and creation. I see these artworks as not only sources of joy, recognition and insight, but also as a call to be inspired. Can we see in Ogboh's *Deutschlandlied* a way to build community? Can we see in Opoku a way to connect the loose threads of our lives and our loved one's lives? Can we see in Massey stories we need to tell or contributions we overlook or dismiss? Can we identify and create homes where all people, especially oppressed ones can be more fully themselves?

Chapter 4: Activist Curatorial Practice and Decolonial (Digital) Humanities

While curating, museum education, and the Digital Humanities may not always interact, what they share on an activist front is emancipation: becoming free of the constrictions of museums built and run with colonial worldviews, presenting artworks for viewers with and without specialized knowledge and, with DH, embracing a guiding principle of open access to scholarly knowledge. Whether it is Martha Rosler curating art with homeless activists in 1980s New York or DH scholars mapping the travels of influential Black intellectuals, there is a sympathetic push across disciplines not just to give voice and platforms to oppressed peoples, but to identify within their thinking different paths towards more democratic learning and knowledge sharing, different models of community building and, most ambitiously, different ways of seeing and organizing our world.

In its hybridity and interdisciplinarity, my dissertation is informed by all these movements, with an emphasis on activist curatorial work. In this final chapter I will first sketch the process behind my own website design, and then offer an overview of the activist philosophies on curating and museum education that influenced my decisions in the digital part of my dissertation.

Building a Welcoming Website

The creation of a hybrid dissertation, consisting of an online art exhibition combined with more traditional scholarly analysis in long-form prose—the work of the three previous chapters—has required pulling from a variety of disciplines in order to understand the historical missteps and injustices of each discipline and to learn from contemporary practitioners striving to carve out new, more just and accessible paths. My approach is then informed by activist curatorial work, current best practices in museum education, and the spirit of DH's push for free

access to scholarship and, increasingly, providing platforms for oppressed communities to represent themselves with digital tools. All these different approaches are then read through a decolonial analysis of power and oppression. In total that means 1) highlighting the experiences, technologies and intellectual work of marginalized people 2) making my own work and the artwork I write about, accessible to a broad audience, as the best museum educators strive to do and 3) letting anyone with a link to the digital exhibition I built have access to it. Ultimately, I hope my work allows for members of the diasporas I write about to connect with the art pieces and my curation of them, and ideally to be inspired to do their own digital curating.

The digital exhibition of three galleries of 15 artworks—originally built on Scalar and then rebuilt on WordPress—opens with a main page with tiles representing each gallery. The background of each of these three main gallery tiles is an image of one of the artworks contained within each gallery, so that viewers can get a peek into each gallery. The idea behind this homepage design was to mimic the way visitors to a physical gallery are drawn to certain artworks by scanning the physical space. I did not want to dictate a linear flow for visitors, but rather let them follow what catches their eye. Thus, the gallery tiles are not organized in a sequence, unlike the written dissertation, since I want to let visitors be guided by what interests them. Unlike the written portion of the dissertation, where previous sections can inform what follows and provide useful context for understanding the complex interweaving of concepts, histories and interpretations, the open-ended website design is geared more towards facilitating a meaningful experience with art for the visitor and reflecting my curatorial philosophy, which embraces balancing a curatorial vision with honoring the ideas of the artists and the needs of visitors.

Within each gallery users can then click through to read labels on pieces and artists that interest them, like the photo in figure 39. The labels, while lengthier than the industry standard of 60 or so words that specialists recommend for physical exhibitions, focus on what viewers see in the artwork, since studies show that this kind of description holds their attention longer than art history-centric labels (Serrell 97-104). While my labels often contain some biographical background or context, I aimed to keep that background brief so as to not have too long a detour away from describing the visual content.

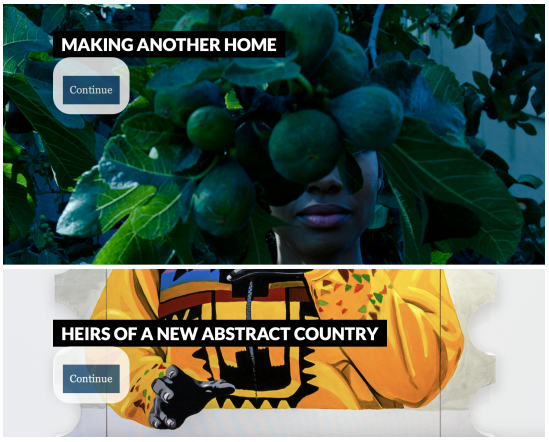

Figure 39. Santos, Krsna. Website Screencap, 2022.

In situations where an art historical explanation could potentially help viewers understand more about an artwork, I included a link to a paragraph-length art historical write-up, like the blue "Continue to 'Boafo and Matisse'" you see in figure 40. This is not for the sake of sharing art historical knowledge, but to reflect one of the key arguments in this dissertation, that these artists are in big and small ways subversive in the face of oppression. For example, in these works, Boafo is not just using techniques from European modernists, like the tilted forward, flattened perspective; he is using those techniques to represent his dignity and complexity, even after Viennese art society rejected him because he was African. Therefore, talking about Matisse is really a path to talking about the

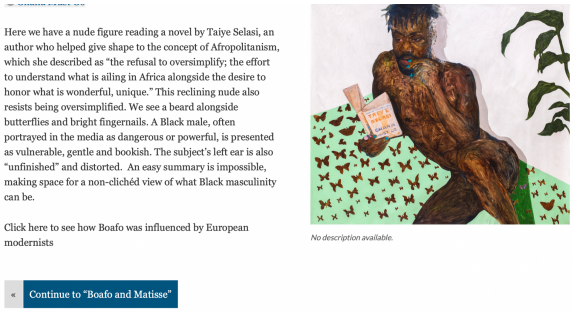

Figure 40. Santos, Krsna. Website Screencap, 2022.

power of Boafo's work, a power that may resonate with viewers who take up the option to learn more about the work past a short label.

A similar design ethos of embracing the role of curator as facilitator, rather than as authoritative scholar, is seen in the omission of the customary introductory text. This is in part to draw viewers' attention toward the artworks more directly, and in part because viewers find longer introductory texts intimidating and are therefore not likely to read them (Serrell, May). While having a large introductory text is typical in physical museum galleries, educators like Serrell and May have studied how most viewers do not typically spend much time with walls of text, so I wanted to lower any speed bumps that may deter a visitor from taking time with the artwork.

In sum, all these designs decisions were made with the goal of giving visitors the freedom and resources to have the emotional and intellectual experiences with the artworks that they choose. Additionally, I worked to make those resources as unintimidating and welcoming as possible. The ultimate hope is that when viewers approach the gallery, they have an unencumbered and hopefully meaningful interaction with a work of art.

In the following sections I will go into detail on the disciplinary conversations that informed the choices within my digital exhibition. The first is the current reckoning happening within the museum world in terms of who is represented and how they are represented. The second section is on museum education, particularly how educators and researchers on visitor engagement are responding to a long history of museums being reflections of elite, white male knowledge and not of the communities they are in. Lastly, I discuss ideal future directions for my project and how online exhibitions could be a model for open access, ever expanding and ever

adaptable curation. Within each section I will return to my digital exhibition and speak about how I strove to integrate the progressive ethos of each discipline.

Reckoning with Museum Histories

As all the disciplines in this section strive to turn away from past wrongs of their respective fields, it is important to trace the histories they are critically confronting. Nothing epitomizes the troubled history of museums better than Berlin's Humboldt Forum. The site of the current Humboldt Forum housed the primary residence of the Hohenzollern royal family for centuries until it was damaged during World War II and demolished by the East German government in 1950. While the palace was in fact still structurally stable, having a symbol of Prussian and then German imperialism in East Berlin did not align with the ideology and aims of the East German government, which wanted to rebuild the nation with an anti-fascist and revolutionary worldview (Ossenkopp). In its place they built the Palace of the Republic, a modernist government building that housed the national parliament, along with many spaces for the public like bowling alleys, art exhibition spaces and restaurants. In 1990, after reunification, the building was closed due to asbestos contamination and after heated debate, particularly from East Germans who wanted to preserve their history, the building was demolished between 2006 to 2008 (*Berlin's Palace*). Rather than build a contemporary structure, the German parliament decided to reconstruct an updated version of the old royal palace and turn it into a museum named after famous scholar and explorer Alexander von Humboldt.[53] On top of that plans were made, and now implemented, to move the complete collections of Berlin's ethnographic and

[53] Humboldt is a hotly debated figure among scholars. He was a wealthy aristocrat who traveled and documented the world during colonialism, but was also an abolitionist. See Pratt for a critical analysis of Humboldt's work and writing.

Asian art museums into the new Humboldt Forum. On multiple levels the Humboldt Forum thus became a structure that reverberated with colonial and imperial history.

The Humboldt Forum may be a headline example, but many German museums were built with the support of colonialism and in support of colonialism. Ethnographic museums in Germany around 1900, for example, had display cases crammed with cultural artifacts and were meant to showcase the "curiosity" and "primitivism" of non-white cultures (Murrell).[54] It took the activism of people like art historian and art critic Carl Einstein in 1915 to help begin a process of raising the status of African sculpture in the West to that of fine art, eventually bringing non-Western artworks and artifacts out of cramped display cases and displaying them individually.[55]

Treating Africa as a "primitive" curiosity extended beyond just cultural artifacts, however. In the late 19th century, figures in the German-speaking world also brought in Africans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and other minorities to take part in "human zoos," with the Hamburg-based Carl Hagenbeck being the first person to ever host such events. Groups of primarily non-Europeans were brought in to perform shows in fake villages within zoos in order to entertain white, mostly middle-class Europeans. The animals Hagenbeck showcased in his zoos and the people he paid to perform were often from places where Germany had colonies,

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[54] Most German Expressionist artists of the era also saw African art as "primitive" and "childlike," which in their view meant it was more "pure" than European art, which they saw as alienated from nature and human instincts. For that reason, it fascinated and inspired them, but this fascination of German Expressionists (and artists like Picasso) then carried with it a different version of the colonial racial hierarchies seen in ethnographic museums. See Murrell for more.

[55] It is important to note that many non-Western artifacts in Western museums were made for primarily religious and spiritual purposes, so even while presenting these artifacts as art may come from a desire for respect, it can also lead to misreading the significance of artifacts in their home communities. It also hints at the case for repatriation, as the artifacts can be used for their original intended purposes in their places of origin.

making zoos another showcase of colonial reach and a tool for marketing white, male cultural "superiority" (Heise, Kurt).

While museums as showcases of these forms of power may seem a thing of the past, the contemporary demographics of collections show us otherwise. Museums in the West are still overrepresented by white men. The Detroit Institute of Arts, for example, states in their mission "[w]e will offer relevant museum experiences that authentically connect with the needs and interests of diverse, wide-ranging audiences" and yet a 2018 study of 18 prominent US museums, including the DIA, shows there remains much progress to be made: 85% of art in the collections of these museums is by white artists, and 87% by men (Topaz). Many activist groups and curators since the 1980s, such as Gorilla Girlz and Pussy Galore, have found similar overrepresentation in galleries in the West, including Germany. A glaring example is the 2014 list in the publication *Kunstkompass* of "The World's Great Artists," which is compiled based on frequency and prestige of exhibition, publication and press coverage: this list included three women out of twenty artists, and no people of color (Reilly 18). This issue of lopsided representation extends beyond museums and into galleries as well. In her project Gallery Tally artist Micol Hebron compiled artworks that were critical of the gender disparity in museums, such as the work by J Walker Michael in figure 41 (Hebron).

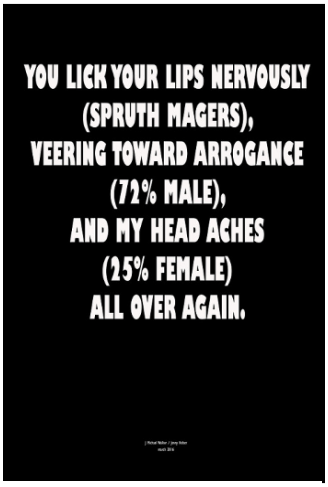

Figure 41. Michael, J Walker, 2016.

Since at least the 1980s there have been movements to push museums to change and to expand what gets curated and for whom. Artist Martha Rosler organized a group of exhibits and public forums, with artists, activists, the homeless, squatters, schoolkids and more, to address pressing issues in late 1980s New York (Langner). In Germany, Nigerian curator Okwui

Enwezor in 2002 used his role as the first non-European director of *documenta* — a quintennial showcase of contemporary art in Kassel, Germany that is known for cutting edge and experimental curating — to intentionally curate a show with non-European art in conversation with European art. The focus, according to Enwezor and his co-curators, was to highlight art as knowledge production, and with that to figure out what comes after imperialism (McEvilley). As the director of Haus der Kunst, originally built by the Nazis as the *Haus der deutschen Kunst* (House of German Art) from 2011 to 2018, he initiated an investigation and exploration of the Nazi history of the museum while also actively curating art by people of color. The 10th Berlin Biennale in 2018 was also a departure from art-world norms, with the entire curatorial team being non-European and Gabi Ngcobo from South Africa as head curator.

The Southern hemisphere has also fostered innovative decolonial museum work, such as the work of indigenous curators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The curatorial group Mātauranga Māori has worked to bring about a process they call “reMāorification," to recentre Māori voices in an act of restoring *Mana Motuhake* (independent thought and autonomy) and privilege the various ways that Māori perceive knowledge and knowledge sharing (Cairns). One result of that work is the fourth floor of the Te Papa Museum in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is autonomously curated by Māori curators and filled with Māori work. Similar curatorial work has happened in the US, such as a 2023 exhibition of Tlingit artist Preston Singletary's work at the Chrysler Museum that focused on an indigenous Pacific Northwest creation story and was curated by A:shiwi/Tlingit independent curator Miranda Belarde-Lewis ("Raven and the Box").

While powerful art institutions may still be learning how to respond to the demands and realities of our times, activists and artists within and independent of institutions have laid a

framework for how art spaces can be liberatory, inclusive, justice-minded and imaginative.[56] This history of under and misrepresentation, and of activist and community-based curating, deeply informed both the selection of artworks chosen for the digital exhibition and the three previous chapters of my dissertation. Two of the clearest examples of artworks in my exhibition that address the white patriarchal and colonialist history of collecting in museums come from Theo Eshetu and Amoako Boafo. Indeed, Eshetu himself began the artwork I analyzed in the previous chapter, *Atlas Fractured,* while researching for a film about the Humboldt Forum. As he told me in an interview, the Benin Bronzes that appear in *Atlas Fractured* are ones that were part of a heated debate on the repatriation of artwork looted during colonialism (Eshetu). Furthermore, the banners in his work also represent the colonial worldview that races could be neatly categorized via only four categories, his inclusion of them thus creating a confrontation with the colonial history of Western museums and museum collecting. By including his artwork, I hope to give viewers the chance to think differently about how museums, and society in general, uses a broad and dehumanizing brush to portray our world and the people within it. Amoako Boafo takes a different approach in criticizing the history of museum and gallery collecting by using his artwork, which is inspired by techniques in European modernism, to add nuance, dignity and beauty to his representations of Black people. Faced with a world where his artwork was rejected simply by virtue of being made by an African, he chose to create his own Modernism that is for Black people. He offers viewers the chance to see what European (self-)portraiture might look like if it were not only about reproducing colonial mindsets.

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[56] While not as directly related to colonialism, many activists have also protested the reputation laundering many ultra-wealthy people do by donating to museums, such as the Sacklers, who were central to the creating the opioid epidemic. While many museums have removed the Sackler name from their buildings following protests, several still have not. See Kazakina and Stupples, Porterfield for more.

Museum Best (Education) Practices

The American Alliance Museum (AAM) is a highly influential US-based organization that has worked to develop and share best practices in all areas of museum work since 1906, advocating for everything from standards on how to structure a museum to how to prepare for natural disasters. One of the core standards the AAM pushes for is that "[t]he museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role" ("Core Standards for Museums").[57] Moving well beyond a passive education role, they advocate one where the museum constantly solicits feedback from the public about their interests and incorporates that feedback into their educational work. In its plain English description of education guidelines, the AAM says:

> Ask them [the visitors/the local community] what they want to know
>
> Know what you want to say […]
>
> Make sure people understood you
>
> And ask them if they liked it
>
> If not, change it" ("Core Standards for Museums in Plain English").

While many (museum) educators may recognize this as common practice, it marks a decisive shift away from the still influential tradition of museums primarily as showcases of curatorial expertise and the interests of the founders and donors. In the following, I will discuss what museum education best practices look like, the exclusive tradition they are responding to and

[57] The AAM could be more progressive, such as requiring listings on their job board to list pay ranges, but they generally reflect at least the language of the progressive edge of museum work.

how the accessibility best practices of museum educators have informed the digital galleries of my dissertation. [58]

To trace the ideological history embedded in Western museums it is illustrative to turn to the *Wunderkammer* (Cabinet of Curiosities). As art historian Mårten Snickare succinctly puts it, "[…] the history of European colonialism is inseparably intertwined with the history of the museum as a typically European institution" (148) because, citing James Clifford, Snickare says "the museum and colonialism are two sides of 'the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world'" (148). As Gabriele Beßler tells in detail, the predecessors to European museums were the large collections of aristocrats and royals in the Holy Roman Empire of the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly in what is today southern Germany. This region was then a trade hub and the nobles used connections to colonial trade hubs in the Netherlands and Paris to collect items from around the world. Sixteenth-century Bavarian Duke Albrecht V, a member of the powerful Wittelsbach royal family, was possibly the first person in the German-speaking world to create a building solely for the purpose of showcasing artistic artefacts, in his case a large collection of over 6,000 objects (Beßler). Among these German collections were objects like narwhal tusks, coral, dissected animals and even nuts from Seychelles. The royals and aristocrats arranged their collections with the aim not only of ordering the world, but of creating spatial connections between objects and evoking memories (Beßler). This early curating was also aimed at reflecting colonial reach and Enlightenment positivist thinking of categorizing and organizing the world. The powerful had both a trade reach that extended across the globe and their curating of objects could also, in their view, explain the world.

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[58] Accessibility in this context means that the art is presented in a way where it can ideally be understood by people of all ages and educational backgrounds.

While royals initially served as the curators of their private collections, once museums were opened to the public and art history became an established and respected field of study, dedicated professional curators took on the role of being the "all-knowing" experts of art and by extension the world. This often meant, and often still means, colonial ideologies being replicated in curatorial work. One of the most infamous modern exhibitions to embody this "all-knowing" curatorial eye was Edward Streichen's 1955 exhibition *The Family of Man* at The Met, which through its 508 photographs tried to argue that humans are all the same. Conceived as the curator's photo-essayistic commentary, it was, not surprisingly, criticized by heavyweights of photographic criticism like Barthes, Susan Sontag and Allan Sekula as, respectively, fairly meaningless, naively sentimental and as patriarchal and capitalist propaganda (Muracciole and Young 9).

A key breaking point for this solo "genius" model of curating was the 1969 exhibit *Harlem on My Mind*, which Bridget R. Cooks calls "[…] one of the most controversial exhibitions in US history" (5). *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900—1968* was an attempt by director Thomas Hoving and curator Allon Schoener—both white—to contribute to the civil rights conversation and movement of the 1960s. While modern and ambitious in its multimedia, photography-heavy approach, neither Hoving or Schoener incorporated much feedback from Black artists or Harlemites while creating the exhibition. One of the most glaring omissions voiced by Black artists like Romare Bearden, who spoke several times with Schoener, was that the show had no non-photographic works from Black artists. Artist William T. Williams said the photography-only exhibition felt more like a sociology exhibition than anything about art (Cooks 17). While Allon Schoener likely felt the photography represented an embrace of a modern artform, for artists like Williams and Bearden it smacked of

dismissing Black painting and sculpture as not worthy of consideration. Additionally, John Henrik Clark, a historian and leading figure in establishing Africana Studies, was consulted for the exhibition, but as he said, "[this exhibition] never belonged to us and while alot [sic] of people listened to our suggestions about the project. Very few of those suggestions were ever put into effect" (Cooks 18). A result of not truly incorporating feedback from Black Harlemites was creation of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), which was created specifically to picket *Harlem on My Mind.* Allon Schoener nevertheless refused to change his exhibition (Cooks 22). As Cooks argues, Schoener's approach led to an exhibition where "[B]lack culture emerged in the Metropolitan not as creative producer, but as ethnographic study (5).[59] Director Hoving and curator Schoener may have assumed that their training and expertise would be enough to create a show that fostered meaningful communication between the Black and white communities, but the response from the Black activists showed that that was nowhere near enough.

In the US this exhibition and the ensuing protests established the fault lines present to this day in art museums and galleries throughout the West. Within museum walls this is clearly represented in tensions between museum educators, many of whom strive to create accessible, collaborative and community-informed museum experiences, and curators who are still often celebrated as singular, authoritative voices on art. Although many museums in their mission statements say that they are motivated by community-centered and justice-minded values, the choice of what gets talked about and exhibited in art museums is still regularly entirely up to the

[59] While Black painters and sculptors protested a photography-only show, Cooks notes how photographic artists like James VanDerZee had a significant boost to their reputations due to *Harlem on My Mind.* So, while the show displayed some naive confidence from the curator and director, in its embrace of photography, it did also boost the careers of Black photographers.

curators. This top-down approach has led to severe missteps, for instance, as museums scrambled to respond to the 2020 George Floyd and Breonna Taylor protests, and the ensuing demands for institutional responses. One of the most high-level botched responses was when the Whitney Museum of American Art, one of the most powerful contemporary art museums, hastily organized an exhibition of minoritized artists in 2020. The museum bought prints that the Black art collective See in Black were selling at low prices to raise money for charity. The Whitney curator Farris Wahbeh never consulted with the artists whose prints the museums purchased, likely at the request of the curator, and as "compensation" the Whitney offered the artists lifetime passes to the museum (Ulaby). Giancarlo Valentine, one of the artists whose prints were purchased, said "'[this] man [Wahbeh] was following me, not engaging my work, not asking me [expletive], and 'acquired' a print that I did not sign or make, meant to raise money. I wanna [expletive] fight'" (Ulaby).[60] Urgency to respond resulted in a return to worst practices: ignoring input from the artists and undervaluing artwork, which consequently led to a disrespectful exhibit built on unethical practices. The exhibition was quickly canceled (Ulaby).

In sharp contrast, an approach following the AAM guidelines would have engaged artists and relevant community members in the conceptual stages of an exhibition. It would also reflect collective decisions, instead of the sole voice of the curator. Even if an exhibition were to receive blowback, museum educators would ideally solicit feedback and move forward with that input in mind, instead of simply canceling an exhibition. As with progressive education in classrooms today, museum education in its activist form strives not to support one authoritative voice, the highly educated and institutionally influential professor or curator, but instead to have a constant

[60] The [expletive] in brackets ware from the original NPR article. I tried to find the original tweets, with the unedited language, but had no luck. It is, however, obvious what Valentine said.

back and forth with community members and those who come to learn and have experiences with art.

An important figure in this shift to more democratic, responsive museum work is Beverly Serrell, who put forward the concept of organizing galleries around a "Big Idea," that is, one concept that connects the art pieces in a gallery, rather than a strictly art historical approach. For example, a gallery centered around Benin Bronzes depicting royalty might focus on how power is portrayed in the works. Writing on the Detroit Institute of Arts' entire reinstallation of their collection between 2002 and 2007 on Serrell's principles, former DIA curator of Native American art David W. Penney wrote: "[t]his requirement—the need to orchestrate all the interpretive media within a gallery to support a Big Idea, while winnowing out all 'sub-themes' or interesting but unrelated facts—was perhaps the most unfamiliar and culturally difficult task for many curators" (3).[61] In this ambitious and visitor-centered reinstallation, curators were not even tasked with writing labels, but instead were primarily researchers and editors. Instead, the education staff were the primary authors of labels, in consultation with Serrell, Deborah Perry, and Daryl Fischer. This is because art-history based curatorial training tended to lead to labels that did not connect with visitors, because they often assumed a high level of education and did not always focus on the aesthetic elements of the works (Penney 13). As Penney succinctly puts it: "[t]he art history had little or no context for many viewers" (17).

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[61] "Reinstallation" is a museum-world term for redesigning how a gallery is laid out. In the case of the DIA from 2002-07, all the galleries were redesigned, including with new educational materials.
Sadly, the DIA has not sustained its implementation of Serrell's approach as new leadership has pushed out many of the staff who championed visitor-centered museum work. Among many high-profile missteps was funding a pro-police mural in a Detroit suburb. The police in Detroit and its suburbs are notorious for harassing and profiling Black people. (Greenberger)

This reality embodied in the DIA's visitor research—that many visitors do not connect to presentations of art based on traditional scholarly knowledge—was one of the key motivating factors behind my creation of a hybrid dissertation. While I may find something like the intellectual history of the *Wunderkammer* fascinating, going into those histories can often detract from what visitors see in front of them. When an exhibition is presented without an eye to helping viewers have experiences with art, it can also have a consequence of making an art museum seem aloof and elitist. When viewers are met with cultural and art historical lessons that do not make sense to them and do not speak to what they see in the art, an understandable response is to believe the art museum is not interested in talking to them, but rather only to well-educated specialists and connoisseurs. That is why, for example, in my label of Amoako Boafo's artwork *Ghana Must Go* on my exhibition website, I include no references to the European modernists who influenced his style, but instead talk about how he represents a softer side of Black masculinity in a world where Black men are regularly portrayed as dangerous or as hypersexualized. That is what viewers can clearly see in the painting of a reclining Black male nude reading a book on a surface covered in butterflies. Not only do viewers not need to know about painters like Matisse and their use of flattened perspective, but an explanation of that may also even put off viewers. Viewers can still read about the art history if they want, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, but they can ignore it and still have an experience with the art. This choice to give both options, a primarily inviting approach with links to specialized knowledge, was influenced by my own experiences with the DIA after the reinstallation mentioned above, my Museum Studies training at MSU, and personal conversation with Rosie May. May, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Public Engagement at Oklahoma City Museum of Art, explained how according to her research in Oklahoma and at the MCA in Chicago, it is more effective to offer

the option to learn more specialized knowledge than to foreground it. Most viewers, her research and experience show, are simply not primarily interested in specialized knowledge or even watching videos from curators talking about art (May).

Additionally, the practices of more traditionally minded curators and many art galleries also have consequences even for the artists they highlight. Art galleries in particular are often not accessible to scholars unless they have a connection through an established museum. That gatekeeping then likely limits the amount of scholarship that can occur. Academics can more easily get access to art via museums, but that level of access already requires an elevated professional status that many artists do not have. This can then lead to artists not being read deeply and also a reinforcement of the gatekeeping that typifies the contemporary art world where the very wealthy and well-connected often have incredible influence on who gets taken seriously and gets paid accordingly. Given the overwhelming white and male demographics of museum leadership and art collectors, this then creates a moat that many artists of color cannot cross unless they are digestible and comprehensible to funders and influential figures in art. In the following section I will discuss DH philosophies and a DH project that show paths for art not to be mediated through established and often exclusionary networks.

DH: Making (Ignored) Knowledge Visible

The digital exhibition I created has many of the same aims as the Digital Humanities, even though its form mirrors traditional exhibitions in physical spaces. In addition, DH has fostered projects that show how the Humanities can be easily accessible to all and how scholars can create projects that connect with other disciplines. Those two trends intersect with the goals of my project to be as accessible as possible and to contribute to the now decades-old history of a German Studies that works across borders and disciplines. Digital Humanities has within it an

ethos that knowledge should also be available to those who are not connected to institutions of higher education. As Abdul Alkalimat succinctly puts it: "digital tools can facilitate crossing the feudal moat that separates the campus from the community. We are only a click away if we are willing to lower the virtual drawbridge and follow the path of open-source information and the creative commons that unite us within the free culture movement" (Alkalimat).
This value had led to everything from digitizing library materials to publishing work on free-to-access websites, instead of being only accessible through the high-fee model that many, if not most, academic publishers follow.

While making free to access projects is central to the Digital Humanities, it can also have pitfalls if not approached critically. In that vein Roopika Risam has put forward the concept of postcolonial digital humanities, which "explores how we might remake the worlds instantiated in the digital cultural record through politically, ethically, and social justice-minded approaches to digital knowledge production" (Risam 4). One key part of Risam's approach is being mindful of not just how DH projects are published, but what they are publishing and, critically, how the "Other" is being represented.

One project that embodies this critical postcolonial perspective, and resonates with my contribution to German Studies focused on the minoritized, is *Same Boats* by Kaiama L. Glover and Alex Gil.[62] Glover is trained as what she describes as a Francophonist. She, like many scholars trained in linguistically defined and delineated disciplines, became frustrated at not being able to draw more expansive geographic and cultural connections in her scholarship. That is why, together with Alex Gil, Glover created a DH project that literally maps the travels and

[62] This project is highlighted in Risam and Josephs 2021.

intersections of Black scholars from around the world. There is also an option for visitors to the website to filter the map, so it shows the places where more than one scholar visited, which they label as intersections. Lastly, visitors can filter the results by time frame, so they can see, for example, that Kamau Brathwaite, W.E.B Dubois, C.L.R. James, George Lamming and Eslanda Goode Robeson all visited Accra in the 1950s. The project can then be a tool to ask questions, for example, about why Accra was visited by all of these thinkers in the 1950s. In total, the project is not only a model for what internationally minded, Black interdisciplinary work can look like; it can also be a tool for further scholarship in the same vein. Rather than spreading limited and limiting histories in the Humanities, Glover and Gil created a tool for expanding the connections viewers can see and the questions they can ask.

Epilogue: The Flexible Archival Exhibition

The ethos of the DH scholars above—of accessibility, thoughtfully doing work on minoritized people and creating projects that empower users—is also where I dream of this project going. The emotional core of this dissertation has been curating and presenting artworks that hopefully have meaning for diasporic people. In my mind I picture someone seeing an Opoku self-portrait or even Leitolf's subject-less scenes and finding a part of their experience reflected in the art. A reality of displacement, in all its forms, is that even to know oneself requires forming or finding a new language. Maybe with the written and exhibition portions of my dissertation other immigrants like me can find a language that feels powerful to them. That desire to connect with readers and viewers also necessitates exclusion for the sake of clarity. One dissertation, one exhibition, one photograph cannot possibly encompass all the stories immigrants have within them. However, the nature of the digital exhibition is that it can remain viewable far longer than most physical exhibitions, and it can continually be added to. Like visiting a library, where your interests can lead to any book on the shelf, I imagine a diasporic web of exhibitions that addresses the vast constellation of realities that affects diasporic people.

One of the key questions I have asked myself while in Museum Studies is: how can an exhibition adapt to the viewer? The power dynamic embodied in most curatorial processes and the limits of the physical spaces of galleries makes it so viewers can only see what is provided to them. There may be catalogues in a bookstore or QR codes for visitors to scan, but most art spaces offer an experience much less like a library than like a high-end store with a handful of items in display. Digital exhibitions offer a way out of this dilemma. My online exhibition mirrors the three themes of the dissertation, but it could very well be expanded to let viewers

explore topics that did not fit neatly into the cohesive structure narrative a dissertation and most exhibitions need.

For example, Zohra Opoku's most recent artworks, a series called *The Myths of Eternal Life*, have explored mortality and healing after surviving a cancer diagnosis. Here, she combines ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, tree branches and roots, as well as elements of her own physical form into collage-like works. An expanded branch of my dissertation's exhibition could then explore non-Western views on mortality and healing. Viewers could go down that "bookshelf" and see artworks that have meaning for them at that moment. Perhaps themes or tags could be used to allow viewers to see galleries specifically constructed for them. If women and femmes in the diaspora is a theme a viewer wants to see more of, they could click a theme connected to an artwork and see other artworks similarly tagged. The curating would then be in part controllable by the viewer, since they can make galleries from the artworks depending on what they need and are curious about.

Figure 42. Opoku, Zohra. 'I have hacked up the sky. I have opened the horizon. I have traveled through the earth (to) its edges.', 2022. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim.

In another shift away from the single, "authoritative" voice of the curator, the online format could also have an endless number of curators or curatorial collectives who could add specialized insights and interesting connections to a web of diasporic artworks. Perhaps artists in Ghana could comment on their responses to restrictive gender norms following Boafo, or DH scholars could map international links embodied in the stories of the artists across exhibitions. In

this organization, curating and scholarship can mix, with no structural demand for authority, but rather in service of the art and the interests of viewers.

The online format also allows for the collective curatorial and scholarly work, at least in concept, to remain indefinitely accessible. No longer constrained by limited physical space, an online art space can build into an always accessible archive of exhibitions. Instead of only having catalogues or reviews to study and become familiar with exhibitions, viewers and even scholars can see the exhibitions in fundamentally the same way viewers from years ago saw it. This turns the seasonal nature of most physical art spaces into a perennial archive of exhibitions. My hope is that my project is in some way an opening to art spaces being whatever the viewer needs, whenever they need it. Just as all of us turn to literature or music that is meaningful to us in a certain moment, my dream is that the spirit of this project creates openings for the visual arts to be a similar resource. Paintings, sculptures, photographs, sound pieces and video works could be collected together in a kind of arts bookshelf where any of us could find the refuge they need.

The Exhibition and Images

The exhibition can be accessed at https://decolonialfutures.hcommons.org. Please e-mail santos.krsna@gmail.com to request a tour of the online art exhibition.

If any mistakes have been made in image captions or attribution, please contact the e-mail above. I am happy to make corrections as necessary.

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