

VAN LÉVÉ

AN INTRODUCTION TO

VAN LÉVÉ

**SOVEREIGN VISIONS
FROM THE CREOLE AND MAROON
CARIBBEAN AND AMAZONIA**
Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and Haiti,
2001–Now

September 28, 2026 – June 5, 2027

CURATED BY Claire Tancons

Foreword

I am delighted to welcome to the Alain Locke Gallery the first iteration of **Van Lévé: Sovereign Visions from the Creole and Maroon Caribbean and Amazonia: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and Haiti, 2001–Now**, curated by the Guadeloupe-born international curator Claire Tancons.

The Alain Locke Gallery is a distinctive exhibition space situated in Harvard Square, within Harvard University, dedicated to African and African American art. “African American,” I hurry to note, here encompasses a broader meaning than in its use in common parlance as an adjective referring to the Afrodescendant populations of the United States. At the Alain Locke Gallery and the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research to which it belongs, we understand the term hemispherically. While the United States has historically been at the core of the Center’s research programs and permanent collections of art and archives, attention to the African continent and its worldwide diasporas has also always been central to its work and activities. In the last decade, Latin America has become another strong area of focus with the creation of ALARI (the Afro-Latin American Research Institute) under the impetus of Professor Alejandro de la Fuente. The exhibition *El Pasado Mío/My Own Past: Afrodescendant Contributions to Cuban Art*, presented at the gallery in 2022–2023, and its accompanying publication only underscored ALARI’s critical role in the Center.

It is with this wide-ranging view of African and African American expressive cultures that the gallery welcomes Van L  v   and the opportunity it brings to turn our sustained attention for the first time to the French- and Creole/Kr  yol-speaking Caribbean and Amazonia. We are especially thrilled to engage with, showcase, and amplify artworks and artists, some of which are seldom exhibited in the United States, and even less so in a presentation curated from a situated Caribbean-French perspective.

Born and raised in Martinique, I belong to the large, diverse, and vibrant Caribbean diasporic community who calls the Boston area home and with whom, I hope, the show will resonate as deeply as it does with me. For our friends and neighbors from Haiti and the Creole/Kréyol-speaking Caribbean and Amazonia, *kay la se pou nou, kay-la sé ta zot*.

As a university gallery, it is our mission to foster scholarly and pedagogical engagement with the artworks and artistic practices presented in our exhibitions as well as with their sociopolitical and historical contexts. The conversation around Van Lévé already began in the spring of 2026 with the international symposium *Exhibiting Art from the French and Creole/Kréyol-Speaking Caribbean and Amazonia: Sociological, Historical, Art Historical, and Museological Perspectives* organized by Audrey Célestine, Claire Tancons, and me at the Hutchins Center with generous support from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.

We hope that this exhibition guide and its companion gallery supplement will prove useful resources to prompt further thinking and conversations about the historical and contemporary expressive cultures of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and Haiti.

The show and the questions it raises are timely. While the visual and expressive cultures of and about territories and peoples of the Americas once under French colonial rule have received relatively little attention in museums and in the academy, the tide is shifting. Recent landmark exhibitions and publications have paved the way for greater recognition and better understanding of these expressive traditions (as further discussed in the gallery supplement). Renewed attention to the region is also deservedly arising thanks to an effervescent art scene that has emerged around distinguished contemporary artists whose creative visions bring into the spotlight the past, present, and future of expressive cultures in, from, and about this geography. The wind, indeed, is rising—Van Lévé—and the Alain Locke Gallery is pleased to catch an early breeze.

–Cécile Fromont, Faculty Director
Alain Locke Gallery of African & African American Art

<i>Ven en lève</i>	<i>The wind is rising</i>
<i>I ka hélé, I ka hélé</i>	<i>It hails, it hails</i>
<i>I ka mandé lé répondè</i>	<i>It calls for the responders</i>
<i>Ven lève Manman</i>	<i>The wind is rising Mama,</i>
<i>I ka hélé, i ka mandé</i>	<i>It hails, it asks for</i>
<i>lé répondè</i>	<i>the responders</i>

Gratien Midonet, 1979

Parsing the Embers to Save the Breeze: Flickers of Caribbean-French Art Theory (around Van Lève)

An American Prelude to Van Lève

Mainstream United States media, perhaps unbeknownst to them, have registered Caribbean-French presence in the past months like never before. Following a dazzling entrance to “*Matété a krab*,” a Creole song played to *gwoka* (the traditional drum music of Guadeloupe), the Caribbean-French mixed martial artist Ciryil Gane won by technical knockout the interim heavyweight title at UFC Freedom 250, the Ultimate Fighting Championship bout staged at the White House on June 14, 2026, to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the United States declaring its independence and the eightieth birthday of President Donald J. Trump. Some wavelengths away, Caribbean-French football star Thierry Henry served as Fox Sports’ FIFA World Cup commentator while an intersection of Fiftieth Street and Sixth Avenue in New York was temporarily named Thierry Henry Way.

Did Bad Bunny, the sensational Puerto Rican rapper, start it all by including the flags of the Caribbean-French territories of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane, non-sovereign territories though they are, next to that of his native country of Puerto Rico—granted, an unincorporated territory of the United States—alongside the flags of

all other Latin American and Caribbean countries, thereby granting visibility, legibility, and legitimacy to political entities heretofore largely *un-visible*? Indeed, Krista A. Thompson's consideration of un-visibility, which she defines in her 2015 book *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* as "the state of not being seen, or not being recognized," seems particularly apt here.

What if the time of Caribbean-French territories had come precisely because, in an era when Latin American and Caribbean countries like Venezuela, Cuba, and Haiti are in the orbit of the United States' planetary land grab, they provide satellite tools with which to reckon with the very notion of sovereignty? What, then, if the Caribbean-French regions' tentative initiatives toward greater autonomy had to reckon with the reality of today's geopolitical quagmire, in which to remain French might be seen, under the current circumstances—circumstances of expropriation and expatriation of Caribbean communities from the United States and the return of American colonization of the Caribbean—as a viable and maybe even preferable option to becoming American? Might the sovereign visions projected by the artists of *Van Lévé* against the resonant new sound of Caribbean futurity, cloaked in the secrecy of murmurs and the untranslatability of a creole remix, help eschew such binaries?

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Van Lévé: Sovereign Visions from the Creole and Maroon Caribbean and Amazonia: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and Haiti, 2001-Now (Van Lévé for short) is a collective, intergenerational, and transhistorical exhibition weighing notions of artistic autonomy against political

sovereignty in Caribbean and Amazonian artistic practices, from a distinctly Caribbean perspective, in the period since the French recognition of slavery as a crime against humanity (2001). This ambitious curatorial and editorial project, resolutely situated in a contemporary reading of a transhistorical present, with hints toward Caribbean futurity, takes on an introductory form at the Alain Locke Gallery, at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University, ahead of future sailings at farther ports of call.

The title of the exhibition, *Van Lévé*, "the wind is rising" in French Creole, is a metaphor for the political tensions sweeping across the so-called French Caribbean ever since France's "Old Colonies" became French departments in 1946. It draws from the Martinican poet Gratien Midonet's late 1970s *biguine-bèlè* "*Ven en lévé*," turned autonomist anthem as the Guadeloupean *gwoka*-carnival march "*Van lévé*," all the way to Guadeloupean artist Minia Biabiany's 2020 video-poem "*Pawol sè van*": "words are but wind." It is a rallying cry for Caribbean-French generations of people living in territories traversed by the tensions between the breeze of the trade winds and the gusts of hurricanes, where postcard beauty, natural catastrophe, and political agony can build up a storm.

Van Lévé draws theoretical insight from the Puerto Rican anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla's work on the concept of (non-)sovereignty in the French Caribbean. It is also methodologically informed by the Bahamian art historian Krista A. Thompson's interrogation about installing art as a Caribbeanist. Crucially, it extends this demand for a situated Caribbean curatorial practice toward *instituting* art as a *French* Caribbeanist. Indeed, as the history of *Van Lévé* reveals, curatorial work in and of the French Caribbean cannot be fully implemented as long as institutional

challenges remain unaddressed, political questions inherent to a postcolonial context unresolved.

Van L    delineates the contours of an Antillean Renaissance in the arts and humanities at the inception of the region's fifth century (to bring   douard Glissant's periodization into the twenty-first century). It celebrates artists who are uninhibited vis-  -vis the region's history of slavery and indentureship and are critical of the postcolonial present; who are agents of a decolonial movement with their futurist, feminist, ecological, Creole, Indigenous, Maroon, and revolutionary imaginaries.

Non-Sovereign Political Futures

Nous devenons cr  ateurs de nous-m  mes et du monde dont nous avons d  sir. Van-an l   !

We are becoming creators of ourselves and of the world we desire. A wind rises!

—Patrick Chamoiseau,

Faire-Pays:   loge de la responsabilisation (2023)

The period that began in 2001, when the Guyanese deputy Christiane Taubira successfully brought a law before the French Parliament recognizing slavery as a crime against humanity, seemed to herald a new era of public reckoning with France's colonial past.

Fast-forward to 2026, as the French Republic celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of what has become known as the Taubira Law and the French Parliament repealed the 340-year-old *Code noir* (the legal document codifying slavery in the French Empire), the reality is more contrasted. The lived experience of Caribbean-French populations, notably those of African descent, for whom

this law brought the legitimate expectations of improved living conditions, fell short of providing more than memorial reparation.

A new generation of Caribbean- and Amazonian-French artists, born between the late 1970s to the middle of the 1990s, many of whom are included in Van L   , came of age during this era. Some went on to study at the Campus Cara  b  en des Arts (CCA), or Caribbean Arts Campus (e.g., **Ronald Cyrille**); this is the sole French-sanctioned school offering university-level art and design training in the French Caribbean region (heir to an earlier initiative by then Fort-de-France mayor Aim   C  saire, dating back to the mid-1980s). Others went off to metropolitan France, or *la m  tropole* (as it was then and still is commonly called), to integrate and graduate from the country's many national art schools (**Ga  lle Choise**, **Minia Biabiany**) and decorative arts schools, chief among which are Paris's les Beaux-Arts and les Arts D  co (**Kenny Duncan**). Most found a dearth of material about, and interest in, African or African-diasporic aesthetics or postcolonial studies, or, for that matter, anything non-Western or critical of the West in general. What tools, oppositional or relational, did they then themselves create in order to elaborate their own counter-narratives, counter-histories, and counter-aesthetics?

To return to and linger on the political for a little while, a cursory overview of that first quarter of the twenty-first century—in effect, the period covered by and periodization elaborated around Van L   —shows a few symbolic landmarks and some realpolitik action amid the habitual tug-of-war between central Parisian power and regional overseas representatives, which so often results in stalemate.

On the one hand, elected local governmental bodies have taken steps toward political and symbolic

autonomy, joining regional international organizations such as CARICOM (Caribbean Community) or the PCIA (Interreg Amazon Cooperation Program), or else adopting national flags and anthems. In Martinique, these steps entailed the creation of a new red, black, and green flag flanked with a hummingbird and of a national anthem called “*Ansamn*” (“Together”). As regalian powers on matters of defense and security, for instance, remain exclusively exercised by the French state to which Martinique, like all other French so-called overseas territories, remains tethered, who might these tropes of nationhood fool? They at least don’t seem to fly with Van L  v   artists who, even among the most inclined to close depictions of nature, like **Jean-Marc Bullet** or **Gwladys Gambie**, refrain from featuring the national bird—which, granted, may steer clear from their sickened landscapes, about which more later.

Such autonomist sentiments were relayed by Martinique’s most decorated contemporary man of letters, the close collaborator and prot  g   of   douard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, in a book titled *Faire-Pays:   loge de la Responsabilisation* (2023) (*Country-ing: In Praise of Responsibilization*), which teeters between an aspirational propagandist leaflet and an intellectual political program. The volume celebrates Caribbean labor movements, advocates for the popular seizure of natural resources, and assembles a collective of two hundred like-minded activists, artists, and intellectuals striving toward an integrated, autonomous Caribbean and Amazonian region.

On the other hand, grassroots popular movements have staged a series of protests, strikes, and mildly violent actions against physical and symbolic representatives of the French state and the *b  k  *; i.e., the descendants of the colonial plantocracy. Their demands articulated three

interrelated points: lower cost of living, greater autonomy, and access to and control of the territories’ resources.

Bonilla’s book, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (2015), which planted the seeds of the critical reflection that led to the curatorial project Van L  v  , came out of her 2009 ethnographic study of one of the landmark grassroots movement in Guadeloupe (“*les 44 jours*,” or the “forty-four days” of general strike). She argues in the volume that these activists moved beyond questions of colonization and decolonization, seeking instead “non-sovereign,” if temporary, models of autonomy, always up to being renounced, renegotiated, and reconquered.

Many of the artistic expressions in support of these movements fall outside the realm of officially sanctioned, state-sponsored initiatives. Instead, they exist in the realm of the local and the popular, at the scale of the neighborhood, at the time of the carnival. They also deeply infuse the work of Van L  v   artists. Attuned to the exigencies of visibility—and strategic un-visibility—in such a highly monitored, heavily political context, the Caribbean-French artists of Van L  v   have learned to master the tours, contours, and detours of rich cultural traditions, refashioning the creole imaginary into renewed forms of Antillean and Amazonian visualities—into sovereign visions.

Sovereignty of the Imagination

... tu peux chercher    tout comprendre... tu peux faire les deux: vivre l’opacit   ou la relation. Mais il y a bien une chose qui te ferait passer pour le dernier des cons... c’est de refuser l’un comme l’autre. Tu crois pas? De t’enfermer sur toi-m  me.

... you can try to understand everything... you can do both: live in opacity or in relation. But there is one thing that will make you look like the biggest moron... it is to refuse one or the other. Don't you think? To shut yourself off from everything and everyone.

—Michael Roch, *Kò Mawon* (2026)

Van Lév , then, emerged as a cross-interrogation of two intersecting trends: the troubled political context of the French Caribbean and French Amazonian regions in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, coinciding with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Taubira Law and the concomitant emergence of a new generation of artists from Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane alongside fellow artists from Haiti and its diasporas who I will now introduce. I will do so by taking another critical historical detour, this time around Haiti, whose hard-won sovereignty lies in tatters at the hands of gangs designated by the United States as terrorist organizations.

Haiti, formerly known as Saint-Domingue, the then-kingdom of France's most highly prized colony, famously waged the second successful revolution in the Western Hemisphere (1791–1804) and the sole victorious insurrection by enslaved populations. Having thus gained freedom and independence, if at a high price it continues to pay in many ways, its contemporary sociopolitical contours stand in high contrast with those of the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique and offers a foil against which to test the very notion of sovereignty. The paradoxes and complexities of postcolonial sovereignty might be best exemplified by the common use of the notion of “togetherness” used both in the name of the Haitian gang Viv

Ansanm (“living together”) and as the title of Martinique's aforementioned “anthem,” “*Ansamn*,” even as special French military forces are training on Martinique's soil to assist in the war against the Haitian gangs.

The inclusion of Haiti in Van L v  reflects enduring cultural bonds and ideological alliances between the French Antilles and the “Pearl of the Antilles,” as Haiti was once called, regardless of geographical borders and state-sanctioned boundaries, and despite contrarian—and countered—historical teleologies. Antillean artists *recognize* each other, share kinship, form friendships, and fathom artistic affinities—a sense of the fugitive—all visible in their use of materials, arrangements of objects, and organization of space.

On the Harvard campus, in the city of Cambridge, proximate to the New England metropolis of Boston, home to one of the largest Haitian diasporas in the United States, the presence of four Haitian artists—of French, Canadian, and United States citizenship—is significant. At a time when the Haitian community straddles between the highs of Haiti's participation in the World Cup in a suburb of Boston and the lows of the repeal of the Temporary Protected Status from which many benefit, how might **Herv  T l maque's** harrowing representation of the Middle Passage, **Fabiola Jean-Louis's** eerily empty picture frame, **Manuel Mathieu's** undecipherable portal to a world beyond, and **Ga lle Choise's** precarious cardboard-print landscape register? What horizon might the historical arch traced in the exhibition from the premises of modern enslavement to the aftermath of racial capitalism provide? Van L v  takes its cue from Bonilla's call to desist from the conventional critique of the French Antilles as failing to attain political independence from France compared to Haiti, for instance—with all the caveats of the latter

cursorily recounted above. Instead, she invites us to recognize other internal forms of negotiated sovereignty.

At the heart of **Van L  v  **, then, is the desire to investigate how contemporary Caribbean-French and Amazonian-French artists as well as Haitian artists—at home, in mainland France, and in the diaspora—negotiate what the Barbadian writer George Lamming has called the “sovereignty of the imagination.” At the same time, **Van L  v  ** ponders how artists manage the burden of colonial legacies and navigate a tense French institutional web while holding their own divergent and sometimes antagonistic agendas and, ultimately, find creative freedom despite such strictures.

The seed for a still larger collective exhibition, **Van L  v  ** at the Alain Locke Gallery presents works by twenty-three contemporary artists never brought together before and, for a number of them, rarely, if ever, seen in the United States. These works lay bare some of the fundamentals of Guadeloupean, Martinican, Guyanese, and Haitian art: from the Black body and its spatial convolutions in room 10 (**Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc’s** film of a limbo dancer) to queer histories and experiences in room 6 (**Jimmy Robert’s** Peter Hujar-inspired photograph with an oversized creole hoop); from explorations in room 1 of self-determination (**Minia Biabiany’s** fist-shaped *poto mitan* column) to liminal absence (**Fabiola Jean-Louis’s** empty gilded papier-m  ch   frame); and from the implications of colorism in rooms 1 and 6 (**Kenny Dunkan’s** minimalist “melanin transfers” over white towels, the result of the artist’s skin-drying process) to mercantile and ecological history in room 4 (**Louisa Marajo’s** metallic pallet bedecked with a photographic print of sargassum algae).

The exhibition’s intergenerational approach, including artists born between 1937 and 1995, is a strong show of artistic transmission and genealogical formation that is further deepened by its transhistorical depth. **Van L  v  ** places rarely seen historical works from the Harvard Art Museums and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology collections at Harvard University in conversation with more recent counterparts to which they serve as allies, foils, or foes. While primarily focused on contemporary art, **Van L  v  ** provides a historical grounding and proposes art-historical genealogies for several generations of artists straddling multiple contemporaneities—like in the future-sound and future-utterances composed by writer **Michael Roch** and artist **Jordan Beal** from their hometown of Fort-de-France, or rather from the depths and highs of Lanvil, the dystopic, polyglossic, futuristic Caribbean megalopolis that forms the matrix around which **Roch’s** literary project revolves; it likewise undergirds the multimodal soundscape devised by **Beal**. Just like **Roch’s** urbanistic vision for Lanvil—an interconnected, pan-Caribbean cyborg fantasy—defies colonial cartography, inviting instead the possibility for fugitivity, so does **Beal’s** soundscape for and soundtrack of **Van L  v  ** escape linguistic legibility by challenging audibility itself through hushed voices, muffled sounds, unsettling high-pitched frequencies, and nearly deafening noises.

The old rallying cry “*Van L  v  !*” might no longer be audible to all—but it will rally those who can hear it and respond to its call! Silencing “*Van L  v  *,” then, allows for the possibility of new constituent utterances.

You hear me?

Shhh...

Listen up to the wind...

Room 1

Paths of Self-Possession

*Hush, hush... Did you hear that?
The hailing and the roaring and the
guttural clearing, as if inchoate
articulations of speech deferred.*

Van Lév  begins with a vacancy and a void, the vacancy of the subject and the void of representation. In this introductory work, **Fabiola Jean-Louis** reclaims the framework of classical European representation (a gilded frame) with a twist: It is made with papier-m  ch  and left empty. By voiding the image of whiteness such frames historically contained rather than replacing it with an image of Blackness or otherness, **Jean-Louis** offers a profound meditation on the visual economy of portraiture and the ontological complexity of Black representation. With her untitled work, the artist lays the groundwork for the liminal space of visual utterance occupied in turn by **Minia Biabiany** and **Kenny Dunkan**. Each of their works articulates a space for the Black body, likewise absent from representation other than through marks of **Duncan's** skin and imprints of **Biabiany's** hands. In so doing, **Jean-Louis**, **Biabiany**, and **Duncan** each formulates claims for visual, sensorial, and ultimately spiritual reparation within an aesthetic economy of representation in which retaining access to that representation and denying access to the possibility of othering is a political currency.

MINIA BIABIANY

"*Doubout*" is a Haitian/Guadeloupean Kréyol word meaning standing, raised, upright, or erect. Its meaning and inference could extend to a wide range of things, from a monument to a stand of sugarcane and a fist, to a moral or character trait.

Biabiany's work seems to ask: What does assimilation move one toward or away from? What is sacrificed in terms of people, the land, and the plants? How is colonialism as an extended event archived in memory and in the environment? Culture? And one's perception of oneself? How does one rise out of the weight of prescriptive identities and histories and unspoken traumas?

A statement from Manifesta 13 Marseilles tells us that *Doubout*' 2009 (recreated in 2026 for **Van Lévé**) "stands as an authoritarian symbol of the absence of a struggle for empowerment in contemporary Guadeloupe—which is currently a French territory—but also of the need for one."

The conceptual possibilities of works like this—works that catalyze ideas beyond the materiality of the object, works that bring into play the very spaces in which they are exhibited—are fertile.

Erica Moiah James — art historian, curator,
and associate professor at University of Miami

Biabiany strives to provide a space for community around an erected signpost for dignity, the *poto mitan* of creole societies, made with her own hands and exhorting us to rise up. (The title of the piece, *Doubout*, means "erect" or "rise up" in French Creole.) **Dunkan's** work addresses the trauma of epidermic assignation by reclaiming racist stereotypes associating Blackness and dirtiness. By framing a bathing towel and bathing glove—the latter cheekily embossed with the regal fleur-de-lis insignia—that showcase melanin remnants, or "melanin transfers," as he calls them, as if they were the very image of Christ on the Veil of Veronica, **Dunkan** elevates the stain and sin of Blackness to the realm of the divine and brings the Black artist to the status of sainthood.



1

FABIOLA JEAN-LOUIS | b. 1978

Untitled, 2022

Paper, 24K gold, and coffee stains over papier-mâché frame

Courtesy of the artist

2

MINIA BIABIANY | b. 1988

Doubout', 2026 (artist recreation of 2009 original)

Cotton, wood glue, steel

Courtesy of the artist

3

KENNY DUNKAN | b. 1988

La rencontre

The Encounter, 2020

Melanin transfer onto cotton terry cloth

Courtesy of the artist

4

KENNY DUNKAN | b. 1988

Topsy-Turvy, 2019

Melanin transfer onto cotton terry cloth

Courtesy of the artist

Room 2

The liminal framework through which these Caribbean-French artists apprehend Black representation thus delineated, a path clears through fine-line drawings by **Jean-Marc Bullet** and **Gwladys Gambie**, each attempting to capture the metamorphous stages of Caribbean nature. **Gambie** takes aim at, mingles, and mangles representations of the Black female body and of Antillean nature as natural sites of exotic escapism while **Bullet** takes an even more direct aim at the natural and man-made disasters that wreak havoc on henceforth unviable paradisiacal visions. Whereas **Gambie's** fine-line drawings dissect the female organs most commonly diagnosed with various forms of environmental poisoning, whether from the sargassum algae (here turned into textured paper) or the chlordecone pesticide, **Bullet's** likewise fine-line and mostly black-and-white drawings zoom in on the chemical composition of chlordecone and out onto the fantastical if fearsome transformations it creates.



5-9

GWLADYS GAMBIE | b. 1988

Untitled, from the series *Anatomie du sensible*

Anatomy of the Sensible, 2019–2021

Mixed media drawing on paper

Courtesy of the artist

10-12

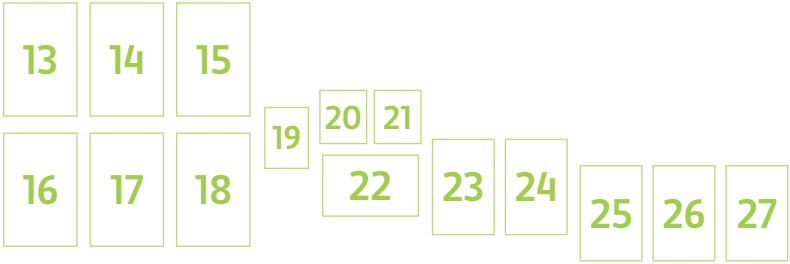
GWLADYS GAMBIE | b. 1988

Untitled, from the series *Anatomie du sensible*

Anatomy of the Sensible, 2019–2021

Mixed media drawing on handmade sargassum paper

Courtesy of the artist



13 **JEAN-MARC BULLET** | b. 1980
15 *Untitled*, 2025
16
17 Mixed media drawing on paper
19-27 Courtesy of the artist

14 **JEAN-MARC BULLET** | b. 1980
18 *Untitled*, 2019
Mixed media drawing on paper
Courtesy of the artist

Room 3

David Gumbs's virtual reality presentation, *Sonjé* (*Remember*), brings ecological reckonings and imaginings around the chlordecone catastrophe into multiple dimensions. **Gumbs's** AR video vividly showcases the aftermath of chlordecone poisoning by immersing the viewer in a dystopic banana plantation where the pesticide ravaged the land and its people for decades, from the 1970s through the 1990s, and will continue to do so for generations to come. Commensurate with the extent of the Antilles's environmental challenges, reflecting the continuity of what the political scientist Malcom Ferdinand refers to as "*l'habiter colonial* [colonial dwelling-in]"—that is, centuries of colonial occupation of Antillean land treating human and nonhuman entities as economic resources—is a pallet by **Louisa Marajo** casually leaning against the wall as if abandoned on a shipping dock. Laden with a golden-hued sargassum imprint, it represents another form of conflation between the abstracted enslaved body alluded to by an object used to carry heavy loads of merchandise and the long continuum of natural depredation of which the sargassum invasion is but one of the latest manifestations.

The artist **David Gumbs** presents two interviews as a behind-the-scenes or documentary layer of the artwork *Sonjé*—providing insight into the process and context in which the piece was created. He feels it is important to include these audio recordings so that the audience can hear the workers directly, in their own voices. These recordings stand on their own, allowing the speakers to address what is currently happening in Martinique and Guadeloupe. In this way, while the VR experience is oriented toward a futuristic vision, the interviews re-anchor the work in our present reality.

And so many people have already died. We already lost a lot of our friends. Once I counted up the number for Yvon and got a count of twenty and some, but now there are many more.

[...]

There are many more. Even close to us in the neighborhood, in the banana field, you see, even young fellows already left us.

Mrs Sorano — banana field worker

DAVID GUMBS | b. 1977

Sonjé

Remember, 2024

Virtual reality installation, runtime: 5 min

Mrs Sorano

Audio interview, runtime: 11:53 min

Mr Amédé

Audio interview, runtime: 8:40 min

All digital files courtesy of the artist

Translation for closed captioning by Hanétha Vété-Congolo,
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Professor of Romance
Languages and Literatures, Bowdoin College

Rooms 4 and 5

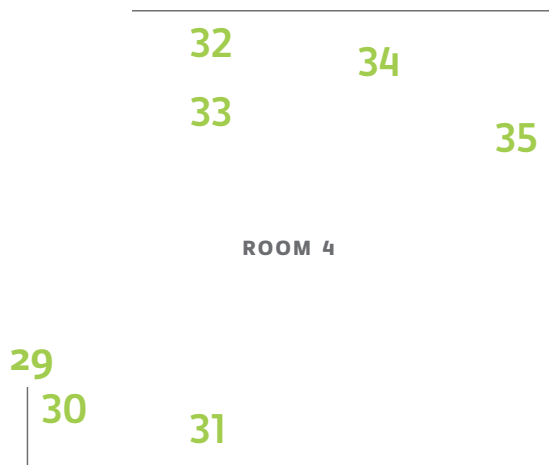
The decor thus planted—of refusals of the degradation of Black visual representation on the one hand and reveals of the colonial depredation of Caribbean nature on the other—**Room 4** avails historical tools for understanding the contemporary legacy of enslavement and colonialism. Featured in this room, on exceptional loan from Hamilton College, is *La Guadeloupe Pittoresque* (*Picturesque Guadeloupe*) by the nineteenth-century Guadeloupean-born creole painter and photographer **Armand Budan** (b. 1827, Guadeloupe; d. 1874, Martinique) with lithographs by **Eugène Cicéri** (1813–1890, France), who, although not creole, was one of the earlier artists with claims to inclusion into a Caribbean-French art history. Compare and contrast these picturesque representations of the Caribbean landscape, devoid as they are of all references to enslavement and colonialism, with **Gambie** and **Bullet's** treatment of the same in their contemporary aftermath!

Topping it all, in close vicinity, is **Hervé Télémaque's** lithograph *Dérive* (*Drift*) (1985), which visualizes slavery's afterlives. The ocean's waves morph into geometric patterns and organic shapes that wrestle to survive the Middle Passage or embrace release into Drexciya, an

imagined oceanic underworld visualizing what the British-Guyanese theorist Paul Gilroy has called “the Black Atlantic.” (The motif of the sinking capsized captives is a detail from an earlier, larger work.)

Proceeding farther along, **Cédrine Scheidig** (**Room 5**) and, farther still, **Clémence Lollia Hilaire** (**Room 9**) bring us face-to-face with male and female subjects of commanding presence in photo and film. **Scheidig** elegantly documents the daredevil, sometimes fatal, motorcycle antics of young Black and brown Martinican men at neighborhood rallies known locally as *cabrage*. These self-aware images also document her own gaze as an Afrodescendant female photographer, thereby engaging in a feminist auto-ethnography.

*Come again, I didn't get that...
Are you trying to make up what is
being said? You hearing voices or
what? There isn't anything to hear,
much less understand*



29

VICTOR LEVASSEUR (designer) | 1800–1870
and **Frédéric-Guillaume Laguillermie** (engraver) |

1805–1870

Colonies françaises (en Amérique)

French Colonies (in America)

from *Atlas national illustré*, pub. Amable
Combette, ca. 1843–1852

Hand-colored steel engraving

On loan from private collection

30

VICTOR LEVASSEUR (designer) | 1800–1870
and **Frédéric-Guillaume Laguillermie** (engraver) |

1805–1870

Colonies françaises. Martinique. Amérique du sud

French Colonies. Martinique. South America

from *Atlas national illustré*, pub. Amable
Combette, ca. 1843–1852

Hand-colored steel engraving

On loan from private collection

31

LOUISA MARAJO | b. 1987

Pallet Sargasse

Pallet Sargassum, 2019

UV imprint on brushed aluminum

Courtesy of the artist

32

ARMAND BUDAN (designer) | 1827–1874
 and **Émile Vernier** (lithographer) | 1829–1887
La rivière Palmiste, hauteurs du Petit Bourg
 (Guadeloupe)
The River Palmiste, on the Hills of Petit Bourg
 (Guadeloupe)

from *La Guadeloupe pittoresque*, pub. Noblet
 et Baudry, 1863

Lithograph

Hutchins Center Collection

33

ARMAND BUDAN (designer) | 1827–1874
 and **Émile Vernier** (lithographer) | 1829–1887
La Guadeloupe pittoresque
Picturesque Guadeloupe

pub. Noblet et Baudry, 1863

Book, 44 pages, 11 leaves of plates (1 folded)

Beinecke Collection of the Lesser Antilles,
 Hamilton College

34

EUGÈNE CICÉRI (lithographer) | 1813–1890
 and **HIPPOLYTE HARTMANN** (photographer) |
 1818–ca. 1902
Vue du château d'eau ou canal de Gueydon,
Fort-de-France, Martinique
View of the Watertower or Canal of Gueydon,
Fort-de-France, Martinique

from *Album Martiniquais*, pub. Imprimerie
 Lemercier, 1860

Lithograph

Hutchins Center Collection

35

HERVÉ TÉLÉMAQUE | 1937–2022
Dérive
Drift, 1992

Lithograph

Estate of Hervé Télémaque

ROOM 5

39

38

37

36

36

CÉDRINE SCHEIDIG | b. 1994
Gold from *Les mornes, le feu, or*
Saltwater and Other Ghosts, 2022–2024

C-print photograph, framed
Courtesy of the artist

37

CÉDRINE SCHEIDIG | b. 1994
Dillon from *Les mornes, le feu, or*
Saltwater and Other Ghosts, 2022–2024

C-print photograph, framed
Courtesy of the artist

38

CÉDRINE SCHEIDIG | b. 1994
Red from *Les mornes, le feu, or*
Saltwater and Other Ghosts, 2022–2024

C-print photograph, framed
Courtesy of the artist

39

CÉDRINE SCHEIDIG | b. 1994
Snake from *Les mornes, le feu, or*
Saltwater and Other Ghosts, 2022–2024

C-print photograph, framed
Courtesy of the artist

Cédrine Scheidig Photographs

The Caribbean has been photographically constructed as empty. Not uninhabited, but stripped of its cities, its people, and its contemporary life, in favor of landscapes that stage availability. Krista Thompson has shown how this visual regime was historically produced, and Rivke Jaffe reminds us of the paradox it sustains: the Caribbean is in fact one of the most urbanized regions in the world, and yet its cities remain almost entirely absent from the images that circulate internationally, including within photography and museum collections. This erasure is not neutral. It shapes what gets collected, what gets exhibited, and ultimately what is understood as Caribbean art.

My work is rooted in those cities. It began in 2022 in Fort-de-France, on a parking lot at the edge of the city. There, a community of young men developed a set of practices entirely their own: a weekly gathering built around motorcycle acrobatics, with its own aesthetics, codes, forms of care.

What emerges from my photographs is a coexistence that feels characteristic of the post-colonial French-Caribbean city: global urban culture and vernacular practice, the motorcycle and the altar, the walls marked by fragmented texts and symbols, all of it layered and unresolved, carried in gestures and objects rather than explicitly named. These are not images of marginality, they are images of invention, and of a city producing its own imaginaries outside the frame the postcard built.

Cédrine Scheidig — Extract from *At the Edges of Paradise: Urban Imaginaries in the Post-Colonial Caribbean City* (2026)

Ronald Cyrille

Timtim in Guadeloupe and Martinique. *Sirandann* in Mauritius. Island riddles practiced then and now, survived and thrived in at least thirteen islands of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean. Riddles are part of our everyday life in a fundamental and porous way. Our expressions espouse the spirit of *sirandann*, with metaphors, a blending of the human and nonhuman worlds, displacing/restructuring categories.

The spirit of our island riddles lives on in the way we communicate, in the way we move in and inhabit the world, in the way we read literature and art, dare I say. Yes, I dare. It is high time we acknowledge that the hermeneutics of reading literature and decoding art taught to us by the academy is anything but universal, as they claim it to be. It is particular, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot would remind us. Yes, I dare make space for a *timtim*, a *sirandann* way of reading literature, of appreciating art, of creating, of producing scholarship.

[...]

Guadeloupean/Dominican artist **Ronald Cyrille** has a distinctive style. His recurrent characters (the bird, the *chyen creole*) are at once alter egos; the locus of a personal mythology; a grammar of displaced categories featuring the human, the natural world, the domestic, the urban. Not enacting a *retour*, but a *détour* to riddles, **Cyrille** “traces” and retraces ancestral traditions toward futurities. He hashtags his artwork: #bestiaire #abécédaire #alphabetde-formes #storytelling. He creates new, exploded categories, remakes our world and our landscapes. He is our contemporary storyteller.

Usha Rungoo — Mauritian-American scholar, teacher, speaker, creative writer, and assistant professor at Harvard University

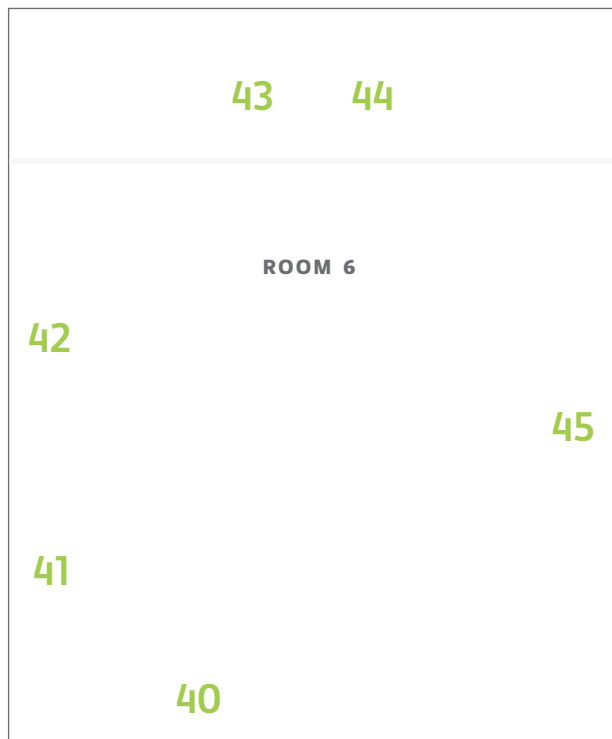
Room 6

A significant feature of **Van Lévé** at the Alain Locke Gallery, fulfilling its transhistorical ambition to help trace a creole and maroon art genealogy, is the inestimable presence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imagery from pioneering artists—by criteria determined by the art historian Christelle Lozère regardless of racial assignment—including rarely seen paintings by **Agostino Brunias** from the Harvard Art Museums. These historical works offer rare pendants to contemporary paintings by **Ronald Cyrille** and **Tessa Mars**. Heir to a longstanding lineage of Guadeloupean painters dating back to the nineteenth century, **Cyrille** offers elements of reconstruction toward a contemporary Caribbean landscape, one which is populated with human and animal presences that often merge as zoomorphic or anthropomorphic creatures, of the kind that so often elude colonial representation of landscapes. In such older representations, the Black human figure would be either totally absent or rendered exotic and made subaltern. **Cyrille's** resort to the rich vocabulary of Caribbean folktales provides windows into an Afro-Creole psyche, procuring visions of self-possession that may have made survival possible.

Tessa Mars's submerged female subjects—among whom an older woman and the artist herself, or rather, a woman whose head is bedecked with horns, barely emerging from the swamp into which she seems to have fallen, or from which she is rising—hint at a longer narrative of which this is but one storytelling element. Proximate with one of **Kenny Dunkan's** melanin transfers, itself adjacent to **Agostino Brunias's** depiction of Creole women of various skin tones, **Mars** and **Cyrille's** non-mimetic colors seem like a rebuke of colonial-era colorist ideology.

The intrusion of photography in what otherwise resembles an archetypal nineteenth-century painting cabinet, replete with the customary green and red wall paint traditionally found in historical museums, similarly does away with stereotypical representations of Blackness, even of contemporary queer Blackness, absorbed by masculinist representations derived from the hip-hop music industry. In *Creole Earring II* (2021),

a reprint of a photograph originally produced for a monographic exhibition at the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow (*Tobacco Flowers*, 2021), **Jimmy Robert** weaves an intricate web of Western visual art references—ranging from 1920s prints by the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, in whose house he is posing, to the New York artist Peter Hujar, whose 1981 photograph he restages, to drag queen Ethyl Eichelberger, whom he impersonates—with creole cultural inspiration denoted by an oversized creole hoop earring. At once racing Hujar's photograph of a white male in drag and queering representations of Black womanhood, **Robert's** self-portrait thus situated amid a small if revealing spectrum of Caribbean painting (paintings and photographs of the Caribbean and/or by Caribbean artists) a few feet away from a small introduction to Caribbean photography with **Cédrine Scheidig**, brings perspectives to the multilayered possibilities of representation with agentivity.



40

ROLAND CYRILLE | b. 1984
L'Accolade, from the series *L'Antre deux*, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

41

TESSA MARS | b. 1985
A Vision of Peace, Harmony and Good Intelligence I, 2020

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of Sabine Vazieux

42

KENNY DUNKAN | b. 1988
Do you washcloth? (#2), 2025

Melanin transfer onto cotton terry cloth

Courtesy of the artist

Agostino Brunias

The two paintings by **Agostino Brunias** presented here belong to a group of six canvases originally gifted to Harvard College in 1790 by John Gardiner, a Boston-born planter and member of the colonial assembly of the Caribbean island of Saint Kitts (or Saint-Christophe), where he likely acquired them directly from the painter. Since then, they have been held and occasionally displayed on campus as curiosities in the college's eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Philosophy Chamber, and later on as ethnographic documents in the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology during the twentieth century. In 2023, they became part of the Harvard Art Museums collection. Starting in the spring of 2027, the other four paintings in the group will be on display at the Fogg Museum on Quincy Street, across Harvard Yard from the Alain Locke Gallery. The Harvard Art Museums collaborated with the Harvard Caribbean Club to devise strategies to display these complex works on campus responsibly and sensitively for present-day audiences.

In the **Van Lévé** exhibition, curated from a Caribbean perspective, contemporary artworks by artists from the regions **Brunias** depicted offer spirited counterpoints to these historical paintings. With their own views of Caribbean landscapes, peoples, and beings, they reframe and challenge the prejudiced representations painted by **Brunias**, which were aimed at promoting plantation colonialism with voyeuristic scenes intended for a male Euro-American gaze.

This presentation at the Alain Locke Gallery, a space dedicated to African and African American art, contributes an important new chapter, on Caribbean terms, to the long history of the paintings at Harvard.

Cécile Fromont

43

AGOSTINO BRUNIAS | ca. 1730–1796

Women of Color Bathing and a Voyeur,
ca. 1765–1790

Former title: *Mulatresses & Negro Woman Bathing*

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of The Harvard Art Museums
(2023.179)

44

AGOSTINO BRUNIAS | ca. 1730–1796

Two Women of Color, Dominica, ca. 1765–1790

Former title: *French Mulatress of Dominica
& a Negro Woman in their Proper Dress*

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of The Harvard Art Museums
(2023.183)

45

JIMMY ROBERT | b. 1975

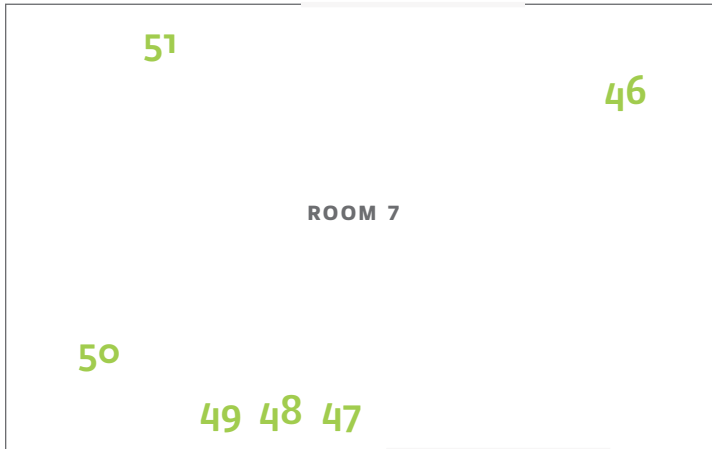
Creole Earring II, 2021

Inkjet print

Courtesy of The Hunterian, University of
Glasgow. Purchased with Art Fund support

Room 7

Eschewing the trappings of representation, the play of light and shadow through **Franky Amété's** *Tembé Cube* reveals the labyrinthine relationship between *tembé* drawing and marronnage. The scaled-down version of a monumental sculpture displayed in the lobby of the General Hospital of Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni (the capital of Bushinengué territory), **Amété's** innovative three-dimensional design appears in such light as a curative to representational tropes that do a disservice to Black subjectivity under conditions of coloniality. This contemporary piece's three-dimensional cutout design contrasts with the Black motifs painted on the Surinamese bowl on loan from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Together, the pieces showcase the centuries-long aesthetic tradition of fugitivity at the heart of Bushinengué artistic practices from the Guiana Shield.



46

FRANKY AMÉTÉ | b. 1965

Cube tembé

Tembé Cube, 2022

Wood, light bulb, electrical wire

Courtesy of the artist

47

HIPPOLYTE HARTMANN | 1818–ca. 1902

Woman, seated, with hat and jewelry,
ca. 1850–1870

Reprint of a carte-de-visite photograph

Courtesy of the Peabody Museum
of Archaeology and Ethnology,
Harvard University, 2004.29.10076

48

HIPPOLYTE HARTMANN | 1818–ca. 1902

Woman, seated, with nose ring ca. 1850–1870

Reprint of a carte-de-visite photograph

Courtesy of the Peabody Museum
of Archaeology and Ethnology,
Harvard University, 2004.29.10078

49

HIPPOLYTE HARTMANN | 1818–ca. 1902

Woman standing, ca. 1850–1870

Reprint of a carte-de-visite photograph

Courtesy of the Peabody Museum
of Archaeology and Ethnology,
Harvard University, 2004.29.10077

50

ARTIST ONCE KNOWN*Painted pottery bowl, before 1922*

Ceramic

Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology,
Harvard University, Gift of Mrs. Thomas E.
Penard, 1942, 42-18-30/3468

51

VICTOR LEVASSEUR (designer) | 1800–1870
and **Frédéric-Guillaume Laguillermie** (engraver) |

1805–1870

*Colonies françaises (en Amérique)**French Colonies (in America)*

from *Atlas national illustré*, pub. Amable
Combette, ca. 1852–1858

Hand-colored steel engraving

On loan from private collection

Room 8

Another grouping consists of works hinting at revolutionary dreams imperiled by death's inescapable calling. To **Raphaël Barontini's** seemingly triumphant Toussaint Louverture on horseback, **Gaëlle Choisine** offers a tentative horizon, glanced through a perspective reminiscent of a door of no return (as in Gorée Island's Museum of Slaves) in the form of a photograph of the sea imprinted on cardboard. An expert of translating history painting onto supports (tapestry) or into techniques (collage) propitious to accretion, **Barontini** revels in visual rebus replete with art-historical fragments cyphered through the import of coloniality to restore a more complex outlook on the making of history as much as of art and of art history. No amount of subdued pastel colors can fully cancel one's knowledge of or intuition for the impending dramatic fall of the Black character depicted in a position more usually taken by white generals—a character rendered unstable by precisely the non-normative interventions that are meant to elevate him. The story behind **Choisine's** work acts as an eerie illustration of the drama of materiality. It comes in as a replacement for a humbling, upright mortuary stele of concrete imprinted with images of Port-au-Prince's ruins that

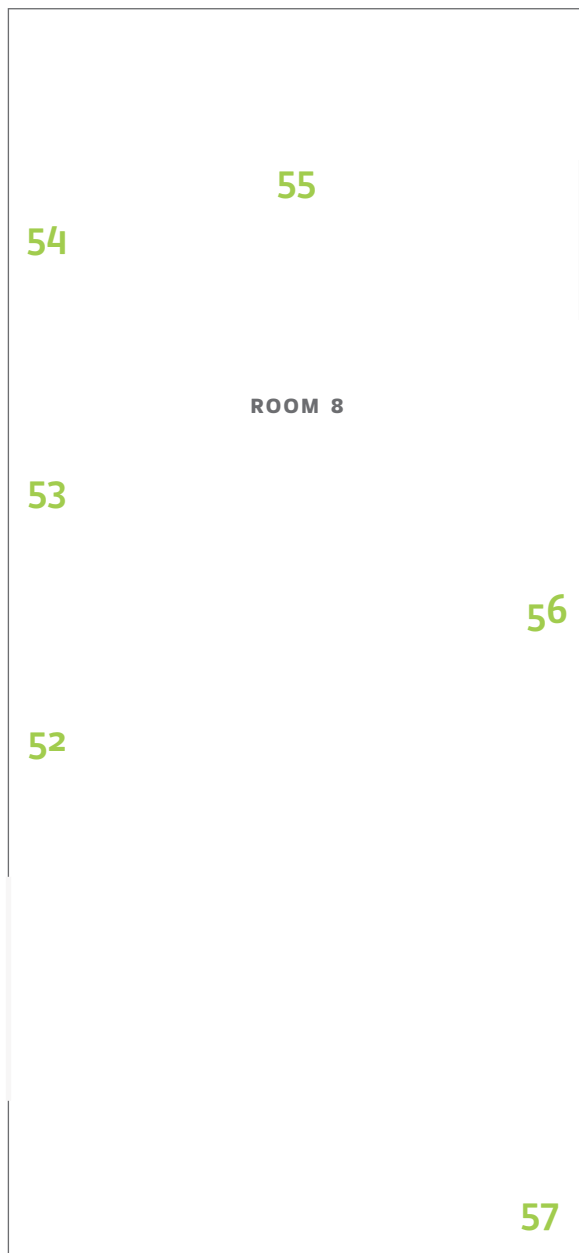
was ultimately abandoned for this exhibition following damages incurred during repeated overseas transfers—a somewhat chilling mise en abyme of the precariousness of the materiality of life itself.

Further on, **Manuel Mathieu's** floor installation of ceramic over burned fabric summons the image of a portal to a possible afterlife, thereby assuaging **Ernest Breleur's** visions of dying birds woven within an intricate web of colored transparencies. Presented in a monographic exhibition at the De la Warr Pavilion titled *The End of Figuration* (2024), **Mathieu's Portals** (2021) is an ode to the imagination as part of a wider discussion about what figuration is and can be, when withdrawn from the false dichotomy with its sparring partner, abstraction.

Signaling the artist's return to painting, the outcome of thought-images formed during meditative walks into the mangles of the Martinican forest transferred into experimentations back at his home studio, **Breleur's** new body of work, *Dans la vallée de l'ombre de la mort, les oiseaux se cachent pour mourir et les arbres meurent debout*. (*In the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Birds Hide When Dying and Trees Die Standing*) (2024), breaks open centuries of painting history. Here, an inspiration from the 1960s French art movement *Supports/Surfaces*, in which the canvas provided the content as much as the context for the artwork, is hybridized with motifs, materials, and an accumulative manner recognizable from a Caribbean artistic logic of excess. Clearly contained within the artist's hand-made wooden frames, stretched with layers

of translucent plastic affording a view of and through multiple layers of painted surface, what comes into excess here isn't so much materiality as visibility itself.

Lushness and lightness nevertheless dominate while these artists' mastery of white cube exhibitionary logics triumphs. Here, **Breleur** acts as the group's elder, giving depth to the intention of intergenerational dialogue and revealing the import of mentorship alluded to in the dual presence of **Breleur** and **Gwladys Gambie** (**Room 2**), the latter a past art student of the former.



52-54 ERNEST BRELEUR | b. 1945
Untitled, from the series *Dans la vallée de l'ombre de la mort, les oiseaux se cachent pour mourir et les arbres meurent debout. In the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Birds Hide When Dying and Trees Die Standing*, 2022–2024

Industrial paint on transparent film

Courtesy of the artist

55 MANUEL MATHIEU | b. 1986
Portals, 2021

Burnt fabric, ink, ceramic

Courtesy of the artist

56 RAPHAËL BARONTINI | b. 1984
Le Triomphe de Toussaint Louverture
The Triumph of Toussaint Louverture, 2025

Silk, cotton, wool, and lurex tapestry

Courtesy of the artist and Mariane Ibrahim
(Chicago, Paris, Mexico City)

57 GAËLLE CHOISNE | b. 1985
Affectives Documents_3 (Sea), 2023

UV printing on cardboard

Courtesy of Fondazione Zimei

Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc

At first Abonnenc's film disorients. One is not immediately sure of what one is looking at. The body has been defamiliarized, turned upside down à la Duchamp to demand something else of us.

[...]

The work suggests a state of contortion, inversion, liminality, but the figure lives in metaphor and as such embodies the ability to rise and occupy space in a manner it directs. Do we see the shadows as a place of emergence or disappearance? If we extend the inversion beyond the artist's intention, turn the image upside down, can we begin to imagine her in flight?

Erica Moiah James — art historian, curator,
and associate professor at University of Miami

Clémence Lollia Hilaire engages with the norms of science fiction gore only to subvert them into another form of auto-fiction wherein she acts as the main protagonist in a coming-of-age tale set in the land of her ancestors, Guadeloupe. Featuring distorting fish-eye camera optics halfway through, the film turns otherworldly when **Lollia Hilaire's** character finds herself on top of a tropical rendition of Le Petit Prince's lonely planet, having fallen through a hollow ground—a representational vortex.

In closing, or to begin with, or to start again, in this museographic peregrination where the end is also the middle of the journey, **Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc** offers a puzzling visual and linguistic riddle. To the play on words based on the alliterative possibilities between the words *limbé* (French Creole for “heartbreak”) and limbo (a Trinidadian ritual dance) responds a shadow play of sorts, in which the image of the **Abonnenc** collaborator and dancer-choreographer Betty Tchomanga slowly comes into focus as the camera zooms in for minutes of disquieting suspense. As one's breath halts with pregnant expectation, and the pupil dilates to adjust to obscurity, so does the human figure take shape—and the mirage of Black representation, at once revealed and withheld, brings a strange dis/comfort.

58

ROOM 9

ROOM 10

59

58

CLÉMENCE LOLLIA HILAIRE | b. 1995

Still Zombie (I fell here through a hole), 2022

Film loop, runtime: 7:37 min

Courtesy of the artist

59

MATHIEU KLEYEBE ABONNENC | b. 1977

Limbé, 2021

16mm film, based on choreography by

Betty Tchomanga, runtime: 10 min

Courtesy of the artist

*Hear it now? The gasps of a breath,
the gargoyles of a voice, a lingo in
turmoil, it's becoming clearer and
yet it isn't. But if you stop trying to
understand it—you will*

Throughout

Historical maps of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane from the bestselling nineteenth-century atlas of France by **Victor Levasseur** (1800–1870) appear throughout this exhibition. Their colonial imagery acts as a reminder of the situated perspective of these artists’ beings, of their feelings of belonging, of their imaginings, largely made evident through the landscapes and bodies they depict and representations they critique. All too often classified in the art world under the lacunar “French” label, these Guadeloupean, Martinican, and Guyanese artists, in kinship with their Haitian contemporaries, continue to eschew the complexities of their variegated colonial histories, born of the entanglements of history and revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic—and much farther beyond.

Audible by default, undecipherable by choice: Such can the intentions be summarized of **Michael Roch** and **Jordan Beal**’s soundscape entitled *2nd Metaphor* that accompanies **Van Lévé**. Agentivity stands between opacity and relationality, or perhaps it is the quivering embrace of both on the shards of creolity and the ruins of humanity. The result of an unprecedented collaboration between a master wordsmith and a master of sound, it

strives to provide aural guidance rather than prescriptive lyrics in an anthem for a spatially embodied experience of the exhibition beyond visibly exhibited material. Yet, over the course of its three movements, *Lè a rivé* (*The Time Has Come*), *Constitution* (*Constitution*), and *Au devant-jour* (*In the Early Morning*), **Roch** provides elements for upheaval whether in the words of a poem “breathed” by **Beal** into a traditional Martinican flute, which resonates with *marronnage* (*la flûte des mornes*, or mountain flute), or in the sentences of the constitution for an independent Martinique muted by its author himself. In many ways, these “muted voices” (in the words of the artist) prolong all that is made un- visible by the artists in the exhibition, in an act of ultimate fugitivity that is as political as it can be in an era of deafening hypervisibility. Rather than letting cacophony prevail, the artists and the show invite visitors to avail their senses of that which is all the more sensitive that it is barely sensible, that which is left unsaid beyond the words of any language. Neither void nor silence, noise nor image. So what? What if... Once upon a cry, a call, a people.

Claire Tancons

Notes on Soundscape, Typography, and Design

2nd Metaphor – a sonic installation

by Jordan Beal & Michael Roch

Part 1 - Lè a rivé

Part 2 - Constitution

Part 3 - Au devant-jour

Sound installation, runtime: 26 min.

The composition offers a sensory anchor in the megapolis of Lanvil inhabited by the Tout-monde. As the exhibition's sound matrix, it allows visitors to approach this invisible territory and places them at the heart of Van Lève in a holistic way, through light and sound.

The sound travels through the space with the visitor. At times, the flows dissociate, opening up the possibility of a shift or tension. In this interstice, lines emerge that haunt “the margins,” those of the mythical figure of the poisoner who embodies the panic of dominant spaces in the face of the possibility of emancipatory chaos. The voice touches on the multilingualism of our territories and, spatialized, changes status depending on where one stands: sometimes a collective breath; sometimes an intimate address; sometimes a threat, a warning, or a confession. **Michael Roch's** texts are conceived as a breach, made up of low murmurs,

sporadic bursts, and indefinable echoes. They balance **Jordan Beal's** composition, which is influenced by a discreet relationship with minimal, cumulative music and the notion of noise, where the organization of motifs flirts with saturation and the structure allows for the unpredictable. The two artists' composition invites us to drift, to wander, to explore all possibilities. It unfolds throughout the entire space, embracing the movements of the body and prolonging them in frequency.

Graphic Design – typography by **Arthur Francietta**

The visual identity of **Van L  v  ** features **Arthur Francietta's** contemporary typography, born of an engaged design practice anchored in age-old spatial and scriptural traditions, revisited for the current moment. The fragile but resolute-looking upward blooming tassels of the sugarcane—called arrows, in French and Creole—became the source, for instance, for his Kann font typeface (2019). For the **Van L  v  ** logo (2023) commissioned by EXTEMPORA, **Francietta** developed in dialogue with Claire Tancons a design that is equally powerful in its delicacy. Thin yet strong lines capture the   lan of the wind, suggesting an oxygenating breath, as a bluster, rising.

Exhibition Design by **Studio Gia Wolff**

Gia Wolff (b. 1978) is known for her interdisciplinary approach to design, primarily through the frameworks of architecture, environments, and installations. Based in Brooklyn, New York, she leads Studio Gia Wolff, a design practice creating multi-scale projects ranging from residential interiors to masterplans, site-specific experiences to ambitious urban interventions, and gallery installations to large-scale curatorial collaborations.

In 2013, Wolff won the prestigious inaugural Harvard GSD Wheelwright Prize for *Floating City: The Community-Based Architecture of Parade Floats*. This groundbreaking research into the ephemeral architecture of carnival culture continues to inspire her projects through the exploration and interplay of mobility, temporality, and collective identity.

Wolff is a frequent collaborator of curator Claire Tancons on projects for the Tate Modern, the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, and the opening of Miami Beach's Faena District. Wolff also works with a variety of creative clients, including Diplo, for whom she recently completed the design of Pompey Estate in Jamaica in collaboration with Freecell Architecture, a project featured on the cover of *Architectural Digest* (May 2025). Most recently, Wolff was named one of *The Architect's Newspaper's* "Twenty to Watch."

Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc (b. 1977)

An artist, researcher, and curator from Guyane, Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc works across film, drawing, photography, and sculpture. Drawing on the close study of colonial and postcolonial archives, he asks how historical records shape and sometimes distort our understandings of both past and present. Collaboration is central to his practice: Along with artists, writers, and researchers, he explores how overlooked histories might support new forms of collective memory and political action. Now a resident in Sète, France, he has exhibited globally, including in Paris, Los Angeles, Jakarta, and Medellín. He also works with the publishing houses B42 and Ròt-Bò-Krik, which he co-founded and named after a well-known neighborhood in Cayenne, Guyane's capital city.

Franky Amété (b. 1965)

Franky Amété is a descendant of the Bushinengué Maroons, enslaved Africans who escaped from Surinamese plantations into the Amazon rainforest, where they established their own communities. After his family fled to Maïman in Guyane during the Surinamese Civil War (1986–1992), he finally settled in Kourou in 1989. Following in his father's footsteps, he began practicing Tembé, a set of Maroon practices intermixing visual forms, abstract and embodied knowledge, and social relations. After spending time with the Libi Na Wan association and developing his craft in

Jamaica (2004) and France (2015–2018), he returned to Guyane, where he now resides in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni. Amété expands Tembé through three-dimensional works and shadow installations that mobilize positive and negative forms. His work was recently featured in *Marronnage: L'art de briser ses chaînes* (*Marronnage: The Art of Breaking One's Chains*), at Maison de l'Amérique Latine in Paris (2022).

Raphaël Barontini (b. 1984)

Born in the suburbs of Paris to a family of Italian, Guadeloupean, and Réunionnais heritage, Raphaël Barontini places Black histories at the center of his work, challenging the French state's claims to "color-blindness" (exemplified by the removal of "race" from constitutional language in 2018). A graduate of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Hunter College of Art in New York, he works with paintings, flags, banners, tapestries, ceremonial capes, and public performances. Drawing on carnival, portraiture, and techniques ranging from screen-printing to tapestry, Barontini reverses familiar images of authority and restores visibility to figures obscured by histories of slavery and colonization. His work was the subject of a major solo exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2025.

Jordan Beal (b. 1991)

Jordan Beal is a Martinican artist working across photography and sound. Based in Schoëlcher, his experimental practice explores island landscapes, borders, displacement, and identity through processes such as burial and seawater corrosion, allowing materials and environments to shape the work alongside the artist. In dialogue with Édouard Glissant's thinking on opacity and relation, Beal resists fixed images of place and instead approaches landscape as unstable and porous. His work has been exhibited across the Caribbean and Europe, and his series *Corrosion*, *Deliciosa*, and *Linéaments* has received major awards, including the 2026 Rencontres d'Arles Prix Découverte.

Minia Biabiany (b. 1988)

Central to Minia Biabiany's work is the belief that bodily experience is inseparable from our perception of space, land, and history. Through installations and videos, her poetic and political narratives of self-understanding and healing explore possible ways of learning and speaking beyond colonial systems. She is especially concerned with how Guadeloupe's incorporation as a French overseas department has shaped relationships among people, political power, and the environment. Her first multilingual monograph, *Ritmo volcán* (2022), asks what a Caribbean volcano might teach us about resisting colonialism. Her work has been shown in Germany, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Paris, and she is affiliated with the collective projects Semillero Caribe and Doukou.

Ernest Breleur (b. 1945)

Ernest Breleur is a major figure in contemporary Caribbean art and a founding member of the Martinican Fwomajé group, established with Victor Anicet and other artists in the 1980s. In conversation with writers and thinkers including Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, Breleur has developed an open, modern, and ethically sensitive practice spanning painting, drawing, and sculpture that explores cultural encounter and creolization. He is also known for experimenting with media and technology, especially X-rays. Notions of death and decay play a key role in his practice, including in recent paintings on stretched plastic. Having appeared for decades in international exhibitions, his work is held in major collections throughout Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean. In 2026, the Museo de Arte Moderno in Santo Domingo held the major retrospective *El Maestro Breleur*.

Agostino Brunias (ca. 1730–1796)

The Italian painter Agostino Brunias spent his final decades in the British West Indies, initially under the patronage of William Young, the governor of Dominica who oversaw the colony's transfer from French possession. Alongside conventional portraits of the planter class and watercolor landscapes that included enslaved laborers, Brunias also completed a series of oil paintings of free and enslaved subjects who were African-descended, Indigenous, and of mixed ancestry, especially on Saint Vincent and Dominica. His carefully staged scenes document clothing, markets, dances, and social distinctions, while also idealizing a

colonial order founded on slavery. Later viewers have therefore read them both as valuable visual records and as blunt instruments of plantation propaganda.

Armand Budan (1827–1874)

Armand Budan was a Guadeloupean painter and early photographer whose work moved between the Antilles and metropolitan France. Born into a plantation-owning family, he painted floral studies and decorative murals in Guadeloupe and Martinique before publishing the lithographic album *La Guadeloupe pittoresque* (*Picturesque Guadeloupe*). In the 1860s, Budan exhibited at the Paris Salon and settled for several years in Bourron-Marlotte, near Fontainebleau, while also pursuing photography and opening a studio in Paris. He later returned to the Caribbean, dying in Saint-Pierre, Martinique. Few of his paintings survive, but he is remembered as one of the Antilles's earliest photographers.

Jean-Marc Bullet (b. 1980)

Having studied art, landscaping, and industrial design in Martinique, Strasbourg, and Paris, Martinique-based Jean-Marc Bullet creates objects deeply rooted in their particular place. This attention to geography and the human relationship with nature also allows Bullet to consider how his Afro-Caribbean background informs his approach to design. His open-air exhibition *Presqu'une île* (*Almost an Island*) (2021) invited the public to discover a mangrove

through a multisensory experience punctuated by what he calls “sense capsules.” He has completed residencies in China and Abu Dhabi and won a German design award for his *NESTOT* urban composter project.

Gaëlle Choïsne (b. 1985)

Born to a Haitian mother and Breton father, Gaëlle Choïsne examines environmental exploitation and the continuing effects of colonial history by bringing together sculpture, video, creole traditions, mythology, and popular culture. Conceiving her installations as ecosystems of collaboration, she seeks to create pockets of “resistance.” Alternating between playful, speculative, and even confrontational, Choïsne’s work is consistently concerned with how communities resist systems of extraction and control. Winner of the 2024 Marcel Duchamp Prize, France’s top contemporary art prize, Choïsne has undertaken residencies in Holland, the Antilles, Canada, and Germany, and her work has been exhibited globally, from China to Turkey to the United States.

Eugène Cicéri (1813–1890)

Étienne Eugène Cicéri was a French painter, lithographer, and stage designer celebrated for his dramatic landscapes and architectural views. A leading figure in nineteenth-century lithography, he produced illustrations for major travel publications documenting France, Italy, Switzerland, North Africa, and the Caribbean. Although he likely did not visit the French Antilles, his lithographs of

Martinique and Guadeloupe—many based on photographs by Hippolyte Hartmann—helped shape colonial European imaginations of the islands. Cicéri’s images combined documentary ambition with the picturesque aesthetic that dominated nineteenth-century imperial art.

Ronald Cyrille (b. 1984)

Ronald Cyrille, who also works under the street-art name B. Bird, is known for public murals and surreal imagery. He has expanded his mural practice into painting, drawing, sculpture, video, and performance to develop a personal mythology populated with animal-human hybrid creatures and castaway characters. In lush but unsettled landscapes, his otherworldly figures and dreamlike settings use satire and humor to sow intentional confusion over the Caribbean’s complicated history. Born in Dominica, Cyrille has lived in Guadeloupe since he was nine. His work has been shown widely in the United States and the Caribbean, including the 2026 Fondation Clément solo exhibition *J’habite une terre sacrée*.

Kenny Dunkan (b. 1988)

Drawing on Guadeloupean carnival, advertising, fashion, and religious imagery, Kenny Dunkan’s work dramatizes the continuing effects of French colonialism. His own body is often the central material in his performances, videos, sculptures, and assemblages that combine the personal and political with humor and theatricality. By reworking familiar visual traditions, he exposes how colonial forms

of representation persist in contemporary culture. A longtime resident of Paris, Dunkan graduated from the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs with *félicitations du jury* (highest honors), won the Visual Arts Prize of the ADAGP (Société des Auteurs dans les Arts Graphiques et Plastiques), and completed the Villa Medici residency in Rome.

Arthur Francietta (b. 1990)

Martinique-born artist, designer, typographer, and curator Arthur Francietta works at the intersection of contemporary art, graphic design, and Caribbean cultural heritage. His practice is distinguished by its use of “asemic” writing—script-like marks without fixed linguistic meaning—which draws on *vévé*, sacred diagrams used in Haitian Vodou, and *anaforuana*, a graphic system associated with the West African-derived Abakuá initiatory society. Reimagining these visual traditions, Francietta creates richly symbolic compositions that explore ancestral memory, spirituality, and the relationship between humans and nature. Active between Martinique and Paris, he collaborates with institutions including the Édouard Glissant Art Fund, Créatives Renegades Society, and EXTEMPORA and has completed a residency at the Villa Albertine in San Francisco.

Gwladys Gambie (b. 1988)

Through drawing, sculpture, and writing, Gwladys Gambie, who also works under the name Black Meisha, examines Black Caribbean femininity, the body, and the

natural environment. A graduate of the Campus Caraïbéen des Arts (CCA) and a recent resident at the Jan van Eyck Academie, she draws on Martinique’s landscape and creole traditions to invent an organic, fantastic world that stages the dramatic reality of “paradise.” At its center is the constantly shifting figure Manman Chadwon, whose name evokes both sea urchins and spiky native cilantro plants. Inspired by Antillean mythology, textiles, and fashion, Gambie uses this character to explore the sensuality, eroticism, and violence of the Caribbean feminine experience. Her 2023 book *Mofwazé* offers a poetic account of Manman Chadwon.

David Gumbs (b. 1977)

For more than twenty years, David Gumbs’s immersive work has explored identity, memory, and environmental fragility in the Caribbean. Merging light, sound, and motion, his installations create poetic and interactive experiences rooted in ancestral memory and digital innovation. Turning public spaces into living archives of resilience and transformation, he reveals what he describes as the unseen emotional geographies embedded in Black and Indigenous ecologies. In multiple residencies in the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, Gumbs has developed a singular visual and sonic landscape that merges cutting-edge technology such as augmented reality with Caribbean rhythms and spirit. Born in Saint-Martin, Gumbs now teaches at the Campus Caraïbéen des Arts (CCA) in Martinique. His art has won awards and been exhibited around the world.

Hippolyte Hartmann (1818–ca. 1902)

Hippolyte Hartmann was a pioneering Martinican photographer and painter, born in Saint-Pierre. Active from the mid-nineteenth century, he worked across a remarkable Caribbean network that included Martinique, Curaçao, Suriname, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and possibly New York. His practice encompassed portraiture, landscape, and architectural views, from daguerreotypes to cartes-de-visite. Photographs associated with the Hartmann name informed major lithographic projects, including the 1860 *Album Martiniquais*.

Fabiola Jean-Louis (b. 1978)

Born in Port-au-Prince and raised in Brooklyn, where she now lives, Fabiola Jean-Louis is a conceptual artist specializing in paper sculpture, photography, installation, and painting. Through self-portraits and elaborate paper costumes, she crafts powerful narratives that blend Afro-surrealism with Haiti's rich cultural heritage. Her acclaimed series *Rewriting History* uses gowns, painterly photographs, and Polaroids to reconsider how Black women have been represented in and excluded from Western art history. The series was shown at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 2023. Jean-Louis was also the first Haitian woman artist commissioned by the Met Museum, for the exhibition *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room* (2021).

Victor Levasseur (1800–1870)

Victor Levasseur was a French cartographer and geographer best known for his illustrated *Atlas national illustré des départements et des possessions de la France*. First issued in the 1840s, before France abolished slavery in its colonies in 1848, the atlas combined maps with elaborate decorative borders representing landscapes, commodities, peoples, and colonial economies. Its imagery helped frame France's overseas possessions through the visual language of empire and plantation production. Strikingly, later editions published after abolition largely retained these same illustrations, allowing pre-emancipation colonial imagery to persist within representations of French Caribbean colonies well into the post-slavery period.

Clémence Lollia Hilaire (b. 1995)

Combining moving image, sculpture, audio, and installation, Clémence Lollia Hilaire asks how belonging is formed in the French Caribbean and its diasporas. Her work brings autobiographical experience into contact with monsters, spirits, bodily transformation, and gore imagery. These unexpected encounters challenge fixed definitions of Caribbean identity, blurring boundaries between human and nonhuman, beauty and horror, attraction and disgust. Lollia Hilaire revels in the transgression of such conventional categories. Born in Guadeloupe, she studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and has completed residencies in France and the United Kingdom. She is based in Amsterdam.

Louisa Marajo (b. 1987)

Louisa Marajo's fascination with chaos, wreckage, and ruins began during childhood encounters with accounts and images of Hurricane Hugo's destruction of Guadeloupe in 1989. She describes her multimedia artworks as a "chaos factory" in which she brings together fragments, scars, and discarded materials while still finding energy and pleasure among the debris. Having studied in France, where she now spends much of her time, Marajo remains deeply conscious of the colonial history of her native Martinique and the fragmented experience of its diaspora. The sea especially captures the ambivalent tension of chaos in her work, serving as a space of gathering and mixing, a bridge between nations, and a source of shipwrecks and dismemberment.

Tessa Mars (b. 1985)

Working primarily in painting and papier-mâché and at times expanding into large installations, Tessa Mars explores gender, landscape, migration, and spirituality in relation to Haitian history. Rejecting colonial accounts of Haiti, she turns instead to local stories, symbols, and ways of understanding the world. Mars proposes storytelling and image-making as a means of survival, resistance, empowerment, and collective healing. In addition to in solo exhibitions in Mexico City and Port-au-Prince, her work has been shown throughout the Caribbean, Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and Europe, where it also features in numerous collections. Dividing her time between the United States, Puerto Rico, and Haiti, Mars is a graduate of both the Université Rennes 2 in France and the Rijksakademie in Holland.

Manuel Mathieu (b. 1986)

Manuel Mathieu's art has been shaped by his childhood in Haiti after the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship, his move to Canada at nineteen, and the mentorship of his uncle, the painter Mario Benjamin. His work connects individual and communal struggles across national borders to explore cultural approaches to historical violence, erasure, physicality, nature, and spiritual heritage. These experiences deeply inform Mathieu's multidisciplinary practice, encompassing painting, sculpture, drawing, film, poetry, installation, and, most recently, olfaction (smell-making). Recent projects include monumental mosaics in his adopted city of Montréal and exhibitions across North America, Europe, and Asia. His work was also included in the 2026 Venice Biennale.

Jimmy Robert (b. 1975)

Jimmy Robert's installations encompass photography, performance, and video to explore the tensions between image and body, language and space. His practice centers on issues of Black bodily representation, experience, and visibility, often questioning the very stability of representation and visual narrative. Robert frequently places his own body at the core of his work, alongside movement, gesture, and delicate materials such as paper. His body becomes a medium to examine and expose how Black bodies are made visible, interpreted, and fixed by systems of representation. He challenges us to ask whether photographs and performances can escape these inherited ways of seeing. Robert's performative and visual practice is in dialogue with a wide range of artistic and literary influences, from Marguerite Duras to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

Michael Roch (b. 1987)

Michael Roch is a Caribbean science fiction writer and screenwriter born in 1987 in Lyon. He currently lives in Martinique. His novel *Tè mawon*, published in 2022, was highly acclaimed by both readers and critics. He is a member of La Fabrique décoloniale, which brings together sociologists, political scientists, and artists to discuss issues of decoloniality. He has been leading writing workshops in prisons and universities on the theme of Afrofuturism—a literary movement developing Afrocentric counter-dystopias—since 2015, when he returned to his Caribbean homeland. He hosts writing workshops on Latilié, his Twitch channel.

Cédrine Scheidig (b. 1994)

A photographer of Guadeloupean heritage working between Paris and the Caribbean, Cédrine Scheidig shows through her work how Caribbean identities transcend geographic borders and are continually remade. Moving beyond traditional documentary, she examines the intricate and unexpected ways young people imagine themselves and their communities in an era shaped by postcolonial and neoliberal realities. Displacing fantasies of empty beaches and exotic nature, Scheidig places urban practices and the forms of resistance they produce at the center of her work. Her photography has won several international awards and has been exhibited throughout France, Europe, and the Caribbean. Her 2023 solo show at Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris was followed by a feature on Martinican “*cabrage*” (motorcycle stunt) culture in *The New York Times*.

Hervé Télémaque (1937–2022)

Hervé Télémaque was a Haitian-born painter whose work reshaped postwar figurative art. Amid the repression surrounding Duvalier’s rise to power, he left Haiti for New York in 1957 before settling in Paris in 1960. He soon became a leading figure in the French Narrative Figuration movement, which used mass media imagery for political and narrative ends. He developed a unique visual language fusing Caribbean history, literature, comics, advertising, surrealism, and political symbolism. A return to Haiti in 1973 profoundly renewed his artistic imagination, inspiring decades of work recentering Vodou and African traditions and themes of memory and exile. Spanning painting, drawing, assemblage, and monumental public commissions, Télémaque’s long career included major retrospectives at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2015), the Fondation Clément in Martinique (2016), and the Serpentine Gallery in Paris (2021–2022). His works entered the major museum collections such as the Centre Pompidou, MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Aspen Art Museum, cementing the legacy of an unprecedented career.

Claire Tancons is a curator and scholar invested in discursive and curatorial investigations of the postcolonial, inflected by a diasporic historical consciousness.

She has been a curator in and of contemporary art biennials and festivals, including Prospect.1 New Orleans, Gwangju Biennale 08, Sharjah Biennial 14, and Nuit Blanche, Paris's iconic all-night art festival. Her adjacent focus on civic rituals, public ceremonial culture, and carnival, last anthologized in the *Routledge Companion to Performance Art* (2026), has unfolded over the last two decades in projects ranging from *En Mas': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean* (2012 Emily Hall Tremain Exhibition Award, with co-curator Krista Thompson) to *Ceremony: (Burial of an Undead World)* (2022) at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (under the direction of Anselm Franke and others). Tancons is the recipient of grants from Prince Claus Fund, Warhol Foundation, Creative Capital, and Ford Foundation. Born and raised in Guadeloupe, she currently resides in Paris.

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Fabiola Jean-Louis

Victor Levasseur

Clémence Lollia Hilaire

Louisa Marajo

Tessa Mars

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Hervé Télémaque