

ekphrasis

an art history graduate journal

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About the Journal

Ekphrasis is an online scholarly journal produced by the graduate students of the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at Tufts University. Founded in 2025 and published annually in partnership with Tisch Library, the journal will provide a platform for art historical exploration and analysis to fulfill its essential objective of foregrounding critical, diverse, and innovative perspectives both within and beyond Tufts University.

The journal features written submissions from graduate students studying art history (and related disciplines), including academic essays, book reviews, and exhibition highlights. Additionally, there is a section devoted to spotlighting the Tufts University collection of art and objects, housed in the Tufts University Art Gallery and Tisch Library; undergraduate and graduate students currently attending Tufts author these short-form research notes.

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Painting and Collage, Picture and Matter: The meaning of Frank Bowling's *Wintergreens* in the Royal Academy's collection

Artie Foster, University of Illinois Chicago

Abstract

The painter Frank Bowling's election to the British Royal Academy (RA) in 2005 was historic for two reasons: the Guyanese-British painter was the storied institution's first black academician in its nearly 225-year history; however, in an unprecedented turn, his choice of submission for diploma painting—a customary bequeathal by all incoming RA members—was rejected and he was asked to select another. Bowling's original submission, *Wintergreens* (1986) was nearly two decades old at the time of his election and, so the RA suggested, the artist might wish to select a more recent and representative work to join their permanent collection. The backlash from the Bowling camp was swift, with charges of institutional racism countering the RA's stated reasons for their unorthodox rejection. As one commentator posited, "perhaps it was thought that such a major work by the Academy's first black British member would be too imposing?" This paper examines the two competing narratives for *Wintergreens*' apparent unsuitability for the Royal Academy and proposes a third possibility that has heretofore gone unexamined: that, at best, *Wintergreens* is a difficult and unusual painting, given its clear anti-formalist and proto-New Materialist commitments (especially for Bowling, a self-professed formalist); or, at worst, that it threatens to undermine the very definitions of art established at the RA's inception and, by extension, imperiling the role of the viewing subject whom this art historically addresses.

Keywords:

painting, formalism, postmodernism, New Materialism, British Royal Academy

Wintergreens' (1986, fig. 1) encrusted surface, upon first viewing, seems designed to repel its observer. It is a large, dark painting, horizontally oriented and segmented by raised, wavering lines into an uneven grid of rectangles and squares. Overtop this structure, viscous clumps of acrylics in varying shades of dark moss, charcoal, pea green, and ochre swirl and bleed into one another, choking—in some places, totally submerging—the structure beneath. Its scale is such that taking in the entire work in one go is impossible, requiring its viewer to traverse in the gallery a long swath of muck similar to the polluted riverbed of the Thames. Various media poke out of the muddy buildup: a bottle cap, a small plastic owl, and other indiscernible detritus obscured by layers of paint. At close proximity, the sickly, uneven palette and lumpy appearance are practically feculent, making *Wintergreens* a compelling though uninviting painting to behold for a length of time.

The greatest challenges of Frank Bowling's 1986 work, though, exceed its flirtations with abjection. It may recall those aspects of the natural world or human embodiment we might normally wish to suppress, especially in the presence of art. Yet, the challenge *Wintergreens* poses to viewers also stems from its rejection of some of the medium's most fundamental conventions. Its

gridded foam understructure lifts off the canvas and gives the object a dimensionality more akin to bas-relief than painting. Bowling's close attention to surface, thick and calloused, impels viewers to observe the physical properties of his materials rather than dwell on their representational or expressive capacities. And, of course, given the various mixed media suspended within its layers, its designations by the British Royal Academy (RA), to whose collection it belongs, seem comically inadequate: "Object Type: Painting. Medium: Acrylic on canvas."¹



Figure 1. Frank Bowling, *Wintergreens*, 1986, acrylic paint, acrylic gel, foam and mixed media on canvas, 173 x 348 cm. Courtesy the artist. Unknown photographer. Royal Academy Collection. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 2026.

Upon his election to the RA in 2005, Bowling submitted *Wintergreens* as his diploma work, a customary bequeathal made by all of the Academy's incoming members. There, it would join the ranks of J.M.W. Turner's *Dolbadern Castle* (1798-99) and John Constable's *A Boat Passing a Lock* (1826), among countless other works by the masters of British painting. Upon its submission, however, in a shocking and unprecedented turn, it was rejected, and Bowling was asked to select another work to join the Academy's collection. Writing on behalf of the artist, Richard Gibson, an old friend of Bowling's, expressed the team's dismay that Bowling—who was already believed to be long overdue for inclusion in the RA and who, some 225 years after its inception, would be the Academy's first black member—should be denied his choice of diploma work.

Furthermore, Gibson accused the Academy of underhandedly removing *Wintergreens* from its privileged location near the Academy's restaurant where it was to be photographed and the painting's installation filmed. "Nothing was said to Frank," he writes of the debacle, "it was arranged in the dark and in the knowledge that Frank was in the United States to attend exhibitions

1 "Wintergreens, 1986," Royal Academy of Arts, accessed January 5, 2026, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/wintergreens>.

of his work in Chicago and New York.”² Gibson went as far as to accuse the Academy of racism, convinced that *Wintergreens*’ apparent unsuitability stemmed from extrinsic factors unique to its creator rather than issues intrinsic to *Wintergreens* itself. “This strange turn of event [sic] will certainly only suggest that the old racist double standards [of the Academy] still continue,” Gibson forecasted. “Perhaps it was thought that such a major work by the Academy’s first black British member would be too imposing?”³

The Academy quickly realized their misstep in clandestinely removing *Wintergreens* without consulting the artist and confirmed to Gibson that they were proud to have Bowling among their ranks. Writing on behalf of the RA, Jenni Francis described Bowling in her reply as, “a greatly valued new member.” She briefly explained the Academy’s wariness, writing: “Council felt that although *Wintergreens* was a fine example of Frank’s earlier work [he] might wish to be represented by a more recent example of his work.” This suggestion was couched in the compromise that, “Council is now in discussion with Frank Bowling RA and are sure that the eventual choice of work will be decided by amiable discussion.”⁴ In the end, this discussion proved favorable to Bowling and his original choice of submission: ultimately, *Wintergreens* was accepted as the artist’s diploma work and has resided in the RA’s collection ever since.

The two competing explanations about *Wintergreens*’ unsuitability for the Academy on offer here—institutional racism according to the Bowling camp versus the RA’s desire for a more contemporary work—are not without their merits. On the one hand, Bowling was and remains keenly aware of how institutions, peers, and audiences have read his identity into and against his work. He attributes the shrouded racism of the early-1960s London art scene as the primary motivation for his move to New York in 1966, and has decried racial stereotyping, tokenism, and discrimination in several other instances in the interim decades.⁵

On the other hand, the RA’s request for a more recent painting is corroborated by the great many—even majority of—diploma works that hail from the years around the academician’s election. Over its 250-year lifespan, this certainly seems to be the norm, and a survey of contemporary academicians confirms that most submit diploma works created within five years prior to joining the Academy, if not from the precise year of their election.⁶ Further, Bowling’s formal experiments of the mid-1980s, emblemized by *Wintergreens*, are considered a deviation from the

2 Richard Gibson, email to Jennifer Francis, April 12, 2006, 14:27pm, Frank Bowling Archive.

3 Richard Gibson, email to Jennifer Francis, April 12, 2006, 11:08am, Frank Bowling Archive.

4 Jennifer Francis, email to Richard Gibson, April 16, 2006, 19:22pm, Frank Bowling Archive.

5 “Frank Bowling: Mappa Mundi – Eröffnung,” posted June 23, 2017 by Haus der Kunst, YouTube video, 55:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDMpYX6SD5o>; In his critical writings for *Arts* magazine, Bowling also decried being pigeonholed as a “Black artist” upon arriving to the U.S. In his writing, he also prefers the lowercase “black” as opposed to capitalized “Black,” which I use here in deference to Bowling’s preference; Frank Bowling, “It’s Not Enough to Say, ‘Black is Beautiful,’” *Arts* magazine, April 1971, republished in ARTnews, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/from-the-archives-frank-bowling-on-why-its-not-enough-to-say-black-is-beautiful-in-1971-8668/>. As recently as the press tour for his 2019 Tate retrospective, Bowling decried institutional tokenism and exploitation on the basis of his race; Frank Bowling, “Frank Bowling on BBC News at Ten,” YouTube video, 2:36, June 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_Vb6pe6oxw.

6 “The Diploma Collection at the Royal Academy,” *Art UK*, accessed January 2, 2026, <https://artuk.org/discover/curations/20th-century-spotlight-the-diploma-collection-at-the-royal-academy-london-adams-to-irwin/template/storyline>; Of the outliers who have submitted works made a decade or longer before the academician’s nomination—of which there is a non-negligible minority—the span between 1986, when Bowling painted *Wintergreens*, and 2005, when he was elected to the RA, does appear to be among the longest.

artist's *modus operandi*.⁷ It is at least plausible that the Academy took notice of Bowling because of his more recent paintings and expected his admission to their ranks to be illustrative of these contemporary developments.

In the past twenty years, these two narratives have become enshrined in institutional history and personal memory, and to date none have questioned their Manichean division. Yet, fluttering between these accounts, a third explanation has gone uninterrogated. Without discounting the material fact of the RA's racial exclusiveness, while also recognizing the Academy's request to Bowling was not baseless, we might consider the extent to which qualities intrinsic to *Wintergreens* motivated the initial rejection. What if more than (or alongside) Bowling's racial identity, the failure of *Wintergreens* to impress the Academy stems from the fact that as a painting it is, at best, heterodox and, at worst, flagrantly undermines the medium to which it purportedly belongs (at least for a self-professed formalist like Bowling)? That is, what, if any, formal and aesthetic aspects of *Wintergreens* might have disqualified it from joining the ranks of great British masterworks—indeed, of constituting the official canon of British painting?

To answer these questions, we must first understand how *Wintergreens* departs from the artist's customary approach. The protruding surfaces of Bowling's mid-1980s series, the "sculptural paintings" to which *Wintergreens* belongs, are not the only instances in his career where impasto and multi-media take centerstage but do represent the most dramatic examples of these impulses. Up until the early 1980s, Bowling's work was of a flatter, more conventional ilk. Influenced by his time amongst the American avant-garde between 1966–75, as well as his deepening



Figure 2. Frank Bowling, *Courteous Shade*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 193 x 155 cm. Courtesy the artist. Photographed by Charlie Littlewood. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 2026.

relationship with friend and mentor Clement Greenberg, Bowling had, as late as 1976, self-identified as a formalist.⁸ The series emblemizing this approach, the *Poured* paintings, revel in the material properties of (specifically acrylic) paint, especially its color and liquidity. For these works, Bowling poured layer after layer of acrylics onto the canvas and then tilted and turned the surface to coax the paint into directions he could direct though never fully control.

Consider the opposing forces on display in *Courteous Shade* (1974, fig. 2), where gravity and paint's viscosity press against the rectangular frame Bowling stenciled onto the atmospheric coral and mauve background. In the canvas's center, denser layers of tangerine, yellow, and lime overlay one another, and left of center a ghostly vertical line of light pink and orange suggests a boundary the central mass only acknowledges, though fails to fully obey. We might also consider how these wholly abstract works are indebted to the tradition of figure painting, such as *Julia* (1975, fig. 3). The density of the central vertical pours contrasts the background's airy washes of blue and indigo,

7 Sam Cornish, *Frank Bowling: Sculpture* (London: Ridinghouse, 2022), 113.

8 Kobena Mercer, "Atlantic Errantry," in *Frank Bowling's Americas: New York, 1966–75*, ed. Reto Thüring, Akili Tommasino, and Debra Lennard (Boston: MFA Publications, 2022), 33.

creating something like a figure-ground relationship. Bowling stops short of articulating a human form (the titular Julia) and a voluminous, three-dimensional world she could inhabit. Yet the sense that this work is about paint's representational capacities persists, even in the absence of recognizable iconography.

This series situates Bowling as the preeminent inheritor to formalism, even though its heyday passed some decade and a half prior, and there is little doubt to which category of art these works belong. They are unmistakably paintings, overtly concerned with the mechanisms and materials of their own production, and directed towards the viewer's "eyesight alone."⁹ Aesthetic judgments about the series might debate Bowling's jarring combinations of colors or their serialized format. None, however, can deny these works belong to the tradition of Euro-American avant-garde painting and reside squarely within the medium's parameters. Furthermore, Bowling's deployment of pictorial conventions signals to viewers that these works, despite their opacity, are engaged in processes of representation—that these pours are not merely an invitation to lose oneself in the kaleidoscopic cascades, but that the form color takes and how Bowling structured the picture bears historical meaning which transcends the sublimity of color.

By the early 1980s, Bowling had relocated back to London, where, in another anachronistic swerve, the tradition of landscape painting reinvigorated his stagnating practice. While a new generation of artists in Germany, Italy, and New York resurrected figuration, British artists lagged in adopting Neo-Expressionism and, as Tony Godfrey observed, were also reticent to engage with the rich tradition of the English landscape.¹⁰ Bowling, conversely, cut a discrepant figure. He cited Turner and Constable as his primary inspirations, rather than adopting the frenetic styles and defiant affect of the ascendent younger generation. "It's exciting and challenging to work in London, Turner's town," he wrote in the late 1980s, "and the pressures of the weight of British tradition are exhilarating."¹¹

Yet Bowling's homecoming saw him eschew nearly all recognizable conventions painters typically use to delimit a composition or to imply dimensionality and space, treating the canvas as a site for material buildup rather than pictorial illusion and representation. Paired with a geographic and growing emotional distance from Greenberg,¹² Bowling also shed the doctrine



Figure 3. Frank Bowling, *Julia*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 233.7 x 119.4 cm. Courtesy the artist. Photographed by Damian Griffiths. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 026.

9 Clement Greenberg, "Sculpture in our Time," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 59; Greenberg would espouse the virtues of painting that appealed to eyesight in numerous other instances, but the quotation "eyesight alone"—which has become infamous in part due to Caroline Jones' monograph on the critic with the same title—hails from this 1958 essay on sculpture.

10 Tony Godfrey, *The New Image: Painting in the 1980s* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1986), 89–101.

11 Mel Gooding, *Frank Bowling* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2021), 109–110.

12 Correspondence archived in both the Clement Greenberg papers (Getty Museum) and Frank Bowling Archive reveal that the two fell out of touch for a little over a year in both 1985 and 1988.



Figure 4. Frank Bowling, *Rockface*, 1985, acrylic, acrylic gel, metallic (gold) paint and polyurethane foam on canvas, 178.5 x 358.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Hauser and Wirth. Photographed by Damian Griffiths. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 2026.

that governed his strictly formalist approach and began affixing to his canvases all manner of extraneous materials. Long strips and chunky blocks of foam, like those in *Rockface* (1985, fig. 4) regularly adorn his surfaces, drawing attention to their literal dimensionality and their varying topographic effects. Strips of polyurethane foam and packing peanuts like those

embedded in *Sand Circle* (1983, fig. 5) mimic natural phenomena like silt buildups and seashells. Elsewhere, newspaper clippings, children's toys, and other detritus from the world make their way onto his surfaces and transform not only the look of these works, but their aesthetic impacts.

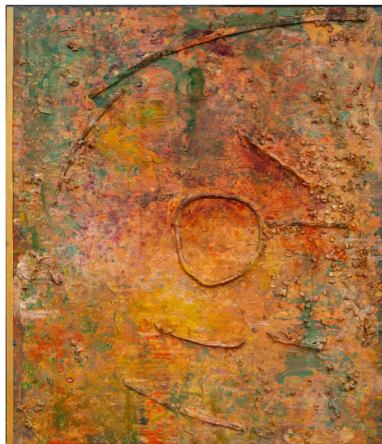


Figure 5. Frank Bowling, *Sand Circle*, 1983, acrylic, acrylic gel and polyurethane foam on canvas, 210 x 180 cm. Courtesy the artist and Hauser and Wirth. Photographed by Damian Griffiths. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 2026.

Whereas the *Poured* paintings evince a Greenbergian-modernist sensibility, one could reasonably view the sculptural paintings of the mid-1980s as a direct repudiation of formalism. Instead, they welcome the postmodern embrace of interdisciplinarity and what Donald Kuspit calls “material togetherness” that “has to do only secondarily with issues of representation and abstraction.” Instead, he posits, such collaged surfaces are “about the establishment of a particular kind of artistic, subjective concreteness” realized by the literal fact of the materials’ physical presence and appearance.¹³

While Kuspit’s invocation of concreteness may have been a nod to the broader history of Concrete Art or *arte povera*, which were being revitalized by the global Neo-Expressionist movement, it is also an apt description of the agglomerated surfaces favored by many artists at this time, Bowling included. Peers like Jules Olitski and Larry Poons, among others in the group Kenworth Moffett eventually dubbed the “New New” painters, inverted paint’s subordination to iconography, insisting it stand as a material fact, valid in its own terms.¹⁴ These “New New” paintings are hard—aesthetically, but also quite literally, caked

13 Donald Kuspit, “Collage: The Organizing Principle of Art,” in *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 507.

14 William Zimmer, “A Dozen ‘New New’ Painters and a Sculptor, Too,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/29/nyregion/a-dozen-new-new-painters-and-a-sculptor-too.html>. Though never formally organized as a movement, Moffett exhibited artists displaying this trend towards heavy paint build-up in a 1992 exhibition called “New New Painting.”

with such thick layers of paint that any pictorial space is smothered by brute materiality, optical abstraction traded in for blunt literality (figs. 6 & 7).

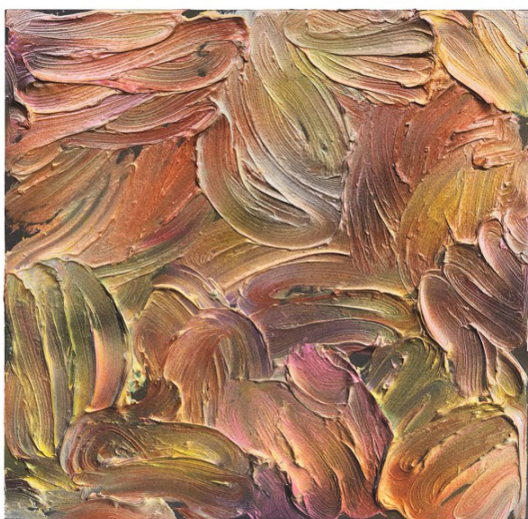


Figure 6. Jules Olitski, *The Beauty of the Queen Sheba*, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 142.87 x 142.24 cm. © [1989] Jules Olitski Art Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

does not seem all that interested in the perceptual processes pictorial conventions typically elicit from the embodied beholder. Instead, canvas is a surface upon which one is expected to relish the literality and vibrancy of matter, both natural and artificial, and the processes, both physical and chemical, that matter undergoes in the hands of the artist. As Gooding concludes, paintings like *Wintergreens* are “the result of natural actions, interactions, and physical contrarities . . . allow[ing] no illusion, no pretense: means and effect are one.”¹⁷

Representation’s demoted status might have precedents from earlier in the century (e.g., Cubist collage, Dada, Neo-Dada), but Gooding underplays the seismic shift Bowling’s sculptural paintings signaled, especially for the Royal Academy. Even if the

In his sculptural series, Bowling’s emphasis on paint coincided with other material explorations, blurring the lines between painting and collage, picture and matter. Mel Gooding highlights their “material togetherness,” claiming the sculptural paintings are “an enthralling spectacle of simultaneities,” wherein the “image [is] coterminous with the beautiful singular object that bears it.”¹⁵ Gooding’s conflation of image and object recalls the kind of “object-painting” Christos Joachimides described in a 1981 Royal Academy exhibition as constituent of the “New Spirit of Painting.”¹⁶ In this calculus, canvas is no longer portal nor screen; it is not the site of representations nor the analogies they enable. In fact, the finished work

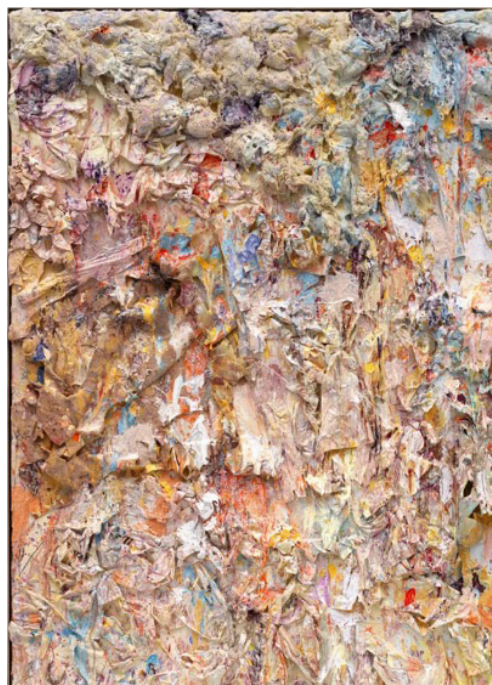


Figure 7. Larry Poons, *Carioca*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 221 x 170.2 cm. © [1986] Larry Poons / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

¹⁵ Gooding, *Frank Bowling*, 106–107.

¹⁶ Christos M. Joachimides, “A New Spirit in Painting,” in *A New Spirit in Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1981), 15.

¹⁷ Gooding, *Frank Bowling*, 106–107.

RA was open-minded enough to host in *A New Spirit in Painting* the rising stars of Neo-Expressionism, the British contingent was largely culled from already established (i.e., institutionally vetted) artists like Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud.¹⁸ The implication, Godfrey suggests, is that the RA, while hip to the trends of the day, was more comfortable playing temporary host to the foreign insurgent youth, while remaining committed to the words of the Academy's first president, Joshua Reynolds, from 1771:

The works, whether of poets, painters, moralists, or historians, which are built upon general nature, live forever; while those which depend for their existence on particular customs and habits, a partial view of nature, or the fluctuation of fashion, can only be coeval with that which first raised them from obscurity. Present time and future may be considered as rivals, and he who solicits the one must expect to be discountenanced by the other.¹⁹

This excerpt brings into high relief the essential scandal of *Wintergreens* with which the Academy may have taken greater issue than its creator's racial identity: the fact that it trades in "general nature" for something less abstract than literal, more particularized than eternal. That is, despite its apparent physical similarities to the earth, *Wintergreens*' view of nature is only "partial" insofar as it, as a painting, fails to register its viewer's perceptual capacities. *Wintergreens* may



Figure 8. Frank Bowling, *Traingone (Mahaicony Abary)*, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 96.5 x 210 cm. Courtesy the artist. Unknown photographer. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 2026.

understand *what* the individual sees in the world ("natural actions, interactions, and physical contrarities") but fails to reflect on *how* the individual perceives that world: a world of forms with varying borders and densities, spaces with determinate limits, and a viewing subject whose eyesight is their first line of defense in trying to make sense of the interplay between the two. Moreover, Bowling's diploma work

traffics in the explicitly verboten: the "fluctuation of fashion," particularly those anti-formalist, postmodern, Neo-Expressionist, and/or proto-New Materialist trends endemic to the penultimate decade of the century.²⁰

It is hard to imagine that the Academy's skepticism towards Bowling's choice was not

18 Godfrey, *The New Image*, 89.

19 Joshua Reynolds, "A Discourse: Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes, December 10, 1771, by the President" in *Seven Discourses on Art*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2176/2176-h/2176-h.htm>.

20 Though I have insufficient space to examine the early tremors of New Materialism, we might consider the shimmering, detritus-filled surfaces of the sculptural paintings commanding, "attention in [their] own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects." Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.



Figure 9. Frank Bowling, *Icarus*, 2005, oil on canvas, 51 x 63.5 cm. Courtesy the artist. Unknown photographer. © Frank Bowling. All rights reserved, DACS 2026.

fueled by patronizing or discriminatory attitudes. Yet, it is perhaps even harder to imagine that the Academy would accept without contestation, from any incoming academician, black or otherwise, a work as subversive or attuned to the “fluctuation of fashion” as *Wintergreens*. Its apparent ambivalence towards viewer perception flies in the face of centuries of Academic convention, and its material experiments, though not uncommon for the time when Bowling painted *Wintergreens*, are steeped in the ephemeral trends of the late 1980s.

To complicate matters further, by the 1990s Bowling resumed an approach which more evenly balanced paint’s material and representational capacities. Consider how a work like *Traingone (Mahaicony Abary)* (1996, fig. 8) sees paint retreat from its forward charge out of the canvas and recede into the picture plane. Or how

Icarus (2005, fig. 9), one of Bowling’s “white paintings” which he produced around the time of his RA election, sees the artist return to more conventional picture-making. A centralized green and yellow composition hovers mid-canvas with a density that contrasts its background, suggesting not only volume, but the existence of a space in which differences in volume between forms and the space they occupy matter.

Wintergreens refuses such functions of painting, charting a different *raison d’être* for the medium that does not neatly comply with the RA’s precedents. Yet, given Bowling’s periodic returns to more pictorial, formalist, or representational modes of painting, it is difficult to argue that its submission to the Academy belies the disillusionment for the medium which many of his peers in the 1980s exhibited. A general skepticism towards notions of originality, along with renewed interest in Freud’s anal drive and the coprophiliac undertones to Neo-Expressionism’s fetishization of materiality,²¹ meant that a growing number of painters in the 1980s approached their craft not like the quixotic heroes of the mid-century, but with a cynical, even degrading, view towards the medium, wherein “painting is seen as golden feces.”²²

Yet, in contrast to the bawdy or infantile gestures of his peers, Bowling was, with *Wintergreens*, not only offering a critical reappraisal of painting. With its submission to the RA, he also spurred the revered institution towards an acknowledgment of their implicit processes and rules; that is, towards a new level of self-awareness—of how they treat academicians of varying backgrounds, how they define their media, what aesthetic commitments their definitions of painting entail—that transcends the jejune gestures of his contemporaries. *Wintergreens* may be a hard painting—aesthetically, materially—but, Bowling indicates with his choice of diploma work, it may be a challenge to which British painting is suited and, perhaps, long overdue.

21 Hal Foster, “Between Modernism and Media,” in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 39.

22 Godfrey, *The New Image*, 58.

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Vision Through Ecstasy: Fabián Cháirez & Queer Catholic Symbolology

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Abstract

Spanish colonialism in the Americas offered a single vision of holiness, crafting Western notions of visibility and sign(s) as rooted in Christian imagery. The reality of figures of faith is bound to images and visual perception. This paper aims to examine this notion, how it upholds Western power structures, and how mysticism disrupts gendered boundaries within the Catholic Church. Mystic experience emphasizes female pleasure and women's capacity to commune with the holy, ultimately subverting the Western construction of women as sinful. Fabián Cháirez's subversive use of religious symbols in queer contexts challenges Catholic notions of sin, sensuality, and visibility. An analysis of Cháirez's paintings *Estigmas* (2023) and *La Eucaristía* (2020) evaluates tensions in terms of femininity and female pleasure, contesting the Catholic teachings of women as sinful, vision as sinful, and highlighting the paradox of this within socially accepted Catholic art and signs. By placing Cháirez's paintings in conversation with Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52) this paper finds that Catholic constructions of gendered sin inform religious signs, while the mystic body, across both Europe and the Americas, functions as a site of controversy and ecstatic pleasure where queer reinterpretations challenge traditional ideals through depictions of female ecstasy.

Keywords:

ecstasy, Catholic mysticism, construction of holiness, queer visibility

Counter to Christian beliefs, societies led by Catholic faith aim to transform subjects of the Church into subjects of the state, disconnecting humans from their celestial origin and instead focusing on earthly social values.¹ This structure creates one of recognized differences; when placed in the context of the sixteenth century and violent Spanish colonization in the Americas, these social apparatuses denoted any idol worship outside of monotheistic Catholicism as a form of evil. It imposed a similar homogeneity onto sexuality, gender expression, and the practice of faith. It is this colonial boundary that mysticism and stigmatic appearances on the human body challenge, as they do not abide by the institutionalized notion of a single vision of the holy.

Stigmata are a Catholic phenomenon and are commonly expressed on the hands and feet. They emulate the wounds from the nails driven into Christ's palms and feet during the Crucifixion, resulting in their image as symbols of redemptive suffering.² Stigmata have been reported since the time of Saint Francis in the late twelfth to early thirteenth century; however, over the past three hundred years, most documented cases have occurred on women.³ Mysticism and

1 Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2007), 154.

2 Kristof Smeyers, "Building the Archive of Stigmatic Women Religious," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 107, no. 427 (Autumn 2018): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1353/stu.2018.0033>.

3 Smeyers, "Building the Archive of Stigmatic Women Religious," 338.

divine expressions on women's bodies challenge the usual Catholic notion of women being prone to sin.⁴ Historically, Catholic women within visual art were perceived to be passive and penitent and, if not, were seen as figures of temptation and vanity.⁵ Mystic symbols tied to ideas of ecstasy challenge conventional European notions of femininity, a tension that persists in the visual culture of the societies which were under Spanish colonial rule.⁶

Based in Mexico City, Fabián Cháirez (b. 1987) creates paintings that engage a range of social issues, particularly gender, sexuality, and the Church. His work reimagines activities and bodies tied to Western ideals and *machismo*, transforming traditionally masculine characters into queer figures. Cháirez's paintings *Estigmas* (2023) and *La Eucaristia* (2020) use mystical symbolism to challenge the historical use of Catholic art as a colonial tool that suppressed queerness in Latin America, erased differences, and promoted a singular, uniform vision of holiness.⁷ Both paintings highlight the pleasure within ecstasy, the autonomy of the female mystic, and the roots of queer vision in pleasure. As explained by Simon Critchley, "mysticism is not a religion, it is a tendency, a distillation of existing devotional practice, textual interpretation, theological teaching, and conceptual philosophical reflection."⁸ Evidently, mysticism operates both within and beyond institutionalized religious and social paradigms. By breaking from the Catholic model, it creates spectacle, and its association with women challenges the conventional visual signs attributed to religious figures. In order to understand the context of how mysticism breaks the gendered standard within the Catholic church even in traditional European mother country settings, Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52) reveals how women's ecstatic experiences were used to affirm the existence of the divine. However, when the mystic framework shifts from a European context to colonial settings shaped by conquest and cultural hybridity, the relationship between the body and the divine takes on new meanings. Throughout this paper, Catholic symbols will be examined through the perspective of visual sign, exploring the symbols and traditions associated with Catholic female mystics, their interaction with space, and how the limits of a singular, institutionalized faith are disrupted by queer visibility and representations of female ecstasy in the works of Fabián Cháirez.

Divinity and the presence of the celestial on Earth are represented through figural images in Catholic faith and practice. Images of sacred beings are transposed onto the artist's reality; they bring cultural and religious significance to objects of belief and sanctity.⁹ This understanding of visibility is based on art not as an object but as a sign, since art plays a role in the ruling social

4 Smeyers, "Building the Archive of Stigmatic Women Religious," 337.

5 Reina Gattuso, "Women's Reflections in Renaissance and Modern European Painting," *Curationist*, 2022, <https://www.curationist.org/editorial-features/article/women's-reflections-in-renaissance-and-modern-europe-an-painting>.

6 Stigmata are physical phenomena defined not only by visible wounds, but also by the bearer's intense physical and spiritual suffering and moments of ecstasy. In a visitor's account, Theodor Nolde described observing the stigmatized Rosalie Put, noting both her wounds and the ecstatic states she experienced. His account presents stigmata as a visible, physical phenomenon marked by both suffering and ecstasy. Tine Van Osselaer, Kristof Smeyers, et al., "On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity," in *The Devotion and Promotion of Stigmatics in Europe, c. 1800–1950: Between Saints and Celebrities* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 74.

7 Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 154.

8 Simon Critchley, *Mysticism* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2024), 39–40.

9 Alex Potts, "Two Sign," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 25.

and cultural apparatuses of a time period.¹⁰ Significance and formal representation in this structure work in tandem, relying on the knowledge and belief of the viewer to place meaning upon the object. When sign takes on material form, the narratives and embodied representations of the divine become inherently subjective. They rely not only on the viewer's interpretation, but also on the figure itself, offering its presence to be made an image.¹¹ Rico Franes analyzes Jacques Lacan's theories of objects of faith as reliant on coming into existence *to be seen*.¹² This idea implies that the object does not influence the image, but is molded to meet the demands of the image.¹³ The Church invites the viewer to fixate on what is seen in the image, while fantasizing about what is invisible yet signified by the image.¹⁴ Figures of Catholic divinity take on the forms of their social climate; they are a reflection of cultural preferences and not solely a body of the Spirit. Usually, the classification of being seen and being are independent of one another; however, in the context of figures who are visions of belief, the image is the vision, and in turn, the formulation of faith. Being and meaning in the Lacanian context are separate, yet work in a paradoxical process; one must *be* to denote meaning, but meaning destroys being.¹⁵ Meaning pertains to the external, and the signs that surround the subject, while being refers to the bare existence of the subject.¹⁶ The process of signification of the world by the subject in turn destroys its ability to return to being; when applied to Catholic signs, which rely on meaning to be seen, it presents a model that reveals the socio-cultural focus of religious iconography. It is this process of signification that constructs holiness, stabilizing it into a seemingly singular idea of the sacred. Yet when these signifiers are reattached to symbols that carry personal meanings and identities, they disrupt the socio-cultural order—unsettling the reproducible visual codes that dictate what is recognized as sacred and what is excluded.

Christian modes of visibility create a form of representation that is reproducible, one that can be transferred to other cultures to suppress unique expression and create uniformity. Modes of visibility carry layered significance in images of religiosity as not only methods of cultural construct but also as creators of religio-cultural "Otherness."¹⁷ Sylvia Wynter analyzes the hierarchy of thought and religious practice used for imperialist means, explaining that the constructs created by denominational Otherness are held within the Spirit and Flesh codes,¹⁸ which are projected

10 Potts, "Two Sign," 26.

11 Rico Franes, "Lacan and Byzantine Art: In the Beginning Was the Image," in *Byzantium/Modernism: The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*, ed. Roland Betancourt and Maria Taroutina (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2015), 316.

12 Franes, "Lacan and Byzantine Art," 318.

13 Franes, "Lacan and Byzantine Art," 316.

14 Franes, "Lacan and Byzantine Art," 318.

15 Franes, "Lacan and Byzantine Art," 321.

16 Franes, "Lacan and Byzantine Art," 320.

17 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation--an Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (September 2003): 296, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>.

18 It marks a distinction between the celestial and the human. In the medieval Christian context, humanity was understood as bound by Original Sin, requiring the continual pursuit of spiritual redemption. In the colonial period, however, this framework shifted toward the idea that man is created in God's image. As a result, judgment moves away from degrees of spiritual perfection and toward standards of rational, earthly perfection and imperfection. This shift establishes a hierarchy that enables a clear division between "Man" and subjugated Human Others. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 287–88.

onto physical reality.¹⁹ Maintaining a separation of the Spirit and the fallen Flesh absolutizes a “general order of existence.”²⁰ These codes are necessary in subjugating others to create order within places where people are forced under colonial control. Catholic iconography and symbols carry a directive created by the European religious hierarchy. How one consumes image as separate from being, while relying on being to place meaning on image, continues the contradictory idea of the separation between Spirit and Flesh.



Figure 1: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647–52, marble sculpture, Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. Photograph by the author.

Mystic and ecstatic experience blurs the boundary between the body and the Spirit, uniting them through moments of divine vision and earthly pleasure. Saint Teresa of Avila played a large role in the documentation of mystic occurrences in Spain in the 1500s, and her story has far-reaching religious and visual implications. Teresian iconography became popular following the publication of her autobiography *Vida* in the sixteenth century, which includes an account of the piercing of her heart, and the ecstasy she experienced.²¹ Her writing inspired the marble sculpture *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52, fig. 1), created by Bernini sixty years after her death in 1582. Her head is tilted back and mouth agape—she is shown in the midst of experiencing pleasure. The angel readies his golden rod, lifting her by the edge of the layers of immaculate fabric which cloak her form. Her face is the main testament of ecstasy and connects to Saint Teresa’s personal accounts of her body during the ecstatic process.

Saint Teresa claims that at peak ecstasy, all senses are lost and the eyes are usually closed because of one’s inability to engage with the earthly world.²² As the flaming arrow pierced her heart repeatedly, she described the spiritual pain as so intense that it transformed into a feeling so sweet that it became an experience of immeasurable pleasure.²³ The story connects the body with the Spirit—one experiences ecstasy, spiritual suspension within the body at the hands of the divine. Saint Teresa characterizes the experience as being the “farthest from normal human condition.”²⁴

Saint Teresa’s ecstasy corroborates yet challenges the notion that earthly meaning prevents one from experiencing divine events and interacting with celestial beings. The ecstasy was a highly physical experience, one she remembered through her body, Spirit, and mind as juxtaposing the earthly human experience. Given this, Bernini’s depiction of Saint Teresa’s body carries two meanings. First, it canonizes women in mystic experience, unifying vision, divinity, and phys-

19 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 296.

20 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 279.

21 Critchley, *Mysticism*, 33.

22 Susanne Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision: Two Concepts Connected with Bernini’s *Teresa*,” *The Art Bulletin* 66, no. 3 (September 1984): 508, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.1984.10788195>.

23 Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision,” 510.

24 Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision,” 509.

ical ecstasy into one visual object, re-imagining conventional Catholic signs of faith. Second, it emphasizes the experience of female pleasure, breaking the traditional visual sign of women as penitent and passive within Catholic imagery.

In European contexts, mystic and ecstatic experience challenges the materialization of religious figures as repeatable models, which aim to turn followers into subjects of institutional belief rather than participants in faith itself. However, these frameworks in the context of colonization in the Americas, where European expansion was not just religious but ideological, linguistic, and cultural, created social “order” as needed for Spanish profit.²⁵ The secularization of the Christian identity into the socially upheld “Man” created another secular category of Otherness.²⁶ This was the framework necessary to justify the violence, oppression, and slavery which occurred under the Spanish for their earthly capital. The materialism rooted within Catholicism allowed colonists to give rise to an order of faith based on the order of economic wealth.²⁷ This construction of Catholic holiness informed followers’ spiritual and social consciousness, and what came to be socially accepted was and is rooted in moral values crafted to meet the needs of a globalized system.²⁸

When imposed upon gender and sexuality, the European model of hierarchy is necessary for upholding Catholic values of female subjugation and the oppression of queerness. In the Americas, the rejection of queerness and sexual difference was introduced and enforced by European colonizers. In her study of *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, scholar Juana María Rodríguez analyzes shame and submission from the colonial to the modern Latin American context. Rodríguez explains the attachment of shame to “Latina-ness” as rooted in the legacy of European conquest.²⁹ She argues that queer positioning of bodies can present an opportunity to reimagine situations of submission: “This always imagined masochism confirms the way the unequal distribution of power in heterosexual romance is normalized: women are ‘naturally’ assumed to languish and take pleasure in their suffering over male dominance and cruelty.”³⁰ European expectations of female compliance with social and domestic inequalities operate under the hierarchical model, embedding violence and oppression into relationships of intimacy.³¹

Rodríguez’s analysis of religious and socially imposed suffering as a tool of sustaining European systems of hierarchy highlights how Latina bodies function differently in images of faith and worship as having to operate within the history of submission and conquest.³² The painting *La Eucaristía* (2020, fig. 2) by Cháirez challenges aforementioned notions of feminine passivity, repositioning the sign of the Eucharist and cloistered body by foregrounding female pleasure.

25 Notions of religio-cultural differences as means of creating hierarchy for profit is a Greco-Christian cultural construct, basing relationships with others on profit and empire. Profit in this context pertains to economic wealth, and the Spanish empire’s seizure of land and people to be subjects of their economic and ideological means. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 157.

26 Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 292.

27 Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 158.

28 Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 157.

29 Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 143.

30 Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, 143.

31 Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, 143.

32 Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, 144.

Set within an oval frame, the painting presents a nun and a chalice of wine representing the blood of Christ against a deep gray background; her head is encircled by a luminous gold halo suggesting her sacred presence. Cháirez reimagines the cloistered Latina body as one reserved for self-pleasure, utilizing the symbol of the Eucharist as the body in a dual sense: as the cloistered Catholic Latina, and as the figurative holy body or Spirit symbolized by the overflowing cup of wine. The cup is a symbol of Christ and the spiritual consciousness; her interaction with the cup brings her autonomy to the forefront of the scene. The fingers of her left hand dip into the chalice, as the right descends into darkness in the folds of her garment below her abdomen. The blood of Christ trickles down the cup onto her lowered hand. Her tilted face and closed eyes suggest that she derives pleasure from her actions. The nun's fingering of the Eucharist and herself, cast shadows, and closed eyes connect to the physical pleasure within divine ecstasy.

Similar to Bernini's depiction of ecstasy, the ephemeral quality of *La Eucaristía* is shown through mystic gestures, including levitation. The bottom of her habit floats over her cape and casts shadows upon the cream fabric beneath it, giving the impression that she is ascending. Mystics, including Saint Teresa, have documented reports of levitation when accepting the Eucharist, the mystic body becoming a reflection of the miracles done by the body of Christ. The painting utilizes Christian symbols to highlight the holiness in the autonomy of self, connecting the celestial body to the earthly body of the woman. By centering self-derived pleasure and setting it in relation to a figure of sanctity, the painting illuminates the connection between pleasure, ecstasy, and divine presence.

Mystic experiences are often recorded through physical manifestations on the body. Stigmata are a visible and bodily phenomenon encompassing states of ecstasy, pain and suffering.³³ The marks that appear on the hands and feet are those which imitate Christ's wounds from the Crucifixion, and are viewed as divine intervention and signs of sanctity within the person who bears them.³⁴ The physical phenomena relates to the social apparatuses of the church through the culture of Catholic suffering. Osselaer et al. characterize redemptive suffering as a cultural construction, socially defining what pain is, as if pain in itself carries a divine purpose.³⁵ The suffering associated with stigmata is both physical and spiritual, due to its direct relationship with the Passion of Christ; the pain is that of reparative suffering, pain which atones for the sins



Figure 2: Fabián Cháirez, *La Eucaristía*, 2020, oil on canvas, 80 x 59 cm. Courtesy the artist.

33 Van Osselaer et al., "On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity," 74.

34 Jesus bore five wounds from his Passion and Crucifixion: one on each hand and foot from being nailed to the cross, and one on his side from a spear wound. Individuals experiencing stigmata often display wounds on their hands and feet, and some also bear marks on the head from the crown of thorns, bruises on the shoulders, or a wound on the side. Van Osselaer et al., "On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity," 74, 79.

35 Van Osselaer et al., "On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity," 87.

of man.³⁶ Intriguingly, the timeline of stigmata cases align with the Catholic calendar and events within the church, showing the wounds as not only a mystic phenomenon, but a divine response to societal structures.³⁷ The social implication of stigmata relates to the spectacle they create, as stigmata cases were investigated by travelers, researchers, and church officials. In fact, Osselaer et al. note that “stigmata were perceived as sensational epiphenomena, ‘proof’ of the authenticity of a spiritual experience, which many stigmatists were happy to exhibit.”³⁸ This willingness to show the wounds, as proof of heavenly intervention to convert others to Catholic faith, carries social and institutional religious motivations. However, the exhibition of the stigmatic female body as evidence of the divine through physical expression breaks the gendered bounds within Catholic ideology.

Events surrounding the appearance of stigmata on women’s bodies reportedly involved the undoing of spatial constraints, such as her bedroom or domestic sphere; for nuns with stigmata, this includes their spaces of worship and devotion.³⁹ The need for there to be visible and physical proof of the stigmata has been an expectation noted in visitors’ accounts.⁴⁰ The public visibility of stigmatic individuals sparked criticism, as women were put on display for legal examinations of the phenomenon; this question of the authenticity of the wounds made a distinction between godliness or deception, saintliness or sin.⁴¹ The Church wanted to confirm the stigmata as a spiritual phenomenon, but also felt there was a requirement to see the pain, suffering, and physical disability of the stigmata bearer. Smeyers explains the spectacle of the stigmatic body in the nineteenth century as consumed by followers and press, with stigmatic bodies being the crux of debates of fraud or faith, altering the cultural perceptions of the stigmata.⁴² The public spectacle illuminates the social controversies surrounding stigmatic women, as their bodies were seen not only as holy vessels, but as sites of suffering in society, as bearers of the pain once experienced by Christ. In furtherance of this point, Osselaer et al. analyze the stigmatic woman’s body as a reflection of both Christ and society: “The visitors may have been looking at a female body but they were gazing at something that represented other bodies, someone else’s pain—Christ’s obviously, but not solely.”⁴³ The role of the female body in conveying the divine as an earthly reality occurs through mysticism. The spectacle of the body for the confirmation of God as reality illuminates the paradox created by mystic situations in Western religious contexts. The stigmatic woman’s body being consumed by onlookers, and gazed at by strangers, challenges Catholic notions of feminine inaccessibility, despite the stigmatic body being the very representation of sacredness.⁴⁴ Although the transformation of the female body once it becomes stigmatic challenges religious gender confines, the spiritual and physical suffering of the body maintains the culture of Catholic

36 Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 87.

37 The intensity of the stigmata bearers pain coincides with Holy Week, days linked to Christ’s passion, or to the appearance of stigmata on St. Francis. Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 88.

38 Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 77.

39 Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 73.

40 Visitors, or viewers of stigmata, include church officials and religious tourists. Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 73.

41 Smeyers, “Building the Archive of Stigmatic Women Religious,” 338.

42 Smeyers, “Building the Archive of Stigmatic Women Religious,” 339.

43 Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 92.

44 Van Osselaer et al., “On Stigmata, Suffering and Sanctity,” 81.

suffering.⁴⁵

Cháirez's *Estigmas* (2023, fig. 3) transforms the suffering female body into one of queer pleasure and celestial connection. The painting is vivid and striking; the deep red background juxtaposes the tender embrace of two nuns, one of them stigmatic. Their eyes are closed, as the nun in the foreground tilts her head upward to touch the face of the nun behind her. The top of her white habit glows with an iridescent mixture of white, blue, and purple hues. The nun in the background wears a crown of white roses, which are associated with the Virgin Mary, her white cape signifying purity of heart. The rose-crowned nun is darker in complexion and embodies symbols associated with the Virgin Mary, reflecting a connection to contemporary depictions of Mary in the Annunciation. Both nuns wear brown robes, connecting them to the Carmelite nuns, a branch of Christianity founded in the 1200s, and reformed by Saint Teresa in the sixteenth century. Carmelite Catholicism is rooted in humility, represented by the coarse fabric of their brown robes. A thin, gold halo surrounds the nuns' heads, their forms framed by deep red; the darkened edges suggest that light is emanating from the two women.

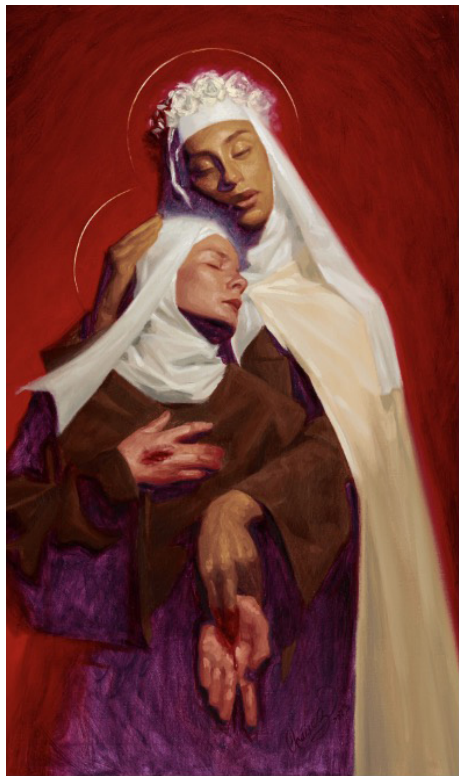


Figure 3: Fabián Cháirez, *Estigmas*, 2023, oil on canvas, 96 x 62 cm. Courtesy the artist.

The rose-crowned nun tenderly holds the stigmatic nun's tilted head, as her other hand enters the stigma in her open palm. The stigma emulates the wound of Christ, and simultaneously the female vulva; the imagery of the open wound is one of pain and suffering, as well as ecstasy and pleasure. Amy Hollywood analyzes the readings of female sex as a wound, identifying its homoerotic underpinnings in representations of Christ's wounds since the medieval period.⁴⁶ She argues that images of Christ's wounds, particularly of his side wound, evokes vaginal form, destabilizing the heterosexual matrix that aligns masculinity with penetration and femininity with penetrability.⁴⁷ Stigmata's relation to the notion of female sex as a wound is reinterpreted through the crowned nun's penetration of the stigmatic nun's hand, shifting the focus toward feminine pleasure and queer gestures. The stigmatic nun's raised right hand reveals that the wound pierces through, as it is visible on the top of her right hand and the inside of the left palm. Her right hand rests on her chest while her fingers grasp at the robe indicating the tightness within her body.

Her lowered palm with the penetrated stigma appears tense; her extended fingers and bent thumb react to the sensual touch. The crowned nun's cradling and caressing of the stigmatic nun demonstrates the immense tender-

45 Smeyers, "Building the Archive of Stigmatic Women Religious," 339.

46 Amy Hollywood, "That Glorious Slit: Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound," in *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Theresa Krier (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 120.

47 Hollywood, "That Glorious Slit," 120.

ness in the pseudo-sexual encounter. Catholic imagery of purity and chastity drapes the nun in the background, juxtaposing her erotic engagement with the stigmata, alluding to the capacity of cloistered women to have queer desires and fantasies. The crowned nun is an active participant in the scene, entering the open wound while also nurturing and comforting the stigmatized nun, illustrating the sensuality and vulnerability within mystic ecstatic experiences. The queer narrative in *Estigmas* reconnects the religious mystic body to the female body, liberating the body through its display of anatomy that stimulates earthly pleasures, connecting the feminine flesh with the celestial Spirit.

The queer framing of two cloistered women and the wounds of Christ within *Estigmas* contests the suppression of queerness in the Americas as a method built for justifying violence, oppression, and Otherness. Before the Conquista, queerness was accepted socially and religiously, as deities and idols were queer in religions in the Americas before Catholicism.⁴⁸ The fear instilled in populations whose ancestors and communities were deeply impacted by colonial violence maintains the Eurocentric narratives of moral and denominational hierarchy, and are perpetuated in the present by Catholic groups founded on conservative social and religious beliefs.⁴⁹

The exhibition *La venida del Señor (The coming of the Lord)*, featuring three paintings from Cháirez's series *Monjes y Cardinales*, was scheduled to run through February 2025 at the Academia de San Carlos Centro Histórico in Mexico City.⁵⁰ Members of the Association of Christian Lawyers (AAC) and Christian groups of the University of Mexico affiliated with the exhibition filed a complaint and staged peaceful protests outside the gallery.⁵¹ Following the complaints and public reaction, Judge Francisco Javier Rebolledo Peña passed a suspension order on the show, giving the gallery twenty-four hours to remove the paintings or risk the use of public force.⁵² Expectations of how viewers encounter and consume the Catholic sign are placed on the artist and figures themselves; when the artists transfigure colonial narratives, their works are removed or protested for occupying exhibition spaces. The censoring of artists who utilize religious imagery in “non-traditional” ways relies on an understanding of religious art as being literal representations of sacred figures. Classifying certain mystic and religious representations as sacred and others as not in an area of faith that relies on figural imagery to be seen, consumed, and followed creates an ambiguous interpretation of traditional faith. However, besides its social impact, the closing of the gallery raises an important question about visibility and visibility within acceptable and so-called unacceptable uses of Catholic signs. Why are figural interpretations that reimagine and reposition Catholic Latina bodies considered sacrilegious by “traditionalist” belief? Art that highlights the Latina body as one of divine and earthly power fails to uphold the Eurocentric idea of gendered hierarchy in faith and devotion.

I present these ideas of controversy surrounding Cháirez at the conclusion of this paper so as not to limit my reading of the work merely to the social reaction which it has provoked. Jennifer Doyle explains how writing in the context of controversy dilutes the analysis of an artwork,

48 Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, 154.

49 Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, 157.

50 Rhea Nayyar, “Mexican Artist Decries ‘Censorship’ of Queer Nun and Priest Portraits,” *Hyperallergic*, March 5, 2025, <https://hyperallergic.com/994150/mexican-artist-decries-censorship-of-queer-nun-and-priest-portraits/>.

51 Nayyar, “Mexican Artist Decries ‘Censorship’ of Queer Nun and Priest Portraits.”

52 Nayyar, “Mexican Artist Decries ‘Censorship’ of Queer Nun and Priest Portraits.”

which triggers societal reaction, “not because it is emotionally intense but because the subjects of their works are so politically charged. Art controversy invariably simplifies its object.”⁵³ It is important to acknowledge, however, the role that the policing of bodies, minds, and spaces has in preserving colonial ideologies. The female Catholic form engaging in self-pleasure, queer gestures, and ecstatic satisfaction eliminates the Catholic imaginings of religious women as unseen and incapable of sensual experiences and desires. Mysticism and ecstasy automatically challenge these notions, but when placed in the context of the Americas, it illuminates the maintenance of European paradigms of control through religious symbols.

Like *La Eucaristía*, *Estigmas* presents autonomy and pleasure as a form of connection to the celestial, freeing the Latina and cloistered body and reimagining its power through the breaking of religio-social confines. The cloistered bodies within *La Eucaristía* and *Estigmas* are liberated from the culture of Catholic shame and suffering and instead become symbols of divine existence through ecstatic experience. The intimacy and gentleness of *Estigmas* remove the spectacle associated with the feminine stigmata and place viewers’ attention on the pleasure in queer touch and gestures. Throughout this paper, I have explored the Catholic mystic body as a site of controversy, pleasure, and spectacle, offering insight into the possible liberation of religious women through queer transformations of Catholic image and sign. From Europe to the Americas, the upholding of traditional iterations of religious women as penitent and cloistered is broken through mystic action and ecstatic pleasure.

53 Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), xiv.

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The Tangled Braid: Race as Signifier in the Art of Sula Bermúdez-Silverman

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Abstract

In *Table for Elegua, Table for Elijah* (2018), Sula Bermúdez-Silverman creates an autobiographical meditation focused on the potential of hair as a racial signifier. Through two video works embedded in the installation, Bermúdez-Silverman juxtaposes her mixed-race identity with the controversial figure of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who insists she is Black. This paper examines how the artist incorporates Dolezal's story not to sensationalize it, but to grapple with the questions her controversy raises about racial legibility and the cultural wound it left on Black communities. Using critical texts by Nicole Fleetwood, Saidiya Hartman, Sandra Ruiz, and José Esteban Muñoz that conceptualize race, colorism, and its relationship to *latinidad* as well as its manifestations in the United States, I argue that Bermúdez-Silverman reveals the inherent slippage between racial and ethnic boundaries, which are perpetually blurred and re-signified. Rather than resolve ambiguities surrounding identity, Bermúdez-Silverman insists on dwelling in them, making visible the precarity and contingencies of racial categories. With the videos exemplifying a small part of what the artist sought to investigate through *Table for Elegua, Table for Elijah*, they demonstrate how she did not privilege appropriative behavior that left a cultural wound, but rather used it to better understand the multivalent facets of her own identity, dissecting the wound in an attempt to find healing.

Keywords:

racial legibility, appropriation, colorism, visuality, installation, video art

In June 2015, the internet erupted with the story of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman in Spokane, Washington who was president of the city's NAACP chapter and claimed to be Black. Dolezal's false posturing ignited a complicated and harmful debate regarding racial identity in the United States. Identifying as a woman who was born white but is now Black, she used her adoptive siblings and biological and adoptive children to affirm her racial identity. Moreover, she claimed the generational suffering of Black people in the United States as her own. Her story went viral across conservative and liberal news outlets alike. Dolezal added fuel to the fire by appearing on major television news programs such as *The Today Show* and *The Real*. This media attention culminated in Dolezal's publication of a memoir entitled *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World* in 2017, an attempt to mitigate the public damage she had done to her own reputation.¹ What is poignant about Dolezal's story is not her public persona but the platform she was given both before and after being outed as white. It raises the question: would a Black person claiming to be white in the United States today be taken as seriously and make for such a widespread news story? Probably not, given the complex history of racial passing, which

1 She was also the subject of a documentary film on Netflix in 2018 to tell her story and that of her family. See *The Rachel Divide* directed by Lauren Brownson (United States: Netflix, 2018).



Figure 1. Sula Bermúdez-Silverman, *Table for Elegua, Table for Elijah*, 2018, clay dominoes, level vials, tar brush, Drakels, spork, hair pick, Elijah's Cup, Manishewitz concord grape wine, seder plate, salt water, Polly pocket, Lazy Kate, artist's hair, herramientas de Santería, 7 knob green candle, butt plug, kanekalon synthetic hair, napkin contract, railroad spike, iron round hair brush, stainless steel potato masher, dome magnifier, offerings for Elegua: ache de santo, cascarilla, chamalongos, cowrie shells, coyote teeth, guinea pepper (grains of paradise), clavo de linea, jutia pescado humado, macutos, brass bell, obatala egg, toasted corn, 3 x 7 x 7 ft when closed. Installation view from *Neither Fish, Flesh, nor Fowl*, California African American Museum, Los Angeles, 2020. Photograph by Elon Schoenholz.

at times allowed Black people to benefit from the advantages of a white identity. In the contemporary moment, a Black person claiming to be white might be dismissed, without so much as a newspaper column or clickbait headline.²

I preface this essay with Dolezal's story because of her involvement in *Table for Elegua, Table for Elijah* (2018, fig. 1) by artist Sula Bermúdez-Silverman and because of the questions her

2 For discussion on the history of "passing" and "reverse passing" illustrating various instances in which white people passed as non-white, see Baz Dreisinger, *Near Black: White-to-Black Passing in American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008) and Daniel J. Sharfstein, "Rachel Dolezal's 'Passing' Isn't So Unusual," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/25/magazine/rachel-dolezals-passing-isnt-so-unusual.html>. Another similar example of a woman who claimed to be Black and Latina is the case of Jessica Krug, who revealed in 2020 she had appropriated Blackness as part of her racial identity. Unlike Dolezal who never admitted publicly to being white, Krug published a public admittance and apology for her actions in a blog post. See Michael Levenson, "Professor Investigated for Posing as Black Has Resigned, University Says," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/09/us/jessica-krug-george-washington-university.html> and Poppy Noor, "White US professor Jessica Krug admits she has pretended to be Black for years," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/03/jessica-krug-white-professor-pretended-black>.

controversy raises about racial legibility. We enter gallery spaces with preconceived notions of what it means to be Black or white, notions that are most often rooted in lived experience. Thus, *Table for Eleggua*, *Table for Elijah* is significant both as an exercise in the artist's self-exploration and because of the affective resonance it activates in viewers. Bermúdez-Silverman's engagement with Dolezal's story is not about sensationalizing her, but about the cultural wound she represents.

Created as part of Bermúdez-Silverman's MFA thesis at Yale University, *Table for Eleggua*, *Table for Elijah* is an installation comprised of a two-piece table with objects meticulously arranged across its surface. It includes spiritual items, like offerings for Eleggua from Santería and Elijah's cup of wine from Judaism—religions practiced by Bermúdez-Silverman's grandmothers, respectively. The spiritual tokens sit alongside children's toys, various hair tools, kitchen utensils, and sex toys. Other pieces include six dreidels emblazoned with images of Canadian rapper Drake ("Drakels"), a compact Polly Pocket hair salon play kit, and a Lazy Kate with the artist's hair spun onto it. Two videos are positioned on opposite sides of the table: a video triptych titled *Duck Test* (2018) and a single-channel work, *Removal of Faux Locs Installed by Nkechi Diallo (aka Rachel Dolezal)* (2018). These videos, which exist within the context of the overall installation, also serve as documentation of an unfinished project that explores racial signification and its contribution to identity formation.³ The objects combine to create a kind of portrait of the artist; items that may have been found around her childhood home are combined with more obvious traces of the self, such as video recordings and human hair collected from the artist's hairbrush.

Table for Eleggua, *Table for Elijah* is primarily autobiographical. Only in the video *Duck Test* does Bermúdez-Silverman share her investigation of self with someone else, namely, Rachel Dolezal. Bermúdez-Silverman, who is of Jewish and Afro-Puerto Rican heritage, became interested in Dolezal's physical resemblance to herself. As she explains, "The reason I was so intrigued by her was that all she did was change her hair in order to become 'Black.' That is kind of the same line I straddle on [...] The scale can be tipped one way or another depending on how someone views me, and it's mostly my hair that does that."⁴ This observation points to how visibility structures racial perception. As Nicole Fleetwood writes, seeing racial difference is never simple; it becomes more complicated for those of mixed race, whose skin color may not, for example, register as Black while their features suggest otherwise.⁵ In Bermúdez-Silverman's case, hair becomes the marker of her racial ambiguity.

Colorism—discrimination based on skin tone within the same racial or ethnic group—complicates this terrain further. Fleetwood observes that "colorism attempts to fix a scale of blackness based on dominant structuring principles of the field of vision," yet simultaneously produces anxiety about vision's failure to detect difference.⁶ She continues, "Because colorism as a system of creating and maintaining racial differences produces its own failure—that is, certain bodies escaping detection—the US legal system historically has been and continues to be a central

3 Sula Bermúdez-Silverman, email exchange with author, March 21–April 29, 2022.

4 André-Naquian Wheeler, "sula bermudez-silverman turns her hair into embroidered works of art," *i-D Magazine*, June 18, 2018, <https://i-d.co/article/sula-bermudez-silverman-turns-her-hair-into-embroidered-works-of-art/>.

5 Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visibility, and Blackness* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 72.

6 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 73.

institution for regulating and adjudicating colorist practices.”⁷ Both Dolezal and Bermúdez-Silverman occupy positions of relative privilege due to having a light complexion, yet their proximity to whiteness marks them in pointedly different ways. Dolezal performed Blackness for over five years largely through the wigs she wore or how she styled her hair, while Bermúdez-Silverman’s hair signals her Afro-Latina identity. The slippage of racial detection operates in both directions, though with vastly different stakes.

As an Afro-Latina of Puerto Rican descent, Bermúdez-Silverman navigates not only colorist ideology but also *latinidad*, which scholar Tatiana Flores argues is rooted in anti-Black racism.⁸ Further, as Sandra Ruiz writes, Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory remains trapped in a time loop of colonialism since its annexation in 1898.⁹ To be Puerto Rican, as Ruiz notes, is to be inherently of mixed race, bound by temporal boundaries beyond linear history due to the island’s quasi-colonial status.¹⁰ Yet, the boundaries between race and ethnicity are perpetually blurred and re-signified, leaving the question of what it means to be Afro-Latina unresolved even in contemporary scholarship. José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of “brownness” captures this: a racialization that indexes vulnerability to discrimination, xenophobia, and dehumanization, operating similarly to anti-Black racism and not reducible to Latinx identity. His “brown commons” resists racial capitalism’s individualizing effect through shared affective experiences and conviviality.¹¹ As he states, “Brown, it is important to mention, is not strictly the shared experience of harm between people and things; it is also the potential for the refusal and resistance to that often-systemic harm. Brownness is a kind of uncanny persistence in the face of distressed conditions of possibility.”¹² Like Muñoz’s concept of Brownness, Bermúdez-Silverman’s artwork refuses easy categorization, insisting instead on the instability and at times futility of racial and ethnic boundaries.¹³

What remains consistent across *Table for Elegua*, *Table for Elijah* is the artist’s fixation on hair and its many forms, both on and beyond her body. In the installation, several combs and brushes are laid out alongside kitchen utensils that might resemble hair tools, including a large spork and a potato masher. On a three-bobbin arched Lazy Kate, Bermúdez-Silverman has spun her hair like any other fiber to create strands of yarn. By experimenting with the ways in which

7 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 76.

8 Tatiana Flores, “‘Latinidad Is Cancelled’: Confronting an Anti-Black Construct,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 3, no. 3 (2021): 58–79.

9 Sandra Ruiz writes, “The Puerto Rican situation exists simultaneously under too much time and timelessness: on the one hand time has appeared to stand still for the island, basically unchanged in its quasi-national status since the annexation of Puerto Rico to the United States in 1898. The island’s lack of a ‘liberatory moment’ makes it difficult to read through traditional constructions of time and subject completion, so I turn to temporal acts of excess and redeploy them as resistance, inner strength, survival, transformation, and self-determination through scenes of endurance. [...] There’s a way to read with and through unwantedness, I suggest, that does not destroy the futural prospects of the subject under a looping colonialism.” See Sandra Ruiz, *Ricanness: Enduring time in anticolonial performance* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 25.

10 Ruiz, *Ricanness*, 2. Further, the 2010 and 2020 census data show an increasing number of Puerto Rican citizens identify as non-white. See Isar Godreau and Yarimar Bonilla, “Nonsovereign Racecraft: How Colonialism, Debt, and Disaster are Transforming Puerto Rican Racial Subjectivities,” *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 3 (2021): 517.

11 José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 2–3.

12 Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, 4.

13 Sóla Saar Agustsson, “Artists at Work: Sula Bermúdez-Silverman,” *East of Borneo*, March 31, 2021, <https://eastofborneo.org/articles/artists-at-work-sula-bermudez-silverman/>.

her hair can be presented and signified, the artist challenges the fundamental idea with which she started: her hair as the sole indicator of her racial difference. Hair as racial indicator can be manipulated in ways that skin complexion cannot. The artist, for example, could straighten her hair to indicate whiteness. If she cuts all of her hair, her racial ambiguity may be exacerbated or may dissipate. The malleability and instability of hair seem self-evident for the artist,

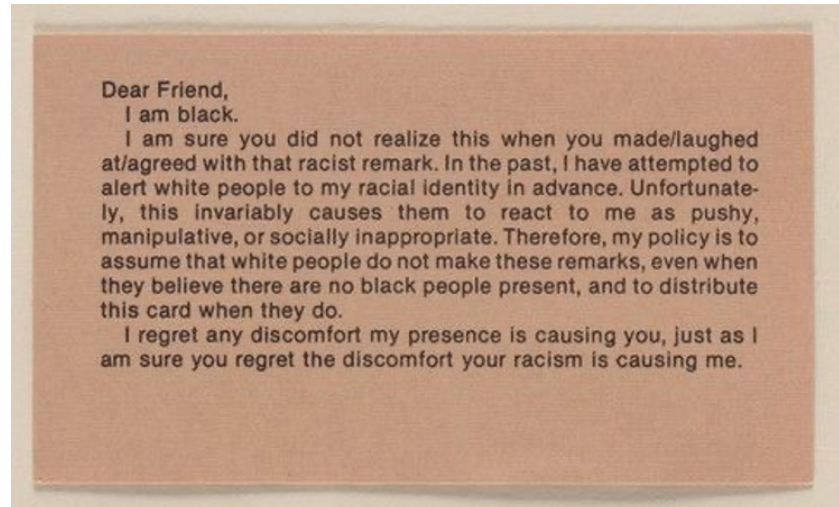


Figure 2. Adrian Piper, *My Calling (Card) #1*, 1986, offset lithograph, 1/8 × 1 1/8 in (0.3 × 2.9 cm). Image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery.

as she displays vestiges of hair once on her body now turned to waste material. While her work takes many subtle, implicit forms, Bermúdez-Silverman's approach to signifying her race is also reminiscent of a much more confrontational work by Adrian Piper. Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1* (1986, fig. 2) challenges assumptions about racial legibility and confronts everyday racism.¹⁴ Like Piper, Bermúdez-Silverman insists on disrupting comfortable assumptions, though her strategy differs. Whereas Piper hands out cards to those who have made racist remarks, Bermúdez-Silverman invites Dolezal into an extended, complex collaboration.

The video *Duck Test* documents segments of Bermúdez-Silverman and Dolezal's nine-hour conversation in a fabricated hair salon while Dolezal braids the artist's hair. The video contains no sound, and Dolezal's face is never fully visible. By withholding audio and image, Bermúdez-Silverman denies Dolezal a platform for redemption or explanation, forcing viewers instead

14 In handing out her calling card, Piper negates her ability to "pass" as white, and concludes with the statement, "I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me." Piper by no means initiates the discomfort, but by calling it out she disturbs the recipient of the card and strips them of the ability to claim any innocence in the matter. As David Marriott concisely points out, the calling card signifies "acts of negation and denial, the incipient hypocrisy when white people—innocently or not, unwittingly or not—imagining themselves unobserved by blacks, give vent to barely repressed forms of conscious and unconscious hatred." Marriott highlights the "accidental nature" in which hatred, discomfort, and contempt arise through such exchange catalyzed by Piper's performance. The artist denies any ability for a racist remark to go unnoticed or forgotten and brings forth as Marriott states, "the affect of those veiled scenes to social consciousness, to show how racism in American social life can itself be exchanged again and again, and especially when the targets of such violence are denied any symbolic equivalence as presences." Both Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1* and the controversy of Rachel Dolezal have to do with a self-identification that might contradict what people see, or what is real. In the case of Piper, she calls attention to her Blackness to stand up against racism in everyday life, though she might not appear Black as her calling card indicates. For Dolezal, she presents as Black though she is white. Although these are extremely different circumstances, they share in their strained similarities in their practice of self-presentation and performativity. See David Marriott, "On Racial Etiquette: Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Cards)*," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 1 (2013): <https://www.pomoculture.org/2016/09/25/on-racial-etiquette-adrian-pipers-my-calling-cards/>.

into discomfort and speculation.¹⁵ When the artist discusses the work, however, she reveals that Dolezal was “easy to get along with” and “charming and sociable”—revelations that complicate the audience’s moral certainty and serve as a reminder of people’s complicated humanity.¹⁶



Figure 3. Internet meme of Jeremy Meeks’ mugshot, 2015. Image courtesy of BBC News.

Dolezal’s story is one that should be taken seriously and risks collapsing the identities of constantly persecuted peoples with those who have historically experienced privilege due to their incorrectly presumed racial superiority. At the same time, it is just one more product of popular culture, one that everyone might collectively gawk at for its absurdity for a few days or weeks, until the next hit piece. Dolezal’s story can be understood as a paradigm of our current moment in pop culture: the age of the internet and misinformation, “going viral,” memes, clickbait, and instant fandom. This is complicated, however, by Bermúdez-Silverman’s construction of a careful milieu that looks like a retro hair salon with checkered floors, art on the walls, and colorful tools, some of which re-appear on *Table for Eleggua*, *Table for Elijah*. These nostalgic elements are intermixed with current trends, bringing the viewer constantly back to the present moment in *Duck Test*.

One such moment is a prolonged view of a small clipping of *The New York Times* “Arts” section that sits at the bottom of the salon mirror. The image is a mugshot of Jeremy Meeks that turned into an internet meme which in turn landed him a modeling career when he was released from prison in 2016. In 2015, Meeks was convicted of being a felon in possession of a firearm stemming from a charge from the previous year in Stockton, California.¹⁷ Upon Meeks’s arrest, his mugshot was posted by the local police on Facebook, and internet users instantly took to editing various captions onto the image on account of his presumed attractiveness. The image is highly stylized, which is unusual for such a portrait. With tattoos covering his neck, his sharp jawline, and piercing blue eyes, Meeks presents viewers with “reproducible racial alterity, nationalism, and hypermasculinity,” as Fleetwood writes.¹⁸ Through his appearance and tattoos—specifically the teardrop on his left cheek—Meeks is a prime example of what Fleetwood describes as “racialized alterity in the context of urban fashion and Black masculinity,” that is, “how the black male body signifies within and outside of black communities a form of coolness through racialized and masculine difference and a diaphanous ‘outlawness’

15 Bermúdez-Silverman, email exchange with author, March 21–April 29, 2022.

16 Wheeler, “sula bermudez-silverman turns her hair into embroidered works of art.”

17 See Veronica Rocha, “‘Hot Felon’ Jeremy Meeks released from federal prison and gets job offers,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-hot-felon-jeremy-meeks-released-20160309-story.html> and J. Freedom du Lac, “‘Hot mugshot guy’ Jeremy Meeks has been sentenced to 27 months in federal prison,” *The Washington Post*, February 6, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/02/06/hot-mugshot-guy-jeremy-meeks-has-been-sentenced-to-27-months-in-federal-prison/>.

18 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 152.

that maintains an affective quality even as it functions as a highly reproducible and mass-marketed commodity.”¹⁹ Meeks’s mugshot as an object of illicit visual pleasure defies expectations, thus coming as a welcome surprise to meme creators.

The fascination with Dolezal is in some sense a futile one, not unlike a viral meme that dies just as quickly as it is born. Dolezal’s story in the limelight is undoubtedly charged with more complex issues of racial identity than a meme like Meeks’s mugshot—one that in fact opened a new professional avenue for him as a runway model. As long as she garners media attention for claiming to be Black, Dolezal detracts from the voices of Black women who are fighting to be seen on equal terms with men and on equal terms with white individuals, including Spokane-based activists and NAACP members Kitara Johnson and Latoya Brackett who were deceived and felt negatively impacted as a consequence of Dolezal’s actions.²⁰

Removal of Faux Locs Installed by Nkechi Diallo (aka Rachel Dolezal) documents a different intimacy from *Duck Test*. In *Removal of Faux Locs*, Bermúdez-Silverman sits alone for several hours, directly facing the camera as she removes the braids Dolezal installed. The video opens with the artist making direct eye contact with the camera, asserting her gaze and agency. As the video accelerates, she continues locking eyes with the camera every few seconds, reminding viewers that she is looking back as actively as they are watching her. Midway through, text flashes on the screen that states, “I had to go eat something,” acknowledging the prolonged labor involved. In the final minutes, the video returns to normal speed as light fades; she finishes brushing out her natural hair, closing her laptop as the room darkens.²¹

Removal of Faux Locs demonstrates a quotidian discomfort familiar to many women with textured hair, a process usually hidden in private, intimate spaces. For viewers without textured hair, Bermúdez-Silverman makes visible an arduous, repetitive labor that is all too frequently expected but overlooked. For those with textured hair, she creates space for recognition and solidarity. The difference between the discomfort of *Duck Test* and *Removal of Faux Locs* lies here: one is interpersonal and speculative, while the other is embodied and shared.

A key instrument in the creation of *Duck Test* and *Removal of Faux Locs* is present in *Table for Elegua*, *Table for Elijah* and privileged on the artist’s website: the Actor Employment Agreement between Dolezal and Bermúdez-Silverman (2018).²² The agreement is printed onto a

19 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 152.

20 Johnson says, “We need to hold our leaders accountable. How is anybody supposed to believe any word that comes out of your mouth when she talked about their roles of race for African-Americans and the disparity? She was speaking truth, but now, in Spokane, it’s hard to push that message. And who’s affected by this? All the people that the NAACP had been advocating for.” She continues describing Dolezal, “I don’t care what color she is, I don’t care how she ethnically identifies, but it’s not okay to lie. That’s not okay.” Moreover, Beckett says of Dolezal, “She destroyed something that now we have to rebuild, if we can. She created the destruction for any Black woman after that, because she was pulling this race card,” and “In Black culture, if someone’s saying that they’re Black, you’re not going to question it.” See *The Rachel Divide*, online, directed by Lauren Brownson (United States: Netflix, 2018).

21 As Fleetwood writes, “Video art, in general, led to a movement of self-conscious artistic practice in which the artist used the medium of video for an often intimate exploration of the self, most intimately one’s own corporeality.” That is exactly what is evidenced through Bermúdez-Silverman’s two video works, particularly in *Removal of Faux Locs Installed by Nkechi Diallo (aka Rachel Dolezal)* as viewers are obligated to confront the muscle movements, tiredness, and repetition that the artist endures. See Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 191.

22 The Actor Employment Agreement previously appeared reproduced on the artist’s website, however the site is no longer extant.

cloth napkin and presented alongside the videos and objects on the table. The agreement brings viewers back to reality. Dolezal is not just a character in Bermúdez-Silverman's work nor is she simply a figment of internet pop culture. She is a real person, who was compensated for her participation in *Duck Test* and given standard terms and conditions prior to the project. Dolezal's legal name change from Rachel to Nkechi Amare Diallo in 2016 necessitates closer scrutiny. The act mirrors, disturbingly, Saidiya Hartman's decision to change her name from Valarie to Saidiya:

I asserted my African heritage to free myself from my mother's grand designs. Saidiya liberated me from parental disapproval and pruned the bourgeois branches of my genealogy. It didn't matter that I had been rejected first. My name established my authority with the people, extirpated all evidence of upstanding Negroes and their striving bastard heirs, and confirmed my place in the company of poor black girls—Tamikas, Roqueshas, and Shan-equas. Most of all, it dashed my mother's hopes. I had found it in an African names book; it means "helper."²³

Given that Hartman is a brilliant pioneer of reframing our understandings of slavery, history, and archiving, Dolezal's seemingly parallel act represents something entirely different. Hartman's name change was recuperative, reclaiming an erased cultural inheritance. Dolezal's was appropriative, though she too might have found her new legal name in an African names book. Both claim reinvention through naming, but the latter constitutes cultural theft. Bermúdez-Silverman invites us to sit in this discomfort: the recognition that the same gesture can enact either healing or violence depending on who performs it and from what position of power.

Bermúdez-Silverman had no intention of further promoting Dolezal or sensationalizing her story. As the artist claims in a 2018 interview: "My project was less concerned with her as a person and more about the cultural wound that she represents for so many people of color. Her notoriety reveals the depth and intensity of the pain and frustration people, namely Black people, feel about race and appropriation in the United States."²⁴ Ultimately, the videos were just a small part of what Bermúdez-Silverman sought to investigate through *Table for Elegua*, *Table for Elijah*. The artist did not privilege appropriative behavior that left this "cultural wound," but rather used it to better understand the multivalent facets of her own identity. Bermúdez-Silverman dissected the wound in an attempt to find healing.

Table for Elegua, *Table for Elijah* was included in Bermúdez-Silverman's first solo museum show, *Neither Fish, Flesh, nor Fowl* (2020–2021) at the California African American Museum (CAAM). Yet institutional recognition brings its own complications. CAAM specifically sought an Afro-Latinx artist, revealing how institutions confine artists within predetermined racial and ethnic taxonomies even as they strive to uplift them. Bermúdez-Silverman has declined other opportunities when she discovered all-white artist rosters, recognizing that her light skin and relative visibility position her as a "palatable face." When asked about how her racial ambiguity informs people's assumptions of her work, Bermúdez-Silverman stated:

I have a lot to say about that. Particularly during the Black Lives Matter uprising, I started getting emails and invitations, but I mostly declined the opportunities because I would go to the website and I would see there were literally zero Black artists on these rosters. It was clear that I was going to be a palatable face for them to put as their Black artist, right?

23 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 8.

24 Wheeler, "sula bermudez-silverman turns her hair into embroidered works of art."

First of all, this opportunity should go to somebody else who is darker-skinned than me or more visually Black. It's like, "You look sort of different, but you still have white skin." Even when I got the CAAM show, I was like, "Why am I the one getting this opportunity?" It's hard because even though I can pass as a white person, the context of how I'm perceived changes every single day.²⁵

Much like how Dolezal may have benefited from her lighter complexion during her tenure as president of the Spokane chapter of the NAACP, so too does Bermúdez-Silverman recognize the ways in which her appearance benefits her over other Afro-Latina artists and how she might be more readily tokenized as a Black and/or Latina artist in a sea of white creators. Such self-awareness catalyzes conversations surrounding issues of representation, inclusion, and equity. Rather than resolve ambiguities surrounding identity, Bermúdez-Silverman insists on dwelling in them, making visible the instability and precarity of racial categories and the persistent violence of attempting to contain people within them. Her work demands that viewers remain uncomfortable, refusing easy answers and instead confronting the tangled structures of race, ethnicity, and visual legibility that shape how we see and are seen.

25 Interview by Folasade Ologundudu, "Sula Bermúdez-Silverman," *Foundwork*, 2022, <https://foundwork.art/dialogues/sula-bermudez-silverman>.

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Blackness, Sin, and Evil: European Religious Perceptions in Albert Eckhout's Depictions of Africans, Dutch Brazil Series

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Abstract

Albert Eckhout's *Series of Eight Figures* (c. 1641–1643), painted for Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen in Dutch Brazil, visualizes colonized subjects as distinct racial “types” and contributed to emerging hierarchies of difference. Focusing on *African Man* and *African Woman and Child*, this article argues that Eckhout adapts Christian discourses on the Curse of Ham and the opposition of light and darkness to construct African Blackness as marked by sin, hypersexuality, and spiritual lack. Exaggerated skin tones, eroticized bodies, and the display of cowrie shells, ivory tusks, and tropical fruits detach these materials from African ritual contexts and recode them as emblems of commercial value and extractive potential. Reading Eckhout's paintings alongside early modern visual culture, biblical exegesis, and the Atlantic slave trade, the study shows how they operate not as neutral ethnographic images but as colonial instruments that naturalize racial hierarchy and help legitimize the enslavement and commodification of African peoples and resources.

Keywords:

Albert Eckhout, visual representation, Blackness, sin, biblical interpretation

Introduction

Albert Eckhout's *Series of Eight Figures* is a group of lifesize portraits painted around 1641–1643 in Dutch Brazil for Governor Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, who commissioned Eckhout and the landscape painter Frans Post to “describe” the colony's peoples, flora, and fauna through images rather than text. The series consists of four male-female pairs representing the principal “nations” of Dutch Brazil—Tupi, Tapuya, African, and mixed-race (*mameluca* and *mulatto*) subjects—each posed in three-quarter view against a carefully composed landscape and still-life backdrop. Plants, animals, tools, and luxury objects surround the figures, signaling supposed degrees of “civilization,” religious conversion, and economic usefulness to the colony, and translating the classificatory logic of the cabinet of curiosities into the visual language of large-scale portraiture. Produced during Maurits's governorship and later gifted as diplomatic trophies to the Danish court, the paintings operate simultaneously as courtly decoration, colonial inventory, and visual propaganda: they naturalize racial hierarchy, eroticize and exoticize non-European subjects, and present Dutch dominion over Brazil and the Atlantic slave trade as orderly and divinely sanctioned.

Within this broader program of visual classification and colonial propaganda, each figure in the series is designed to embody a particular racialized “type” and its imagined spiritual and moral status. Against this framework, the depiction of African subjects becomes especially revealing. Accordingly, this essay examines Albert Eckhout's *African Man* and *African Woman and Child* from the *Series of Eight Figures*, arguing that these paintings translate longstanding

Christian constructions of Blackness as cursed, hypersexual, and spiritually deficient into a visual language of the Dutch colonial project. Drawing on art historical analysis and scholarship on the Curse of Ham, light-dark symbolism, Edenic allegory, and Atlantic slavery, the essay shows how exaggerated corporeality and the strategic inclusion of symbolic objects—such as cowrie shells, ivory tusks, and tropical fruits—mobilize visual narratives that cast African Blackness as synonymous with sin and idolatry. Detached from their original African spiritual, ritual, and political contexts, these objects are reframed as signs of commercial value and colonial extraction, underscoring the exploitation of African resources and lives. Situating Eckhout's paintings within broader early modern European visual and theological discourses, this study demonstrates how these images function not as neutral ethnographic records but as pictorial instruments that naturalize racial hierarchy and help legitimize slavery, resource exploitation, and the commodification of African cultural and spiritual materials.

Early Biblical (Mis)Interpretations Towards the Age of Exploration

European constructions of African “Otherness” emerged through the convergence of biblical exegesis, cultural prejudice, and pseudo-historical scholarship that associated dark skin with moral corruption and divine punishment. Central to this framework was the post-biblical interpretation of the Curse of Ham (Genesis 9:18–25), which—despite the absence of any reference to race or skin color in the biblical text—was reconfigured by later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic commentators to link Ham's lineage to Blackness, servitude, and sin. As Akaki Mesabishvili argues, this racialization was a historical fabrication, since Noah and his family were not described in racial terms in the original scripture, revealing how theological narratives were retroactively manipulated to serve emerging racial ideologies.¹ These interpretations gained renewed force in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries through figures such as the papal theologian Johannes Annii, whose writings between 1498 and 1515 invented genealogical histories that framed African Blackness as the visible mark of Ham's curse, transforming allegedly “white” descendants into Black bodies marked by sin and hypersexuality.² Embedded within Renaissance scholarship, these claims aligned with prevailing European assumptions that whiteness was humanity's original and normative state, casting Blackness as a deviation or divine punishment. Collectively, such distorted readings of scripture provided a pseudo-theological and intellectual foundation for racial hierarchy, reinforcing perceptions of Africans as inherently inferior and legitimizing the dehumanization and enslavement that underpinned European colonial expansion.

The dichotomy of light and darkness in Genesis established a powerful metaphor in which light symbolized divine creation, purity, and spiritual enlightenment, while darkness represented sin, ignorance, and death—a framework that later informed Christian portrayals of Jesus as the “light of the world” (John 8:12) and darkness as separation from God. Early Church fathers such as St. Augustine extended these allegories by identifying Ethiopians—synonymous with Blackness in medieval Europe—with sin and moral degradation.³ This theological frame-

1 Akaki Mesabishvili, “Misinformation: Black Race Originated from Noah's Son Ham,” *MythDetector*, May 18, 2018, <https://mythdetector.com/en/misinformation-black-race-originated-from-noah-s-son-ham/>.

2 Joaneath Spicer, “European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts,” in *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Joaneath Spicer (Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum, 2012).

3 Augustine of Hippo, “Expositions on the Psalms,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1888), 508–9.

work influenced the way light-skinned Europeans viewed dark-skinned Africans, interweaving abstract metaphors of darkness with real-world biases and racial hierarchies. By the fifteenth century, as the Atlantic slave trade began, the association between Blackness and slavery was firmly ingrained in the European Christian mind. Black enslavement was frequently justified by invoking the Curse of Ham, turning biblical allegory into a tool for legitimizing the exploitation and subjugation of African peoples. As suggested by Joaneath Spicer, these interpretations, although fabricated and unsupported by the original biblical text, reveal the power of religious narratives in shaping cultural perceptions and justifying systemic injustices.⁴

The Age of Exploration did not generate new understandings of African societies so much as it intensified long-standing European religious and symbolic hierarchies of Blackness. As Winthrop Jordan argues, European thought had already structured Black/white difference as a moral and cosmological opposition, in which whiteness signified purity, virtue, and divinity, while Blackness connoted sin, baseness, and evil.⁵ Encounters with Africans were thus filtered through this entrenched dichotomy, leading Europeans to project symbolic meanings onto African bodies and cultures rather than engage with them on their own terms. For instance, in Albert Eckhout's *African Woman* and *Child*, the woman's skin is rendered several shades darker than that of the child beside her, while her exposed breasts, overflowing basket of tropical fruit, and the pipe tucked into her sash foreground fertility, sensuality, and indulgence as defining features of African womanhood. Likewise, the *African Man* is isolated against an African landscape, his dark skin accentuated and paired with an oversized ivory tusk and weaponry, casting him as both primitive and threatening, a visual condensation of European fantasies about African savagery and exploitable resources. African physical difference—especially dark skin—was exaggerated and homogenized, collapsing diverse societies into a singular racialized identity defined by perceived excess, hypersexuality, and moral deficiency. Religious practices were dismissed as idolatrous, social systems deemed uncivilized, and difference itself framed as evidence of inferiority.⁶ In this way, the Age of Exploration functioned less as an empirical encounter than as a reinforcing mechanism that translated symbolic associations of Blackness into racialized knowledge, ultimately legitimizing European domination, slavery, and colonial exploitation. These intertwined theological and symbolic traditions also shaped how African ritual objects were seen, collected, and represented, a dynamic that becomes crucial in Eckhout's treatment of cowrie shells and ivory tusks.

Appropriation of African Religious Objects: Shells and Ivory Tusks

The European commercialization of African ritual materials was inseparable from long-standing biblical and racial constructions of Blackness that shaped how such objects were perceived, represented, and exploited. Drawing on Albert Eckhout's painting *African Man* (1641, fig. 1), this section examines how cowrie shells and ivory tusks were visually mobilized to translate African cosmological objects into legible commodities within a Dutch colonial framework. In the painting, Eckhout presents a monumental Black male figure positioned in front of a coastal

4 Spicer, "European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts," 37.

5 Winthrop D. Jordan, with Christopher Leslie Brown and Peter H. Wood, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 7.

6 Jordan, Brown, and Wood, *White Over Black*, 5.

landscape, with a palm tree, scattered shells, and a prominent elephant tusk arranged around his body. Earlier scholars, including Rebecca Parker Brien and Elizabeth A. L. Latham, have emphasized the painting's ethnographic ambitions and its role in constructing racialized difference through exaggerated corporeality and exoticized attributes, yet the specific clustering of cowries and ivory has received less sustained attention as a theological and economic



Figure 1. Albert Eckhout, *African Man*, 1641, oil on canvas, 267 x 178 cm. Photograph by John Lee. Photograph © The National Museum of Denmark.

sign system.⁷ By foregrounding these objects, *African Man* becomes a key site for tracing the epistemic rupture between African ritual meanings and European commodifying logics.

In many African societies, particularly in West Africa, cowrie shells functioned simultaneously as economic media and culturally embedded forms of spiritual and symbolic capital, a duality that Akinwumi Ogundiran identifies as central to their power and efficacy rather than a contradiction.⁸ This dual status is obscured in Eckhout's composition, where shells are displaced from ritual assemblages and reconfigured as tokens of natural abundance and commercial value, anticipating their later intensive circulation within Atlantic systems of exchange. Archaeological evidence reinforces this embeddedness: Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo in Ile-Ife (1957–63) uncovered cowrie shells associated with ritual objects dated between the seventh and tenth centuries CE.⁹ Additional findings of cowries from Djoutoubaya, Senegal and Yorubaland burial contexts attest to their roles in fertility symbolism, ritual offerings, and beliefs surrounding the afterlife.¹⁰ These continuities demonstrate that the value of cowries was cosmological before it was monetary, a distinction obscured during European encounters when

7 Rebecca Parker Brien, *Visions of Savage Paradise: Albert Eckhout, Court Painter in Colonial Dutch Brazil*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Elizabeth A. L. Latham, "The Commodified Body in Albert Eckhout's Brazilian Paintings" (MA thesis, Southern Methodist University, 2010).

8 Karin Pallaver, "Cowries, the Currency That Powered West Africa," *ReThink Q*, no. 7. <https://rethinkq.adp.com/artifact-cowries-west-africa/>; Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Cowries and Rituals of Self-Realization in the Yoruba Region, ca. 1600–1860," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 84.

9 Léa Roth, Gérard Chouin, and Adisa Ogundofakan, "Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's Excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963)," *Afrique: Archéologie & Arts* 17 (November 2021): 77–114; Thurstan Shaw and Raymond Mauny, "Ife," in *2000 ans d'histoire africaine. Le sol, la parole et l'écrit. Mélanges en hommage à Raymond Mauny*, Tome I (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1981), 109–135.

10 Anne Haour and Annalisa Christie, "Cowries in the Archaeology of West Africa: The Present Picture," *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 54, no. 3 (2019): 287–321; Marta Truffa Giachet, Bernard Gratuze, Anne Mayor, and Eric Huysecom, "Compositional and Provenance Study of Glass Beads from Archaeological Sites in Mali and Senegal at the Time of the First Sahelian States," *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 12 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0242027>.

shells were abstracted into instruments of exchange within the transatlantic slave economy. Ethnographic parallels further illuminate this loss of meaning: the Zulu diviner's bandolier (c. 1940s–50s, fig. 2), analyzed by Abigail Moffett and Simon Hall, assembles multiple shell species—including cowries—to materialize ancestry, healing, fertility, and political authority, reinforcing the healer's spiritual legitimacy.¹¹ Strikingly, the assemblage mirrors the scattered varieties of shells in Eckhout's painting *African Man*, underscoring the unified spiritual significance of the various species of shells across many indigenous African societies, yet in the painting these shells have been visually flattened into a generic sign of trade wealth.

Also reinterpreted in Eckhout's *African Man*, the ivory tusk is another object that held deep social, ritual, and religious significance within the African cosmology, but was inadvertently reframed within the European commercial pursuit and representation, alongside the cowrie shells. Significantly, the value of both objects is altered, as the cowrie shells underwent significant transformation following European contact in the sixteenth century, which led to a substantial increase in the importation of cowrie shells, driven by growing European demand. The same European encounters and commercial interest also reframed African ivory tusks as mere exotic commodities.

Historically, ivory held deep spiritual and social meanings in precolonial African societies, where carved tusks and ivory regalia served as key components of royal ancestral shrines and ritual practices rather than simple trade goods.¹² Archaeological and art historical studies of Benin altar tusks and West and southern African ivory assemblages show that tusks materialized kingship, fertility, and ancestral authority, even as they later became entangled in expanding commercial networks.¹³ Excavations from farming communities in the uThukela and uMngeni valleys located in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa, dating between 600 and 1000 CE, reveal ivory's symbolic association with elephants as creation symbols and intermediaries between humans and



Figure 2. Bandolier (“outfit for diviner/isangoma”), artist unrecorded, collected at Mtubatuba, Zululand, by Barbara Tyrrell. Photograph by Justine Wintjes. Anthropology Collection, Department of Human Sciences, KwaZuluNatal Museum.

11 Abigail Moffett and Simon Hall, “Divining Value: Cowries, the Ancestral Realm and the Global in Southern Africa,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30, no. 2 (2020), 9.

12 Barbara Winston Blackmun, “Icons and Emblems in Ivory: An Altar Tusk from the Palace of Old Benin,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997): 149–98; Kathy Curnow, “Ivory as Cultural Document: The Crushing Burden of Conservation,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12227>.

13 Ashley N. Coutu and Paul Lane, “Ivory in West Africa, c. 100 to 1900 CE: Archaeological Evidence and Future Research Priorities,” in *African Ivories in the Atlantic World, 1400–1900 / Marfins Africanos no Mundo Atlântico, 1400–1900*, ed. José da Silva Horta, Carlos Almeida, and Peter Mark (Lisbon: Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa, 2021).

the cosmos.¹⁴ Similarly, Thurstan Shaw's 1959–1964 excavation of the Igbo-Richard site, one of three Igbo-Ukwu sites in South-eastern Nigeria, unearthed elephant tusks among the grave goods of an important individual, believed to be the Eze Nri's (king of Nri) grave, dated to between 880 and 1160 CE.¹⁵ Also, in the ancient Benin Kingdom, carved tusks adorned royal ancestral altars (fig. 3) and burial sites, embodying sacred authority and playing critical roles in sociopolitical and spiritual practices.¹⁶ These findings reflect the intertwined cultural, religious, and wealth symbolism of ivory tusks in African societies, emphasizing their role as a medium for creative and spiritual expression before European interruption. The oversized tusk beside the figure in *African Man* compresses these royal and ancestral resonances into a single emblem of exportable raw material, exemplifying how encounters with Europeans altered ivory's meanings and enabled its misrepresentation and exploitation—processes inseparable from preexisting biblical and racialized perceptions of Blackness in Europe.



Figure 3. Ancestral shrines, House of the Oba, Benin City, Nigeria. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1970. Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, EEPA EECL 7610. National Museum of African Art.

Eckhout's painting of the African man prominently displays the man's muscular physique, with a palm tree on his left serving as a phallic symbol and elements of sexualization emphasizing virility and power. His ceremonial sword, adorned with a large pink shell and a tuft of yellow hair, suggests a blend of African and European influences while underlining notions of "Otherness." Scattered at his feet are various shells, including cowrie currency types, and a curving elephant tusk, symbolizing both Africa's natural wealth and the means of its exploitation, as currency and trade commodities.¹⁷ The sea in the background represents the connection to trade, exploration, and the transatlantic routes used to transport goods, such as ivory tusks, along with enslaved people. Dressed minimally in a tightly wrapped blue-and-white striped cloth around his genitals, his attire perpetuates stereotypes of African primitivism and hypersexuality.

Eckhout's *African Man* visually appropriates Pieter de Marees's *Cape Lopez* illustration to anchor its Brazilian figure in a West African ethnographic framework. The painting, as argued by scholars such as Brien, appears to borrow visual elements directly from Pieter de Marees's 1602 illustration of the inhabitants of Capo Lopo Gonsalves or Cape Lopez (fig. 4) in his account, *Beschrijvinge ende historische verhael vant Gout Koninckrijk van Gunea* (*Description of the Gold Coast of Guinea*).¹⁸ The depiction of African figures in De Marees's illustrations, including their

14 Gavin Whitelaw, "The Early Ivory Trade and Southern Africa," *The Digging Stick* 41, no. 1 (2024): 3.

15 Thurstan Shaw, *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49, 53, 58; Coutu and Lane, "Ivory in West Africa," 356.

16 Kathy Curnow, "Ivory as Cultural Document," 67–68.

17 Brien, *Visions of Savage Paradise*, 134.

18 Brien, *Visions of Savage Paradise*, 141; Pieter de Marees, *Beschrijvinghe ende historische verhael vant gout koninckrijk van Gunea* (Amsterdam: Michiel Colijn, 1617; originally published by Cornelis Claesz, Amsterdam,

attire, weapons, and contextual settings, bears significant resemblance to Eckhout's portrayal. The detailed inclusion of shells, a curving elephant tusk, and the palm tree in Eckhout's painting echoes the visual motifs seen in De Marees's illustrations. Such parallels suggest that Eckhout incorporated elements from these earlier ethnographic accounts into his Brazilian representations, likely using them as a visual framework to emphasize the African man's connection to the West African coast.

Eckhout's inclusion of cowrie shells and an ivory tusk situates the African man within the expanding sphere of Dutch commercial and political power along the West African coast. As Harvey M. Feinberg and Marion Johnson note, the Dutch challenge to Portugal's West African monopoly—from the 1590s through the capture of Elmina (1637) and Axim (1642)—secured Dutch dominance along the Gold Coast and fostered enduring trade alliances with African communities.¹⁹ Within this context, the cowrie shells and ivory tusk prominently featured in Eckhout's painting of the African man function as visual signifiers of Dutch commercial engagement with the region. While ivory held profound political and ritual significance in Akan society—where rulers often exercised exclusive rights to elephant tusks as symbols of power, wealth, and prestige—and cowrie shells operated as culturally embedded forms of currency and spiritual value within broader West African traditions, both materials were increasingly subsumed into European trade networks. As Margaret Makepeace and Stanley B. Alpern emphasize, the mass importation of cowries facilitated commerce on the Gold Coast, yet their circulation also points to pre-existing indigenous systems of meaning that were subsequently reinterpreted through European economic frameworks.²⁰ Influenced by Pieter de Marees's ethnographic accounts, Eckhout's depiction acknowledges these objects' local presence but ultimately reframes them within colonial logics, stripping them of their cosmological significance and reducing them to markers of extractive commerce. The inclusion of the sea in the background further situates these materials within transatlantic circuits of exploitation, transforming culturally and spiritually resonant objects into visual instruments that reinforce European dominance, racialized hierarchies, and imperial ideologies that justified the commodification of



Figure 4. People of the area of Cape Lopez in Pieter de Marees, *Beschrijvinghe ende historische verhael vant gout koninckrijck van Guinea*, 1602. Courtesy of the University of Toronto.

1602). De Marees's book offers one of the earliest European accounts of the Gold Coast, describing its peoples, cultures, and economy. Based on his own observations and supplemented by information from Dierick Ruijters and Bernardus Paludanus, it became an influential source for later Dutch knowledge of West Africa.

19 Harvey M. Feinberg and Marion Johnson, "The West African Ivory Trade during the Eighteenth Century: The '... and Ivory' Complex," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 3 (1982): 435–53. The Dutch gradually displaced Portuguese trade dominance along the West African coast, establishing key forts such as Nassau and Elmina by the mid-seventeenth century. This transition strengthened Dutch alliances with local African groups and secured their control of regional commerce.

20 Margaret Makepeace, "English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657–1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive," *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 242; Stanley B. Alpern, "What Africans Got for Their Slaves: A Master List of European Trade Goods," *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 24.

African resources and lives.

By foregrounding cowries, ivory, and the sea, Eckhout's *African Man* shows how West African objects and landscapes were recast, signaling Dutch commercial power and the violent extraction of African labor and resources. Yet the logic of commodification and eroticization that shapes this figure is not limited to masculinity. It also becomes pronounced in Eckhout's companion image of the African woman, where fertility, sexuality, and abundance are central to how her body is constructed within the colonial imagination.



Figure 5. Albert Eckhout, *Woman and Child of African Origin*, 1641, oil on canvas, 282 x 189 cm. Photograph by John Lee. Photograph © The National Museum of Denmark.

Albert Eckhout's Depiction of the African Woman

Eckhout's depiction of the African woman places her against a coastal landscape featuring palms, a papaya tree, fishing Amerindians along the shoreline, and ships in the distance, blending natural abundance with colonial narratives of exploration. She wears an elaborate hat adorned with peacock feathers, and a small white clay pipe is tucked into the sash at her waist, adding an air of exoticism. By her side stands a nude boy, presumably her son, with noticeably lighter skin than hers, suggesting his mixed race, holding a small bird in his left hand while pointing a shucked ear of corn suggestively towards her. Around her neck, double ropes of white pearls and red coral beads mirror the form of her full, exposed breasts, emphasizing themes of sexuality and fecundity. These elements are further reinforced by the overflowing basket of tropical fruits she carries, resembling a cornucopia, symbolizing abundance and prosperity.²¹

Eckhout's African Woman and the Black Eve Allegory

This section reads Eckhout's African woman as a "Black Eve," an allegory of temptation and racialized danger within a colonial framework that reworks the

biblical Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. While scholars such as Rebecca Parker Brien and Elizabeth A. L. Latham have foregrounded the sexualized dimensions of this depiction and its alignment with European colonial ideologies, this reading emphasizes how the painting recasts Eve's story through a colonial, racial lens. Through this lens, Eckhout's African woman is constructed as a figure of temptation and moral danger within the colonial imaginary, positioned as a threat to the purity of white Dutch men in Brazil. Although the motif appears in other European visual contexts—such as the 1770 *Black Eve* painting in the Old Pharmacy, Calw, where it intersected with scientific debates on race and heredity²²—Eckhout embeds this allegory within a dis-

21 Brien, *Visions of Savage Paradise*, 134; Latham, "The Commodified Body in Albert Eckhout's Brazilian Paintings," 33.

22 Helga Satzinger, "White Adam and Black Eve: A 1770 Painting at the Old Pharmacy, Calw, Southern Ger-

tinctly colonial framework. The absence of a male figure does not weaken this narrative; rather, the inclusion of a mixed-race child, whose lighter skin implies sexual relations with white Europeans, evokes the consequences of Eve's transgression, framing Black femininity as a corrupting force. The overflowing basket of tropical fruits further reinforces this Edenic symbolism, linking abundance, temptation, and exoticized sexuality to colonial desire and exploitation.



Figure 6. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail, central panel, lower left), c. 1490–1510, oil on panel, 220 x 389 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado.

The coastal setting of Eckhout's painting—marked by ships and fishing Amerindians in the distance—foregrounds the maritime networks of European exploration, trade, and exploitation that frame the African woman within the economy of the transatlantic slave trade, where Black bodies, cultures, and resources were commodified. Her sexualized portrayal, emphasized by exposed breasts and her child's provocative gesture directing an ear of corn towards her genital area, constructs her as a figure of carnal temptation, a visual logic that closely parallels Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490–1510, fig. 6), particularly the young Black nude woman confidently standing among pale white men in the lower left of the central panel, who holds a red berry as an emblem of seduction and postlapsarian moral corruption.²³ Like Bosch's figure, Eckhout's African woman is cast as a symbolic Black Eve, her body mobilized to materialize European biblical and racialized stereotypes that equated Blackness with hypersexuality, sin, and spiritual inferiority. The ships in the background further anchor this allegory within the material realities of colonial extraction and enslavement, reinforcing how religious, racial, and

many, and the Scientific Discourse of the Time on Heredity, Skin Colour, Variation and Race," *Politika* (2019): <https://www.politika.io/en/notice/white-adam-and-black-eve>.

23 Spicer, "European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts," 47.

economic ideologies converged to naturalize the dehumanization and subjugation of African peoples within the colonial imaginary.

Conclusion: Biblical Narratives and Colonial Justifications

Biblical narratives of sin and evil profoundly shaped European conceptions of Blackness, forming an ideological foundation for colonialism that is vividly reflected in Albert Eckhout's representations of African figures. Drawing on misinterpreted scriptural frameworks such as the Curse of Ham and the symbolic opposition of light and darkness, these works align Blackness with moral corruption, ignorance, and divine disfavor, while whiteness is associated with purity and authority. Eckhout's portrayals of African men and women mobilize these beliefs through visual strategies that exaggerate skin tones, sexualize bodies, and incorporate objects such as cowrie shells and ivory tusks—materials stripped of their spiritual, ritual, and political meanings and recontextualized as signs of commerce, wealth, and exploitation. In doing so, the paintings reinforce European constructions of African primitivism and inferiority, reducing African subjects to embodiments of sin and subjugation. These representational strategies parallel Eckhout's depictions of Indigenous peoples, who are similarly framed as "exotic" and uncivilized in order to legitimize their exploitation within a shared Eurocentric worldview. By emphasizing material abundance through trade objects, tropical fruits, and coastal settings populated by ships, Eckhout's works underscore colonial fantasies of resource extraction while implying European necessity and control. Collectively, these paintings function as visual instruments of biblical and imperial ideology, naturalizing racial hierarchy and providing cultural justification for slavery, resource exploitation, and the domination of non-European societies.

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Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy

David Landau

London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2025. ISBN 9781915401168.

In his lengthy and beautifully illustrated book, *Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy*, David Landau moves beyond his specialized focus on printmaking to chart the movement of artists, artworks, materials, and information in Italy at the turn of the sixteenth century. He approaches this broad task by focusing on the year 1506 (although occasionally looking at works from no earlier than 1490). One of the central and most surprising claims of the book is that artists' travel resulted less in the dissemination of new styles and innovative techniques, and more in the heightened social status of the artist, as they mingled with foreign humanists, patrons, and artists. For example, after traveling to Venice in 1506, Albrecht Dürer transformed from "celebrated craftsman to thinker, theoretician and gentleman."¹ Steering clear of attempts to theorize issues of style, influence, and mobility, Landau evokes the physical realities of travel for artists and objects in the Renaissance, while also addressing the ways in which images moved across different media as new techniques of replication emerged.

After a very short introduction laying out the scope of the book, a long chapter ("A Cosmopolitan Peninsula") serves as an excellent overview of the modes, purposes, and contexts of travel in Renaissance Italy. Two chapters are dedicated to media (frescoes and sculpture, respectively), while two chapters examine the letters of individuals from 1506 (those of an artist, Albrecht Dürer, and a patron, Isabella d'Este). A chapter titled "Movables and Multiples" focuses on new types of small-scale domestic objects that became very popular around 1490-1510, such as bronze statuettes that were often copies of antiquities. Here, Landau has a significant intervention on prints produced in Italy just before 1506, as he points out that the important engravings of Mantua, Bologna, and the Veneto did not travel widely across the peninsula but circulated very locally and hence had a limited impact on the broader art scene. Indeed, a surprising amount of *Art on the Move* concerns artwork that did not move, such as Chapter Two ("*Frescanti Erranti*"), which focuses on the eminently static medium of fresco painting. Landau writes eloquently about itinerant painters who travelled across Italy for fresco commissions, arguing that Pinturicchio (1454–1513) was especially gifted in establishing temporary workshops, where he trained local artists *ad hoc*.² This issue of the workshop is one of the most intriguing parts of the book: in contrast to Pinturicchio, Pietro Perugino (c. 1446–1523) did not need to travel for his artistic persona to assert itself, as he had established workshops in Florence and Perugia. This tension between travel and rootedness runs throughout the book, even if it is not explicitly addressed.

By only utilizing primary sources and artworks before 1507, Landau explicitly tells a history of Italian art without the ideas and terminology of Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), who in his 1550 *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* propagates an emphatic-

1 David Landau, *Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2025), 431.

2 Landau, *Art on the Move*, 102.

cally Florence-centric vision of art history. In so doing, Landau avoids sustained dialogue with David Young Kim's 2014 *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance*, which focuses on the relationship between style and mobility in Vasari's *Lives*, especially the writer's anxiety over the contamination of style through travel.³ Stephen Campbell's 2019 *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* presents an understanding of the Italian Renaissance "without Vasari," as he focuses on artists like Lorenzo Lotto, who began traveling to smaller cities for commissions just before 1506.⁴ Surprisingly, Landau does not pull from Campbell's conceptualization of peripheries as sites of artistic and cultural resistance to centers like Florence, Rome, and Venice. Nor does Landau explore the captivating possibility that works of art registered their future movement in their form and content, as Jennifer Roberts argues in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American painters in her book *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (2014).⁵

Indeed, this is not an art history book that involves lengthy, sustained analysis of particular works of art. Instead, many images are cited in service of broader points, such as when Landau argues for the relative lack of influence of Italian art on Dürer during his Venetian trip. While Landau recognizes the cultural significance of artworks, precious commodities, and people that traveled into Italy from across the world, he generally downplays the influence of movement *within Italy* on the form and content of art. While Landau emphasizes novel artistic developments around the year 1500, further explanation is required as to why 1506 is such an important *terminus ante quem*.⁶ The reason, I suspect, may relate to developments in the reproductive print that happened shortly after, as around 1510 Marcantonio Raimondi produced important engravings after works by Michelangelo and Raphael. Figures by these artists, such as nude men from Michelangelo's 1504–05 *Battle of Cascina* cartoon, swiftly became canonical through the widespread circulation of prints throughout Italy.⁷ In this post-1506 context, the relationship between art and mobility shifted, as canonical art became more immediately accessible. Landau also might have considered travel in an expanded context, particularly in the domain of the sacred. For example, what about art that traveled repeatedly, in regulated, ritual processions?⁸ Also, what was the impact of art that miraculously traveled, such as the *Volto Santo* crucifix of Lucca Cathedral, which supposedly journeyed through divine volition from Jerusalem to the coast of Italy in the eighth century? Following its new enshrinement at the end of the fifteenth century, several contemporaneous Tuscan altarpieces portrayed the well-traveled statue at center.⁹

3 David Young Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (Yale University Press, 2014).

4 Stephen Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* (The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

5 Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (University of California Press, 2014).

6 That is, beyond it being the death year of Andrea Mantegna, who Landau co-curated a show on at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Royal Academy of Arts, 1992.

7 Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print* (Yale University Press, 2004); On the canonical status of Michelangelo's figures from the *Battle of Cascina*, due to Raimondi's prints, see Joost Keizer, "Michelangelo, Drawing, and the Subject of Art," *The Art Bulletin* (2011): 314; On "canonicity" in the art of Raphael, see Robert Williams, *Raphael and the Redefinition of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 90ff.

8 Victor M. Schmidt, *Stendardi e gonfalon processionali dalle Marche. Tardo Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Centro Studi G. Mazzini, 2020).

9 For example, see Piero di Cosimo's altarpiece dated to around 1490–1510, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv.

In the opening line, Landau proclaims that the book is “like an enormous footnote to the history of the Italian Renaissance.”¹⁰ Given this quip, it is noticeable that the many endnotes are rather bare, with little commentary. There were frequent omissions of page numbers, making it difficult to follow-up on the fascinating material. Chapters were cited by providing the author’s name in the edited book, but the actual name of the essay was absent from both endnote and bibliography. Yet beyond this, the monograph is a valuable resource for any graduate student or scholar who wants to discover more about the mobility of art and artists across Italy in those years just before Michelangelo and Raphael established a Roman canon of art through their work at the Vatican. As art historians assess the impact of movement on the content, forms, and iconography of Renaissance art, one hopes that Landau’s book prompts them to consider the labor of transporting marble hundreds of miles prior to the first strike of the chisel, the encasement of panel paintings for shipment to patrons, and the feelings of alienation painters may have felt in foreign cities, bereft of their usual, reliable assistants.

1100; On the *Volto Santo*, see Stefano Martinelli, *Il Volto Santo di Lucca: Il successo europeo di un’iconografia medievale* (Edizioni ETS, 2016).

10 Landau, *Art on the Move*, 9.

Myra McCants, University of California, Irvine

Imperial Animations in Transpacific Contemporary Art

Namiko Kunimoto

University of California Press, 2026. ISBN: 9780520421592

Namiko Kunimoto's *Imperial Animations in Transpacific Contemporary Art* arrives at a much-needed time when the highly polarized political landscape of the present demands a reckoning with its past. Kunimoto offers an incisive and insightful analysis of how transpacific contemporary artists visualize and critique ongoing imperial formations amid the global emergence of liberal capitalism across gender, race, and geopolitics.

With the conceptual framework of "imperial animations," Kunimoto analyzes how multimedia artists go beyond a simple consideration of historical events by "animating history" to interpret how global capitalism relies on a presentation of an imagined conservative past to shape a contemporary form of aspirational fascism becoming widespread in today's digital media landscape. By focusing on Japanese imperialism with its desire for geographical expansion, Kunimoto curates a unique selection of case studies to examine transpacific relations and trace how contemporary artists animate colonial histories, through performance and digital transformation, to uncover the forgotten complicities of Japan's nationalistic empire and articulate present-day ramifications in places such as Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and Canada. Kunimoto ultimately challenges readers to take a deeper look at how imperialism, liberalism, and aspirational fascism are deeply intertwined with the media, to view them not as new creations but as developments from Japan's imperial past, and to consider how each of us may be complicit in this growing form of fascistic power.

Kunimoto opens her book by intertwining a discussion of liberal democracy and its contributions to the rise of fascism with global capitalism today with the legacy of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan. Through the two-part project, *Crystal Seeding* (2021) and *There is Another Capital beneath the Waves* (2023), by Taiwan-based artists Chang Ting Tong, Hsu Chia-Wei, and Cheng Hsien-Yu, Kunimoto provides an example of how artworks, upon first glance, may not seem to reveal much, but with an understanding of the unspoken past, operate as a form of questioning imperial history and its ongoing presence. As imperial animations, *Crystal Seeding* and *Another Capital* use 3D printing, a robotic arm, experimental instruments, and virtual reality to engage with the violent colonial past and contend with the present-day aftermath of forcefully imposed imperial modernization in Taiwan. Through these works, Kunimoto strategically introduces many overarching aspects of the case studies that make up the full-length chapters, such as the presentation of local history through site-specificity and the bridging of expansive historical lineages via digital media.

The first chapter begins with the 2019 Aichi Triennale controversy to demonstrate how contemporary institutions are often at fault for complying with censorship under pressure from the imperial system. One of the censored works, Shimada Yoshiko's *A Picture to Be Burnt* (1993),

notably featured on the cover of the book, exemplifies how one should move past the initial impression that this work is simply an expression of anti-imperialism. When taking the steps to understand Shimada's original intent, which was to critique the institutional powers that originally censored Oura Nobuyuki's *Holding Perspective* series (1982–1985) and its depictions of Emperor Hirohito in the 1990s, an even darker irony surfaces, revealing the legacy of fascistic institutional powers nearly thirty years later. Going deeper into Shimada's oeuvre, Kunimoto examines the multinational, transpacific issue of sexual slavery through the animated presence of Shimada's performance piece *Being a Statue of a Japanese "Comfort Woman"* (2012–), which addresses the ongoing debate over the recognition of comfort women today. In doing so, Kunimoto reveals the linked genealogies of institutionalized and militarized violence against women in Japanese colonies as well as within the nation itself.

Chapter two shifts to a singular focus on Goto Yasuka, an artist from Hiroshima, who utilizes ballpoint pens, Japanese ink lines, and a simplified manga-like style to reconsider the militaristic past of famous postwar Japanese artists. Beneath the surface of these candid portraits of Fujita Tsuguharu, Miyamoto Saburo, Tsuruta Goro, and Koiso Ryohei, Kunimoto traces their tainted histories as accomplished war painters in the Japanese occupation of Singapore. Kunimoto also notes Goto's depiction of the famed postwar artist Okamoto Taro and his complicity as a Japanese Imperial Army soldier in China. Goto's work prompts the viewer to be critical of how these art historical figures are framed in the present, particularly how Japanese art history has failed to view them beyond passive victims by praising their artistic capabilities and refusing to acknowledge their fascist culpability before and during World War II. Kunimoto makes clear that Goto's work is not meant to accuse these artists of wrongdoings. In fact, Goto's work also draws on her own family's complicity with the war. Kunimoto ultimately argues that through Goto's contemporary graphic medium and rather mundane animations of notable Japanese artists conducting everyday activities in their war attire, these works intend to provoke everyone in Japan to reconsider their past and their evaluation of historicity today.

Further building on this idea of critiquing how the general public remembers the history of Japan's imperial past, Kunimoto analyzes the multimedia, site-specific installations created by Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen. Ho examines the Japanese occupation of Singapore, and through altered digital media, calls attention to the deceiving façade shaped by Japanese propaganda and postwar films that hide the true nature of fascism underneath. In *Hotel Aporia* (2019), Ho splices clips from the influential filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu and Ryuichi Yokoyama's cartoon propaganda film *Fuku-chan's Submarine* (1944). Kunimoto argues that by removing or de-animating the faces of all the characters appearing in the original film, Ho effectively revokes the originally intended nationalistic sentiment of these public media forms. With this hollowness, Ho ruptures the neutralizing narrative espoused by the media to allow present-day viewers to question how past propaganda effectively masked and promoted Japanese imperialism, and how this is similarly done today with the utilization of big data in the digital world to promote aspirational fascism.

Traversing the transpacific, Kunimoto draws inspiration from her own personal history to shine a light on the historically understudied subject of Japanese Canadian incarceration during World War II and the resulting transnational history of settler colonial capitalism. Kunimoto skillfully weaves an analysis of three Japanese Canadian artists who engage with the community to animate the origin of anti-Asian hate and exploitation in British Columbia, and its continued prevalence today. Examining the works of Cindy Mochizuki, Kellen Hatanaka, and Henry Tsang,

Kunimoto argues that their artworks serve as redressive acts, relying upon participation from the Japanese Canadian community through oral histories to investigate how global capitalism exploits social and class struggle through the use of the Asian body for labor. By animating their research on local histories through multimedia installations, a video walking tour, and more, these artists reveal the complexities of Japanese colonialism across the Pacific Ocean.

To conclude her study, Kunimoto summarizes her imperial animations framework with Malaysian artist Au Sow Yee's video work *The Extreme Journey of Perwira and the Calm Sea* (2019). Similar to Ho's practice of manipulating propaganda material, Au traces the real and fictionalized media icon of Tani Yutaka/Harimao who has permeated the history of global capitalism as he shapeshifts from a Malaysia-based Japanese spy to a famed pop culture manga hero. Namiko claims Tani-turned-Harimao to be a clear representation of imperial animations. As Au unravels Tani/Harimao's transformation across time, his animated and lingering presence across historical and contemporary media links his origins in Japanese imperialism to present-day liberalism.

Imperial Animations in Transpacific Contemporary Art expands beyond the Western-dominated art historical field by including overlooked transpacific artists and practices, predominantly female artists, making it a significant contribution to contemporary art historical discourse. Kunimoto effectively articulates in-depth visual analyses, notably of rather hard-to-describe installation works, and carefully weaves in her interpretation of how each work operates as an imperial animation. Ultimately, Kunimoto urges readers to be aware of how imperialism is linked to the world of media today and encourages readers to take the time to uncover how artists are attempting to call out the trajectory of aspirational fascism and to enact change in the present.

Reality and Imagination: Rembrandt and the Jews in the Dutch Republic

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston | December 15, 2025–December 1, 2026

Isabella Dobson, Boston University

Reality and Imagination: Rembrandt and the Jews in the Dutch Republic, co-organized by Boston University students and the MFA's Center for Netherlandish Art (CNA), is now on view at the MFA Boston through December 1, 2026. The exhibition's aim is twofold: to provide a window onto Jewish lives in the Dutch Republic during Rembrandt's time, and to map these lived realities onto paintings and prints by Rembrandt, his contemporaries, and later artists. Examining Jewish material culture alongside seveneenth-century Dutch depictions of Old Testament narratives reveals that these images are simultaneously fanciful yet reflective of the unique religious makeup of Rembrandt's environs. Comprised almost entirely of objects from the MFA's own collection, this exhibition both furthers the CNA's mission of contributing new perspectives to traditional narratives about Dutch and Flemish art and renews the museum's commitment to fostering a welcoming space where all belong.¹



Figure 1. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669). *Christ Disputing with the Doctors: A Sketch*, 1652. Etching and drypoint. 4 15/16 x 8 7/16 in. (12.5 x 21.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Harvey D. Parker Collection–Harvey Drury Parker Fund. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

A map of Rembrandt's neighborhood, indicating the proximity of the artist's house and studio to various Jewish residences and synagogues, opens the exhibition and highlights the distinctive diversity of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. The map additionally designates the residence of Bastian Fernando, one of many African men living in Amsterdam in this period. As if to visually corroborate this mingling of diverse peoples, Rembrandt's print *Christ Disputing with the Doctors* shows figures resembling Ashkenazi Jews in the foreground and an African figure in the top right corner, suggesting that Rembrandt drew inspiration directly from his diverse neighbors (fig. 1).² From

1 Murray White, "MFA wing looks at – and behind – art of Netherlands," *Boston Globe*, November 21, 2021.

2 *Reality and Imagination: Rembrandt and the Jews in the Dutch Republic*, Wall label for *Christ Disputing with the Doctors*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

the start, *Reality and Imagination* complicates the common perception that seventeenth-century Amsterdam was only home to European Protestants.

Further perusal of the exhibition complicates the seemingly straightforward portrait of both Rembrandt's adherence to reality and Amsterdam's seamless integration of diverse peoples. While both the map and print suggest peaceful cohabitation, the exhibition reminds visitors that prejudice still characterized some interactions between Dutch Protestants and their Jewish neighbors. This tension between religious acceptance and intolerance is embodied by a pair of seventeenth-century Torah finials: though crafted to adorn a sacred Jewish text, they were likely made by Christian goldsmiths since Jews were prohibited from holding this occupation (fig. 2).³ Jews could practice their religion, but not certain occupations, in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Nonetheless, Jenna Wendler, one of the exhibition's junior curators and a PhD student at Boston University, emphasized that, in addition to representing religious intolerance, this Torah finial speaks to a cooperative spirit between Jewish patrons and Christian makers who collaborated to create precious artworks for Jewish worship.⁴



Figure 3. Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680). *Judah and Tamar*, 1644. Oil on canvas. 48 1/2 x 67 7/8 in. (123.2 x 172.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Robert Dawson Evans Collection. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 2. Pair of Torah finials, 1649. Dutch (Rotterdam). Silver, parcel gilt. 16 3/4 in. (42.5 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Museum purchase with funds donated by Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo in support of the Center for Netherlandish Art. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

In spite of this prejudicial treatment, other objects on display, such as a *ketubbah* (a Jewish marriage contract) and a Hannukah lamp, attest to the vibrant presence of Jews in Rembrandt's world, evidencing how they wed, worshipped, and lived. In fact, Wendler revealed that spotlighting the everyday experiences of early modern Jewish people was a major goal of the exhibition, using artworks as conduits to showcase their lived histories. Moreover, Rembrandt's sensitive portrait of Jewish physician Ephraim Bueno, exhibited next to the first known Hebrew map of the Holy Land commissioned by Jewish merchant Jacob ben Abraham Zaddick, emphasizes the importance of contributions made by specific Jewish profes-

3 *Reality and Imagination: Rembrandt and the Jews in the Dutch Republic*, "Reality" wall text, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

4 Jenna Wendler, interview by Isabella Dobson, March 12, 2026, audio, 51:47.

sionals to Dutch society.

These glimpses into the lives of seventeenth-century Dutch Jews often stand in contrast to contemporaneous depictions of Jewish stories and people. For instance, in his painting *Judah and Tamar*, Rembrandt's student Ferdinand Bol illustrates the story of a Jewish couple from the Hebrew Bible, but, in an attempt to appeal to collectors, exoticizes Judah with a turban reminiscent of the ancient Near East and eroticizes Tamar with a low neckline, driving home the exhibition's assertion that Rembrandt and his circle blurred the line between reality and imagination when depicting Jewish people (fig. 3).⁵ Consequently, *Reality and Imagination* does more than foreground the experiences of Jews living in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic; it offers a blueprint for future generations on how to study and evaluate artistic representations of minority experiences.

5 *Reality and Imagination: Rembrandt and the Jews in the Dutch Republic*, Wall label for *Judah and Tamar*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Kelly Taylor Mitchell: *mouth wide open*

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston | November 22, 2025–April 26, 2026

Ada Evans, Boston University



Kelly Taylor Mitchell, *Totem #10*, 2023–2025. Hand embroidered and transfer-printed found textile, tassel, ceramic beads, and crystal. Image courtesy of the artist.



Kelly Taylor Mitchell, *Namesakes*, 2024–2025. Hand embroidered and transfer-printed pano da costa, tassel, found T-shirt and peanut sacks. Image courtesy of the artist.

Kelly Taylor Mitchell's *mouth wide open*, recently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, unfolds as a fragmented yet insistently relational archive, suturing familial memory, vegetal matter, and syncretic spiritual practice with beaded embroidery, glittering thread, tinsel, and raffia. Based between Atlanta and San Juan, Mitchell (b. 1994) takes Brazil's Bahia region as a generative departure point, drawing on her encounters with creolized religious practices and oceanic spirituality during the Festival of Yemanjá in 2023. While her experiences amidst Bahia's large Maroon-descended population anchors the exhibition historically, *mouth wide open* ultimately advances a diasporic geography that refuses fixed territories or national borders.

This refusal materializes in *Namesakes* (2024–25), which merges a found *pano da costa* textile fragment from Bahia with transferred photographs from Mitchell's family and cuttings



Detail of *Totem #10*. Photograph by author. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

hanging's white brocade surface. Yet while *Totem #10* directs a circular movement through the transitional space, *Come Bearing Gifts* (2025), spanning a monumental wall, serves as a



Kelly Taylor Mitchell, *Family Reunion*, 2024. Blow out, pulp painting, and deckle box techniques. Flax, Georgia kudzu, Georgia Spanish moss, Alabama Spanish moss fibers and sequin tassel, textile, image transfer and/or cowrie inclusions. Image courtesy of the artist.

from an anonymous family reunion T-shirt. These images remain partially obscured, resisting full legibility. Rather than affirming lineage through clarity or completeness, Mitchell reframes diasporic kinship as contingent, relational, and mobile, formed through crossings rather than mapped boundaries. Guided by Toni Morrison's concept of "rememory" and Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," *mouth wide open* presses beyond the limits of conventional archival practice through ancestral methods of craft, like sewing and quilting. *Totem #10* (2023–2025) hangs suspended from the museum's tall ceiling, interrupting visitors' passage through the Edward H. Linde Gallery, a large open space with wooden floors, bright lighting, and a grand staircase. Pieces of photographic memories are embroidered across the

brightly colored and embellished anchor work that demands attention. Constructed of handmade paper, the layered and gridded format of *Come Bearing Gifts* combines ancestral quilt making formats with fragmented memories pieced together through collaged multi-media details—price tag stickers, a row of red clay bricks, reflective number signs—that invite prolonged close-looking. Each of these works reflects a sustained engagement with crafted materiality and familial memory across temporal and geographic space.

A parallel logic of transformation animates Mitchell's handmade paper series that is framed along the wall behind *Totem #10*. In these artworks, the watery processes of soaking, pulping, and reforming bind material production to spiritual encounter. These works recall the Bahia region's Yemanjá festival, the largest celebration of the sea goddess within the Orisha diaspora. Documented by Jeffrey Gonzales, devotees travel collectively toward the ocean bearing offerings, often invoking the refrain that "all rivers lead to the ocean and all waterways are interconnected."¹ In *Family Reunion* (2024), Mitchell

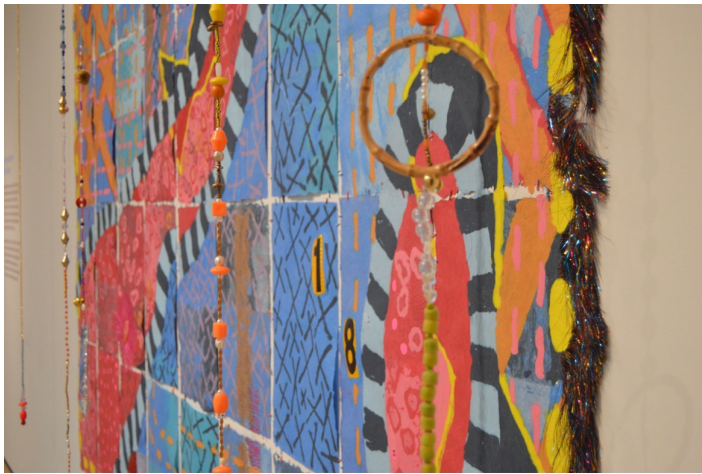


Detail of *Namesakes*. Photograph by author. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

1 Jeffrey M. Gonzalez, "Finding Orisha in New Places," in *Indigenous and African Diaspora Religions in the Americas*, ed. Benjamin Hebblethwaite and Silke Jansen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 307.

aligns this watery interconnection with her wet papermaking practice, embedding spirituality not as iconography but as process.² Mitchell has written that “Yemanjá, Oshun and Mami Wata are all present in Great Dismal Swamp and in my papermaking vat,” connecting her familial geography of the Southeastern U.S. Swamp’s histories of maroonage to those 4,000 miles away in Brazil.³

Material choices contextualize her framework. By harvesting and reconstituting invasive plants such as kudzu and Spanish moss, Mitchell foregrounds the colonial displacement of flora and fauna that occurred alongside forced displacement of bodies. Yet, kudzu’s reputation as an insidious invader obscures its deliberate introduction to the American South as a remedy for soil erosion—a problem produced by plantation monocultures that decimated biodiversity and supplanted Indigenous land stewardship.⁴ As Mitchell observes, “the histories and stories of the materials themselves carry the actual raw fiber plant life... I think memory can be translated through material.”⁵ Morrison’s rememory, the recollection of a forgotten or concealed past, emerges here



Kelly Taylor Mitchell, *Come Bearing Gifts*, 2025. Handmade paper, sequin and tinsel tassel, raffia, netting, stickers, bricks, and beads. Image courtesy of the artist.

through Mitchell’s embodied practices of papermaking, sewing, and quilting that selectively reveal histories, while leaving others hidden and protected.

Across Mitchell’s solo exhibition, discarded textiles, foraged plant matter, and familial photographs function as historical witnesses that refuse to resolve into stable evidence. Mitchell’s kinship with material processes, alongside her vibrant colors and sparkling embellishments, asks its viewers to both consider non-traditional materials as holders of archival memory and ponder what can emerge in *excess* of material knowledge.

2 Didactic text throughout the show explores the connections between Mitchell’s papermaking process and spirituality. Notably, a text block titled “Papermaking and Other Rituals” reads: “Papermaking serves as a connection to the spiritual festival Mitchell observed in Bahia, Brazil, in which water symbolized aspects of rebirth, baptism, and nourishment. This water-reliant process also gestures to histories of forced displacement across oceans that gave rise to African-derived diasporic spiritual traditions in the first place.” Wall text for *mouth wide open*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

3 Kelly Taylor Mitchell, “An Invitation: Ancestral Mapping,” *Burnaway*, November 2023, <https://burnaway.org/magazine/an-invitation-ancestral-mapping/>.

4 Yota Batsaki, “Kudzu in the Patchy Anthropocene,” 1st ed., in *Crossings: Migrant Knowledges, Migrant Forms*, ed. Natalya Din-Kariuki, Subha Mukherji, and Rowan Williams (Santa Barbara: Punctum Books, 2025), 463.

5 Sarah Higgins and Kelly Taylor Mitchell, “Kelly Taylor Mitchell: Masking Practice,” *Art Papers*, 2023, <https://www.artpapers.org/kelly-taylor-mitchell-masking-practice/>.

Medieval | Renaissance: A Dialogue on Early Italian Painting

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College | September 2–December 7, 2025

Emma Kohlmayer, Yale University

Featuring Italian paintings from the late-thirteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries, *Medieval | Renaissance* is an exhibition that invites viewers to contemplate boundaries. Through well-selected comparisons between medieval and Renaissance objects, professor-curators Dr. John Lansdowne and Dr. Stephanie Leone explore the divide between the two periods and reveal the limitations of historical categories.

The exhibition unfolds across two main galleries, featuring objects from the Francione Collection in Florence. In the first room, the curators use a group of religious paintings to explore how devotion dictates both subject matter and ways of looking. Two images of Christ, one medieval and one early modern, offer distinct conceptions of the sacred body. The medieval object, a late-thirteenth-century *Croce dipinta*, hangs alone in a small room which the viewer can access through a Gothic arch-shaped entryway. Evocative of a European chapel, the architectural framing spotlights



View of the *Croce dipinta* in the first gallery of *Medieval | Renaissance*. Photograph courtesy John Lansdowne.

the work's original function as an object made for worship. The artist of the *Croce dipinta* renders Christ's body in modular forms, inviting the viewer's eyes to explore the figure limb by limb. In contrast, an anatomically correct sixteenth-century *Risen Christ* (Circle of Perugino, ca. 1500) blesses the viewer from a contrapposto stance in the second gallery. Seen in succession, these two depictions of Christ—made by artists working almost three centuries apart—trace the shift from the fragmentation of the medieval image to the naturalism of the early modern figure. The curators, however, resist a simple before-and-after narrative. In the wall labels, they note that the *Croce dipinta*'s insistence on Christ's suffering was already a radical innovation for its time.

Medieval | Renaissance explores a second boundary: the divide between church and home. Curators present a *Birth Salver* (Giovanni di ser Giovanni Guidi, 1486) flat on a low plinth, encouraging visitors to look down into it as Renaissance viewers would have done at home. Displayed uncovered, the object invites close looking and supports the curators' claim that it merits fine-art status, while also demonstrating how objects shaped domestic ritual. Yet as the



Installation view of second gallery with *Risen Christ* at back left. Photograph courtesy John Lansdowne.

curators argue, the divide between domestic and sacred space was far from absolute in Renaissance Italy. Piero di Cosimo's *Madonna*, which responds to the clergy's encouragement to display pictures of saints in the home, was likely intended for a chamber in a Florentine palace. The curators keep the panel in its period frame, a classically inspired architectural façade with capitals, an entablature, and a frieze. This decision resists the museum's tendency to detach images from their contexts, allowing the viewer to see the work how it should have been seen in its own time.

The strength of this exhibition is its unique transparency about the curatorial process. Specialists in their fields, Lansdowne and Leone each sign the wall labels for their respective periods with their initials, inviting viewers to recognize that "Medieval" and "Renaissance" are categories largely constructed by art historians.¹ The show's most persuasive claim is not that one period replaces another, but that the museum itself is where that boundary is staged.

¹ The exhibition design supports this: the deep blue walls of the first room intensify the gold ground of the religious artworks, while a pinkish-grey wall color softens the second space, allowing works like the relief of *Hannibal Carthaginensis* (late fifteenth century) to breathe.

The Leo Bible: A Byzantine Masterpiece at Tisch Library

Abigail Beus, Tufts University

Few Byzantine manuscripts so vividly unite artistic ambition, personal devotion, and elite self-fashioning as the so-called *Leo Bible*. At the request of Associate Art History Professor Dr. Alice Isabella Sullivan, the Tisch Library at Tufts University has recently acquired a full-size facsimile of this monumental work. This remarkable manuscript was commissioned around 940 CE by a man named Leo, whose donor inscription identifies his status as a patrician, eunuch, court chamberlain, and treasurer. It was made for the monastery of St. Nicholas, which was founded by Leo's brother, Constantine. According to an inscription embedded within the work, Leo presented the book as a pious offering intended to redeem his sins and to obtain the favor of the Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas.¹ The manuscript's large size, detailed donor inscription, and lavish illuminations all testify to Leo's munificent gesture, which was likely motivated by both personal devotion and the desire to display his wealth and status within Byzantine society.²

Beyond its obvious material value, the *Leo Bible* has long fascinated historians because it represents one of the earliest extant Byzantine picture bibles and one of the largest volumes ever produced in a Byzantine scriptorium. Although the manuscript originally contained both the Old and New Testaments, only the Old Testament portion survives today, consisting of 565 folios.³ The work is also significant because it was produced not long after the tumultuous iconoclastic controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries CE.⁴ During this period, fierce debates over the legitimacy of religious images led to the destruction of many works of art and even the suppression of image-making. The *Leo Bible's* text reveals a self-conscious commentary on the inherent value of coordinating text and image to aid spirituality—a concept that had previously



Leo Bible, fol. 11r: Genesis frontispiece. Fol. 11v: Description in iambic verse of the contents of the manuscript and the circumstances of its making. Tisch Library Special Collections, Tufts University. Photograph by the author.

1 Georges Sid  ris, "Eunuchs of Light': Power, Imperial Ceremonial and Positive Representations of Eunuchs in Byzantium (4th–12th Centuries AD)," in *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Shaun Tougher (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2002), 168–169, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1n35846.13>.

2 David Olster, "Byzantine Hermeneutics after Iconoclasm: Word and Image in the *Leo Bible*," *Byzantion* 64, no. 2 (1994): 419, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44172184>.

3 Kelsey Eldridge, *K        and Synthesis: Epigrams, Miniatures, and Authorship in the Leo Bible* (MA thesis, University of Washington, 2014), 6, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/07d2cb2d-997c-40eb-bcb6-83c0f4e9371c/content>.

4 Paroma Chatterjee, "The Emperor and the Idyll," in *The Bucolic Mode in Byzantine Art: Sound, Weather, Imperium*, new ed. (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2025), 124, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.38843901.8>.



Leo Bible, fol. 263r: Samuel anointing David as king. Tisch Library Special Collections, Tufts University. Photograph by the author.

caused so much contention and destruction during the iconoclastic period.⁵ Similarly, the manuscript's visual program suggests a deliberate effort to reassert the legitimacy and usefulness of images within the context of a religious text. The *Leo Bible* therefore provides a valuable window into the intellectual, cultural, and artistic climate that emerged after the restoration of icons in the mid-ninth century CE.⁶

Of particular interest to art historians are the manuscript's thirteen full-page miniatures (or images) in addition to the complex interplay between the Greek epigrams and the accompanying illustrations. Entire pages are devoted to imagery, and their presentation—framed with decorative inscriptions in a manner reminiscent of easel paintings—further emphasizes their importance within the manuscript.⁷ The style of these images is also noteworthy. The miniatures display a painterly and classicizing style, which has encouraged scholars to discuss the relationship between the more stylized iconic imagery of Byzantine tradition and this naturalistic interpretation of tradition-

al iconography, calling into question whether there was a "Macedonian Renaissance" or whether these classicizing elements represent a continuation of earlier artistic interests. Thus, the *Leo Bible* also serves as an invaluable resource for examining the relationship between text and image and for understanding how disparate influences shaped the artistic production of this period.

Today, the original manuscript is preserved a continent away in the Vatican Library, where access is strictly limited and especially difficult for younger scholars to obtain. This acquisition helps overcome those geographical and institutional barriers, making possible a more immediate encounter with the manuscript and a stronger sense of its physical grandeur. Its extraordinarily large scale becomes palpable as its weighty pages are turned, while its carefully orchestrated visual program comes into sharper focus through the interplay of miniatures and text in ways that digital images cannot replicate. Therefore, the acquisition of this new, high-quality facsimile provides a unique and important opportunity for students, researchers, and members of the Tufts community to engage directly with one of the most significant surviving manuscripts of the Byzantine world.

5 Rico Franses, "The Literal, the Symbolic, and the Contact Portrait: On Belief in the Interaction between Human and Divine," in *Donor Portraits in Byzantine Art: The Vicissitudes of Contact between Human and Divine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 194–222.

6 David Olster, "Byzantine Hermeneutics after Iconoclasm."

7 Helen C. Evans, ed., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 87.

Michelle Lopez's *Single Line* and its Chemistry

Connor D'Angelo, Tufts University

There is a certain nostalgia that comes with objects of play, a delineation so precise in the memories and imaginations of our youth. Inexplicably vivid, inexpressibly secure, and initiated by tactility, they are memories we can feel. It was Michelle Lopez's *Shadow of a Doubt* (January 15, 2025–April 19, 2026) at the Tufts University Art Galleries that evoked one such memory from my childhood. As I stared at Lopez's first work in the exhibition, *Single Line* (2023), I recalled a distinct tactile sensation, a feeling in my hand: the Calico Critters of my youth. *Single Line* is a snaking, coiled metal rope; greeting visitors with its humble, fuzzy form, the surface of this impossibly standing structure is coated in floccose haze, the same material that encases the small form of a Calico Critter. The rope, no more than an inch in diameter, is covered in a thin layer of nylon hairs, so ultra-fine one would think it was velvet.

Flocking, the electrostatic application of fine fibers, gives both *Single Line* and the Calico Critters their shared texture. An adhesive coating is applied to the desired substance, the base "rope" in this case, and cut nylon fibers are applied using an electrostatic applicator gun. Lopez utilizes this complex process for a myriad of her gravity-defying rope works (including *Safety Dream* and *RopeHinge*). As she defines it, this "hyper-rope" defies its traditional "limpness and restraint" in search of "tactility of reinforcement and contradiction."¹ It is this defiance of expectation, this surreality, that causes one to question the form in front of them. How can such a process, that renders an everyday object suddenly unfamiliar, be better understood?

The feeling of surreality is not restricted to the final product but extends to the method itself. The flocking process is done with nylon, the colloquial polymer, which is reduced to fine, millimeter-long strands. Difficult to adhere, its repeating chain, upon observation, finds itself as its own "single line." The long, snaking polymer mimics both the form and emotion of the work, its monomer defying physical reason. Where one would expect nylon to coil and clump, it stretches and supports itself just as Lopez defies the typical bunching of a rope. Hidden under a microscopic barrier on Lopez's *Single Line* are millions of applied, coiled snakes of alkanes and amides, electrostatically charged to align and adhere onto the rope's glue-coated surface. With



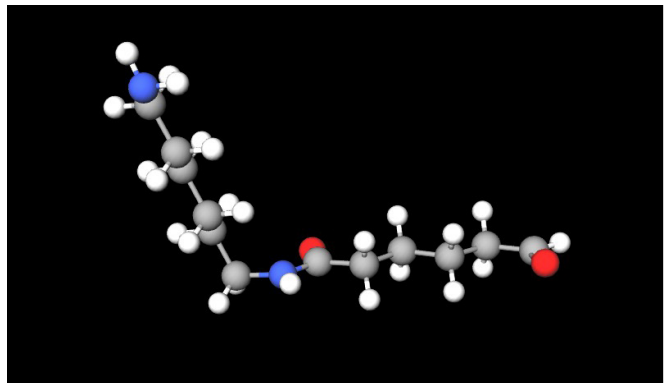
Michelle Lopez, *Single Line*, 2023, steel and nylon, 42.25 x 49.5 x 20 in. Photograph courtesy of Tufts University Art Galleries.

1 "LASSO REPRIEVE: Michelle Lopez," Commonwealth and Council, September 16, 2023, <https://commonwealthandcouncil.com/exhibitions/michelle-lopez/press>.

all charged ends sitting neatly in line with one another, the desired velvety texture is achieved, a fine fur application that shifts the texture of the sculpture's metal surface to align with the visual characteristics of rope.

But there exists another, deeper layer to *Single Line*'s uncanniness—one rooted in emptiness. The success of the electrostatic charging during the flocking process can widely vary fiber density; variables including surface geometry, concavity, and glue application are all crucial to maximizing the process. Even the best flocking oscillates between 8-10% of actual area coverage, meaning the resulting 90-92% of Lopez's surfaces are simply *air*.² Lopez, through the inclusion of empty space, is engaging with the tenets of minimalism. Creation from less and the mental excitation engendered by physical absence is at the heart of the minimalist movement. Lopez produces a vision of a simple rope, but uses flocking to cast an everyday object in a new light. The vocabulary of minimalism, absence and voids, are foundational to the very process that marks the unique texture of her work.

In a way, *Single Line* is a polymer unto itself, a chemical miracle of technical application consisting of endlessly sequential units. And beyond these units exists a deeper surreality, an emptiness of materiality that feels as real as any velveteen toy from childhood memory. Fostering space within lines within lines, Lopez's work defies expectations as much as it capitalizes on the very building blocks of nature.



Capture of Nylon-6,6 Monomer Molecular Model. Created by author using MolView Software.

² "Basics of Flocking," SCHNIER Flock, last modified 2026, <https://schnier-flock.de/en/grundlagen-der-be-flockung>.