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Perpetual Returns: New World Slavery and the Matter of the Visual

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## Perpetual Returns: New World Slavery and the Matter of the Visual

AT THE CENTER OF HIS 2007 installation *An Account of a Voyage to the Island Jamaica with the Un-Natural History of that Place*, the artist Fred Wilson placed a gibbet, a device of torture used in the pre-emancipation era to punish and display the bodies of slaves (*Artists' Portfolios*, plate 10). Erected upright, suspended from a post with wire, and balanced atop a wooden podium, the teetering iron structure seemed poised to assume movement and to muster life, even in summoning death. For while the gibbet's all-too-palpable form cast a network of shadows on the supporting wall, it also conjured up a host of shades long lost from view, whether the dead bodies that once occupied the now-rusted cage or those missing subjects who feared being forced to align their flesh with its metal struts.

Wilson deployed this object as part of an exhibition that addressed slavery's material, archival, and museological histories in postcolonial Jamaica.<sup>1</sup> As in previous museum interventions—most notably *Mining the Museum*, his renowned 1992 reinstallation of Baltimore's Maryland Historical Society (MHS)—to create *An Account of a Voyage*, the artist researched and then freshly displayed materials from an extant collection, in this case, Kingston's Institute of Jamaica (IOJ), established in 1879.<sup>2</sup> Wilson's work in the archive of this institution, one of the oldest museums in the British West Indies, mobilized frequently acknowledged and long-neglected remains, many of which date to the days of plantation slavery. The resulting exhibition, installed on the second floor of the IOJ Gallery, featured an astonishing range of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century materials drawn from the storehouses of the institute as well as those of the National Gallery of Jamaica. Among them were lithographs of picturesque plantations by the

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**ABSTRACT** In this introduction to the special issue *New World Slavery and the Matter of the Visual*, Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson not only frame the scholarly essays and artists' portfolios collected in the volume but also argue for a reorientation of both art history and black studies in light of the ongoing specular effects of racial bondage. In so doing, they underline the importance of the visual to the rewiring of slavery's imaginary by examining the ways in which black subjects have appropriated widely available representational means only to undo their formal contours, break apart their signifying logic, or reduce them to their very substance. REPRESENTATIONS 113, Winter 2011 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 1-15. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI:10.1525/rep.2011.113.1.1.

artist Joseph Bartholomew Kidd, botanical specimens and scientific illustrations; a chinaware teapot inscribed with a smattering of racist verse; mammoth copper pots once used in boiling sugarcane; and a metal chain that encircled a portrait of the abolitionist William Smith, whose marble bust gazed out onto the installation from its perch on a finely turned wooden table (plates 6, 12, 7, 11).

As this cursory description begins to suggest, *An Account of a Voyage*—Wilson’s first exhibition within the viewing and institutional contexts of the Caribbean—explored not only how slavery mattered in Jamaica but also the forms it continues to assume, particularly given the nation’s historical production as an “island factory,” a crucial site of economic exploitation, touristic consumption, and scientific scrutiny in the New World. Coinciding with the bicentenary of the British abolition of the transatlantic trade in Africans, and with the three-hundredth anniversary of naturalist Hans Sloane’s eponymous *Voyage to the Island of Jamaica*, Wilson’s exhibition aimed to consider the relation between apparently disparate forms of classification and subjection in the ordering of the enslaved’s material world. This imperative was announced by the piece that faced the entrance to the exhibition: in it, Wilson placed a rough-hewn metal spike on an intricately inlaid marquetry table, which sat before a library of wood specimens collected from various locations within the Caribbean (plate 5). By combining objects associated with torture, luxury, and study, the artist indexed the wealth produced by forced labor as well as the conditions that structured both the practice of slavery and its historical forgetting.<sup>3</sup>

Of the installation’s various juxtapositions, Wilson’s placement of the gibbet was surely the most dramatic in emotional effect; it was also the most pointed in calling attention to the complicated relationship between slavery’s visual traces and the institution’s historical obfuscation. While the rest of the IOJ Gallery was painted in rich tones of turquoise and purple, the artist hung the gibbet against a brightly illuminated and unforgettably red wall directly across from a low-slung planter’s chair (plate 8). From the chair, the metal cage was not immediately evident, since it could only be seen by passing through a maze of white wrought-iron grilles, typical of those that serve as prohibitive barriers across Kingston’s contemporary landscape (plate 9). At the end of this tightly controlled course, the torture device came into full view, though the decorative security bars cast another net of repeating shadows that again foregrounded the complicated perception of slavery. This spectral latticework seemed a reminder that the barriers to viewership—to seeing, to understanding, to representing the enslaved—are always there, particularly in those moments when they seem to be most plainly, even spectacularly, on display.

Wilson's insistence on this remove, on this disruption of visual consumption, foregrounds the inordinate difficulty of gleaning the histories of the enslaved through the objects and material traces left within the archives of the governing classes. In so doing, the artist emphasizes a problem most cogently articulated by Saidiya Hartman, who argues that even when sympathizers create representations of slavery, they often displace the personhood of the enslaved in the process: "The other's pain is acknowledged to the degree that it can be imagined, yet by virtue of this substitution the object of identification threatens to disappear."<sup>4</sup> In other words, the process of sympathizing with the slave, of making her suffering visible and intelligible, necessarily risks occluding her subjectivity from view at the very moment of its representation.

While Hartman, like most scholars of slavery, focuses on textual discourse, her work importantly suggests that any archival trace of the enslaved constitutes a "scene of subjection" that is frequently imagined in specular terms, yet that is more often than not structured by a visual absence. Indeed, the experience of captivity in the Americas has been described precisely as a blind spot in the memory of the West.<sup>5</sup> Wilson's barriers might be said to materialize such lacunae and to intimate how objects such as the gibbet—irrefutable material evidence of slavery's depredations—simultaneously involve and produce disappearance, casting the enslaved into a perpetual state of visual fugitivity that reflects their shifting status within the archive itself.

Such quandaries have led us to productive questions. What are the means through which modern slavery becomes visible and meaningful at different historical moments? How do material remains—and the institutions that house them—shape and give visual form to the memory of the enslaved, providing both limits on and seemingly endless sources for the reimagining of the past? How do we approach and interpret such materials when visual objects were often crafted precisely to undermine the slave's subjectivity, personhood, and life? What are the implications of unrepresentability, of the disappearance of the enslaved in the archive, for those invested in interpreting that which does remain in the realm of visibility?

These questions speak to Wilson's installation and animate the current volume; they also provide the conceptual framework for "Out of Sight: New World Slavery and the Visual Imagination," the ongoing collaborative endeavor of which both projects are a part. Working with curator Wayne Modest, then Director of the Museums of History and Ethnography at the IOJ, we (the co-authors of this essay) developed a program to critically explore the specular effects and aftereffects of slavery across several discursive, pedagogical, geographic, and exhibitionary platforms, centered around a conference held at Northwestern University in March 2007.<sup>6</sup> Mindful of



FIGURE 1. Laura Facey, *Redemption Song*, 2003. Bronze figures, cast-iron dome, 10 × 11 ft. Monument at Emancipation Park, Kingston, Jamaica. Photography courtesy of Franz Marzouca.

that year's slate of anniversaries, we conceived of "Out of Sight" as a provocation to artists, curators, historians, and theorists to consider the inherent difficulties involved in crafting a visual language capable of representing slavery. Just as important, we enjoined conference participants to think about the temporal closures that contemporaneous commemorations of emancipation and abolition might be said to enable and enact.<sup>7</sup>

We were not alone in seizing upon this moment critically. In 2007, the exhibition *Uncomfortable Truths: The Shadow of Slave Trading in Contemporary Art* opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum; Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth published the edited volume *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts, and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum*; and, in Jamaica, public contestations continued over the aptness of Laura Facey's *Redemption Song* as a monument to the history of slavery (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> The nude figurative sculpture, unveiled in 2003, precipitated discussion—in front of the statue, on radios, in the newspaper and academic forums—about how slavery and the formerly enslaved should be represented or materialized. In the scant time since, analogous commentaries have continued to issue from all points within the African diaspora in response to various constituencies' attempts to reckon with the past of slavery in visual terms.<sup>9</sup> Yet such interventions—including our own—must also be seen as part and parcel of slavery's relatively recent emergence as a site of engagement within art-historical, museological, and visual studies discourses.

The United States context provides a telling example. Since the social upheavals of the 1960s, cultural practitioners of various stripes, from historian David Brion Davis to novelist Toni Morrison, have increasingly emphasized the centrality of slavery for any understanding of life, history, and politics in the modern West.<sup>10</sup> Mainstream American cultural institutions, however, rarely engaged these histories prior to the late 1970s. As Fath Davis Ruffins has shown, in the aftermath of the widely viewed television broadcast of the miniseries *Roots*—based on Alex Haley’s fictionalized account of his own ancestors’ sojourn from slavery to freedom—there was a dramatic uptick of interest in black heritage and renewed debate about the memory of slavery. Numerous institutions responded with landmark exhibitions: in 1985, for instance, the National Museum of American History mounted *After the Revolution: Everyday Life in America*, which integrated materials relating to enslavement within a national narrative for the first time in the institution’s history.<sup>11</sup>

The salvos from the United States reflected a growing international awareness of the visual legacies of racial bondage: the first venue devoted entirely to slavery and emancipation, the Pompey Museum, opened in Nassau, Bahamas, in 1992. Around the same time, touring exhibitions that traversed the African diaspora were set in motion, including *A Slave Ship that Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie*, organized by the Mel Fisher Historical Society of Key West, Florida. These interventions licensed and informed subsequent scholarly and curatorial work throughout the decade, arguably culminating in the 2000 publication of Marcus Wood’s indispensable survey *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865*. Subsequently, a rich literature has begun to emerge, which, while not necessarily focused on the relation between slavery and the visual, nonetheless productively acknowledges how a range of cultural artifacts bear the marks of the world-making and world-breaking effects of the “peculiar institution.”<sup>12</sup>

A painting of Haiti’s founding fathers; British plans for a colonial garden; a pot made by enslaved hands in the American South: these objects of recent study are as disparate as the sites from which they hail and the subfields in which they have been discursively emplotted.<sup>13</sup> By our lights, such heterogeneity is a welcome sign, especially since art history has long lagged behind literary theory and cultural criticism in addressing histories of enslavement, aesthetics, and their mutual imbrication.<sup>14</sup> For centuries, slavery has literally remained confined to the footnotes of the discipline, from British aesthetician John Ruskin’s canonical *Modern Painters*, which bracketed discussion of the subject from its consideration of J. M. W. Turner’s *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying* (1840), to American critic Clement Greenberg’s famous account of Western pictorial modernism, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.”<sup>15</sup> The closing footnote of that essay—a call for the maintenance

of aristocratic values in the evaluation of modern art—found its justification not in the feudal past but in a benighted present: “In Africa today,” Greenberg wrote, “we find that the culture of slave-owning tribes is generally much superior to that of the tribes that possess no slaves.”<sup>16</sup>

The present volume of scholarly essays and artists’ portfolios is, then, one of many recent efforts to bring slavery out from the textual shadows and to give its visual histories their proper due as subjects that open onto discussions of aesthetics, beauty, prestige, property, and subjectivity. Yet what distinguishes these offerings is their sustained attention to the ways that material traces and visual representations of slavery not only give a particular shape to the past, but also actively produce it in the present, providing signal points of departure for work within and against institutional settings, hegemonic ways of seeing, and progressive historical narratives. By shuttling between temporally estranged scenarios, the work in this issue poses history as an open site that can be reconfigured both despite and because of the ongoing modes of violence that situate black subjects within modern regimes of power. While the institution may have officially ended—in 1834 in the British West Indies, 1865 in the United States, and 1888 in Brazil—slavery, each contributor differently insists, is far from over, and freedom is not an end, but an ongoing and elusive process that can be brought into view through repeated attempts at its visualization. What emerges in these pages is the sense that the techniques and forms of seeing that constituted the enslaved still exert a tenacious grasp on black subjects in the present: slavery is never quite the past. Rather, it is constantly returned to through iconic forms that suggest the visual dynamics through which Africans came to be seen and were urged to see themselves as slaves, while also fostering new means of identification and resistance across and within the diaspora.

The history of the gibbet at the heart of Wilson’s installation offers a prime example of these processes in motion, demonstrating that artifacts of slavery stubbornly refuse to remain buried relics of the past. The iron cage quite literally washed up in Jamaica during the Great Flood of 1856 in the immediate post-emancipation period: it contained the skeleton of a woman, who most likely had been a slave.<sup>17</sup> Eighteenth-century colonial accounts of Jamaica, such as Bryan Edwards’s *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, and the diaries of British overseer Thomas Thistlewood, detail how planters and colonial authorities used gibbets to punish, persecute, and expose those deemed to have deviated from the social order.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Wilson printed Thistlewood’s account, including passages describing how slaves were tortured, in black italicized font on the red lower portions of the maze (fig. 2). The words, which could only be read through some manner of bodily contortion, appeared as viewers negotiated their movement through the white grillework and toward the iron cage.



FIGURE 2. Fred Wilson, *An Account of a Voyage to the Island Jamaica with the Un-Natural History of That Place: An Installation by Fred Wilson, 2007* (installation view). Mixed media, dimensions variable. Photography courtesy of Donnette Zacca. © Fred Wilson, courtesy The Pace Gallery.

But the gibbet is notable not just due to its physical reappearance in Jamaica after emancipation or because it did not stay consigned to its description in colonial memoir. The object, which facilitated spectacle during slavery, remained a spectacle through its display at the Institute of Jamaica, where it was on exhibition for more than fifty years, becoming a sight through which many different constituents encountered, imagined, and contested the representation of slavery. Travelers in the late nineteenth century on sightseeing excursions mused about “the grim and gruesome cage,” viewing it as a relic of slavery.<sup>19</sup> Elementary school children filed by and paused before the “very interesting” object in the institute’s wooden vitrines in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

By 1959, however, one William L. Patterson, whose thoughts were published in the *Gleaner* newspaper, openly questioned what the gibbet—displayed next to branding irons and “prints of contented slaves and their benevolent masters”—signified for the vast majority of brown and black Jamaicans. He opined that through such objects, the “black man has a place in the Institute of Jamaica as a slave, as a freed man who is a faithful servant for the economic rulers, as a subordinate to his technical advisers, as a backward and subservient figure.” The torture device, he concluded, was a part



of efforts by “those who rule” to occlude the histories of counterinsurgency, “the struggles of men who valued freedom more than life,” from the museum’s walls.<sup>21</sup> Patterson’s comments again call attention to the fact that due to the constant display of particular materials, certain perspectives on slavery were occluded while also gesturing toward other configurations of the past that only come into view as a result of struggle.

Wilson’s placement of the gibbet behind bars thus served to both disrupt and engage its prior exhibition in Jamaica. Yet the juxtaposition also suggested the Caribbean-American artist’s awareness of the range of visual strategies demanded by slavery’s divergent histories. As he noted in an interview conducted immediately after the opening of his exhibition,

Slavery is a narrative that I’ve worked with before and I knew I wanted to do something different with it. But in going through the archive, I realized how complex it is here. . . . In the collections, initially, I saw things that I knew like slave shackles, and there were shackles so horrific that I knew I was going to have to use them. But figuring out what aspects of this material and history that I could actually use in my exhibition—that I could actually make into something—that was the tricky part. . . . When I’ve worked in the United States and in many other countries, the mainstream museums just didn’t have as much stuff on slavery as this place does because it’s a black country. In the United States, museums are focused on white culture, so it was all about the absences in *Mining*. That’s not the problem here; they have everything!<sup>22</sup>

In these lines, Wilson refers to his previous American museum excavations, which often emphasized objects long banished from view or forgotten altogether (figs. 3–4). Consider two examples from *Mining the Museum*: in the section of the installation labeled “Metalwork, 1793–1880,” the artist famously paired a prized repoussé silver tea service with slave shackles loaned to the MHS by a private collector; in “Cabinetmaking, 1820–1960,” he situated four beautifully preserved nineteenth-century chairs around a whipping post that had long been consigned to storage.

The visual stuff Wilson deployed in *An Account of A Voyage* clearly resonates with that used in *Mining*—indeed, the juxtaposition of the gibbet and planter’s chair in the 2007 work might be seen as an update of “Cabinetmaking,” right down to the choice of red as a wall color. The projects differed importantly, however, in their disposition toward space, meaning, and the archive. In Baltimore, the artist directly abutted dissonant forms of material evidence in order to point up the imbrication of white wealth and black torture that American institutions have consistently repressed; in Kingston, he emphasized how forms of mediation, like the grilles, have consistently brought slavery in and out of view within Jamaican institutional frameworks. Unlike *Mining*’s shackles, the gibbet in *An Account of a Voyage*—as suggested by its very structure—was the source through which the spectacle



FIGURE 3. Fred Wilson, *Metalwork, 1793–1880*, 1992 (installation view). From *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, the Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, April 4, 1992–February 28, 1993. Photograph courtesy The Pace Gallery. © Fred Wilson.



FIGURE 4. Fred Wilson, *Cabinetmaking, 1820–1960*, 1992 (installation view). From *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, the Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, April 4, 1992–February 28, 1993. Photograph courtesy The Pace Gallery. © Fred Wilson.

of slavery remained open, present, and available in the post-emancipation era, whether for hegemonic or resistive ends. In emphasizing such horrific material means, Wilson gave the history of racial bondage a visual form that resonated within a Jamaican cultural imaginary; by contrast, the controversy around Facey's monument to emancipation was partially engendered by critics who took issue with *Redemption Song's* lack of signifiers, like chains or scars, that would immediately have announced the nude figures' belonging to the past.<sup>23</sup>

It is the ability of forms, images, and objects to differentially bring slavery into intimate and profound proximity to the present that the materials selected for this special issue engage. While the interventions in some way register the constitutive visual absences that would cast slavery out of sight, these absences serve to anchor each inquiry in the physical remains of the institution as they come to emerge in various New World locations. The aim of such strategies is not merely historical recovery, but is part of an attempt to make visible that which was seen and not seen by bracketing the visual phantasms that the archive of slavery everywhere throws up and instead focusing on the hard evidence offered by the ongoing transformation of visual objects themselves.

Given that both word and image have long been experienced as sites of constraint for black populations, it makes a kind of sense that African diasporic practitioners have time and again worked to deform extant representational conventions in order to carve out spaces of subjective autonomy.<sup>24</sup> Within a textual frame, histories can be rewritten and new narratives can be spun. However, it is in the specular realm that subjects emerge, that racialization functions, and through which the very materiality of those signifiers upon which the meaning of slavery has come to rest might be recast. For it is the physical remains of slavery—whether absent or present—that provide the shape memory assumes and to which further articulations return. Accordingly, the contributors to this volume underline that the visual *matters* to the rewiring of slavery's imaginary, in examining the ways in which black subjects have appropriated widely available representational means only to undo their formal contours, to break apart their signifiatory logic, or to reduce them to their very substance.

The collection begins with Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's "Negative-Positive Truths," which looks to Sojourner Truth's cartes-de-visite to explore the economies of value and the technologies of racialization that have undergirded the photography of slavery in America from the nineteenth-century to the present. As Grigsby details, Truth explicitly referred to the dissemination of her carte-de-visite as selling her "shadow," a word that "evokes absence, unlike the word 'photo-graph,' which emphasizes inscription." Grigsby provocatively suggests that Truth capitalized on the medium and currency of

photography but simultaneously disrupted its typical functioning, since selling the shadow called attention to absence and to the limits of photography as a semiotic system.

Krista Thompson's "The Evidence of Things Not Photographed: Slavery and Historical Memory in the British West Indies," offers a related revisitation of the photographic that ultimately charts a different trajectory. She argues that although the authors of *Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation: Black Slaves and the British Empire* erroneously ascribe a photograph of Jamaican laborers to the era of slavery, their misstep points up the continuities between captivity and emancipation for subjects on the ground and creates new representational possibilities for the figuration of history. At the close of her text, Thompson turns to the work of the contemporary artist Andrea Chung, who has seized on just such discrepancies to reimagine late nineteenth-century Jamaican photography. Chung cuts all persons of African descent out of these images, leaving behind white spaces and jagged edges that at once prohibit and enable the indexicality of the photograph, refusing the functioning of the image while figuring absence as its own form of representation.

Much the same can be said of Glenn Ligon's work *To Disembark*. As Huey Copeland shows in "Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects," the artist's recasting of Henry "Box" Brown's spectacular escape from slavery points up the relation between those modes of surveillance that continue to produce black subjects as fugitives whether on the ground or in the museum. Yet by proffering multiple descriptions of himself couched within the limiting visual and textual rhetorics of American slavery, Ligon paradoxically begins to fade from view, lost behind the screen of cultural convention. At the same time, the artist's refashioning of workaday nineteenth-century materials into sumptuous works of contemporary art highlights the relevance of slavery as a model for the production of race, objecthood, and value in the era of modern capital.

Marcus Wood's "The *Museu do Negro* in Rio and the Cult of Anastácia as a New Model for the Memory of Slavery," attempts to move beyond such well-worn historical and institutional circuits, looking instead to vernacular practices and visual strategies. Emerging in 1968 after a reproduction of a mid-nineteenth-century lithograph from the French travel book *Souvenirs d'un aveugle: Voyage autour du monde* was put on display at the *Museu do Negro*, the cult of Anastácia was formed not in memory of a known historical actor, but around the image of a blue-eyed, enslaved, and silenced black woman, "a figure who had long drifted about in the black imagination." As Wood argues, such weddings of political fantasy and material fact direct us to alternative spaces, sites, and framings for thinking through the traces of enslaved black subjects. In addition to these pieces by selected participants in the "Out of Sight" conference, the volume includes a commentary by Stephen

Best, “Neither Lost nor Found: Slavery and the Visual Archive,” which interrogates the critical project of slavery’s refiguration in light of the assembled essays.

The artists’ dossiers collected here are equally ambitious and arguably more crucial for a consideration of how the visual matters to our imagining of the past: in fact, much of the strongest work in this vein has come from contemporary practitioners, several of whom began compulsively returning to the peculiar institution in the early 1990s and later participated in our initial conference.<sup>25</sup> The visual artists featured alongside Wilson—Hank Willis Thomas, born and raised in New York, and Christopher Cozier, a Trinidadian based in Port-of-Spain—often employ exactly the same iconic images. Even more than the variations within Wilson’s oeuvre, these artists’ divergent practices testify that the citation and repetition of extant forms is not only constitutive of diasporic aesthetic practice broadly construed but also a means to linger within and redirect slavery’s material transmission in light of particular national, cultural, and racial economies of vision.<sup>26</sup>

In his 2006 *Branded* series, for example, Willis Thomas recast the silhouetted figure of a hanged man as a Nike logo; reshaped the infamous doorway of no return at a West African slave fortress into the outline of an Absolut vodka bottle; and rendered the static icons of slave-hunting efforts as gold medallions suitable for today’s “bling” obsessed hip-hop culture (plates 4, 1, 3). These juxtapositions point up how stereotyped images of blackness remain contested sources of value within the American context and key sites for a globe-straddling logic of commoditization that arguably takes the body of the slave as the pecuniary object *par excellence*. In Willis Thomas’s work, the history of mass consumption becomes inextricable from the marketing of slavery, since both advocates and opponents of the institution were able to stake their visual claims on the black body due to its openness and availability for any use whatsoever.<sup>27</sup> By emphasizing this historical and political continuity, the artist is able to question what “appropriate” means for figuring slavery might be, to underline the complicity of subjects all across the color line in the production of blackness, and to bring into focus the proclivities of modern-day African diasporic youth, which often move beyond traditional aesthetic boundaries.

Cozier’s multiple translations of the fugitive slave icon—from print to drawing to sculpture to installation—provide another instance of such formal promiscuity (plate 13). In the 2001 project *Cross Currents*, the artist placed the runaway image on flags, which he then arranged on the gallery floor in a makeshift fleet. Cozier refers to these figures as “going north,” an appellation that calls to mind the storied migration of black subjects out of the southern United States as well as the voyages of contemporary Caribbean immigrants to points within the industrialized West and between the African

diaspora. But despite their suggestion and solicitation of bodily movement, Cozier's runaways, like Ligon's and Willis Thomas's, are signposts of a mobility that in effect leads nowhere, reflecting the fundamental homelessness of black being across time, space, and nation.

In his subsequent usages of the fugitive icon, Cozier homed in on just these particulars (plate 16). To execute *Terra Stories* of 2003, he created two chain-link enclosures in public spaces, first in Copenhagen and then in Port-au-Prince.<sup>28</sup> Viewers could enter one area—which contained a bench—only after they had completed and returned the artist's questionnaire, which mimicked the forms required to cross national boundaries the world over (plate 14). Those to whom Cozier denied access received a runaway stamp on their papers; to those admitted he offered a key—with a nineteenth-century image of a plantation owner on it—to the chain-link cage. Inside the second enclosure, was a podium, suggestive of the auction block, an athletes' stand, and a school platform all at once. For spectators consigned to the other side of the fence, Cozier's installation served to illuminate the intransigent historical roots of contemporary forms of spatial policing as well as each viewer's relationship to them given his or her specific racial, ethnic, and national positioning. Through such implication, the work posed a question best put by the artist himself in a preparatory drawing: "should I bother should I complain or should I build another or my own concept of history or of historical process" (plate 15).

Cozier's query succinctly describes the problem confronted throughout the artists' projects and scholarly essays assembled in this volume. In each instance, visual referents circulating in different geographic and exhibitionary contexts generate their own image-worlds, pasts, and futures in response to and against the experiences of transatlantic slavery, which continues to function as a site for the production of value. What emerges, ultimately, is the definitively unfinished nature of freedom and the expansiveness of the peculiar institution's deep structure: aspects of its legacy are always differently coming into view, underlining how our approach to its memory in the visual field must necessarily be shifting and recursive, ever alert to both the promises and perils of slavery's perpetual returns.

## Notes

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1. Northwestern University’s Florence H. and Eugene E. Myers Charitable Trust Fund sponsored Fred Wilson’s installation.
2. On Wilson’s Baltimore reinstallation, see *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (New York, 1994); on Wilson’s practice more broadly, see *Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations, 1979–2000*, ed. Maurice Berger (Baltimore, 2001).
3. Our account of Wilson’s installation has been informed by the artist’s comments in Huey Copeland, “How You Look Is How You Look: An Interview with Fred Wilson,” *Callaloo* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 1031.
4. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1997), 19.
5. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester, UK, 2000), 7.
6. In addition to the current volume, Wilson’s exhibition, Copeland’s interview with the artist, and the conference—described in full at <http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/arhistory/outofsight/index.html>—“Out of Sight” included three courses taught at Northwestern in Winter 2007; a two-week summer class in Kingston, “Slavery, the Archive, and the Museum in Postcolonial Jamaica”; and the Pick-Laudati Fund for Arts Computing Award Project, *Big House/Disclosure: An Intermedia Suite by Mendi + Keith Obadike*, which was curated by Copeland in conjunction with Lane Relyea and executed with the assistance of Northwestern undergraduates. On this last, see the volume Mendi + Keith Obadike, *Big House/Disclosure and Four Electric Ghosts* (San Marcos, CA, forthcoming), as well as the project website, <http://www.mmlc.northwestern.edu/external/bighouse/main.html>.
7. On this score, we think in particular of filmic commemorations—such as the 2006 William Wilberforce biopic directed by Michael Apted, *Amazing Grace* (2006; Beverly Hills, CA, 2007)—and a thoroughgoing critique of them, Barnor Hesse’s “Forgotten Like a Bad Dream: Atlantic Slavery and the Ethics of Postcolonial Memory,” in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (London, 2002), 143–73.
8. For a compelling analysis of the work and the public debate that ensued, see Petrina Dacres, “Monument and Meaning,” *Small Axe* 16 (2004): 137–53.
9. See, for example, the special issue edited by Celeste Marie-Bernier and Judie Newman “Public Art, Artefacts, and Atlantic Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2008): 135–303; as well as Tim Barringer et al., *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds* (New Haven, 2007).
10. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy offers a fulsome account of these developments in his *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (New York, 1999), 3–53.
11. Fath Davis Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp et al. (Durham, NC, 2006), 394–434.
12. We borrow the notion of “world-breaking,” from Toni Morrison, as quoted in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 221.

13. Here we have in mind, respectively, Helen Weston, "The Oath of the Ancestors by Lethière 'le mulâtre': Celebrating the Black/Mulatto Alliance in Haiti's Struggle for Independence," in *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture in the Atlantic World, 1660–1830*, ed. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester, UK, 2003); Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (London, 2005); and Michael A. Chaney, "Throwing Identity in the Poetry-Pottery of Dave the Potter," in *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington, IN, 2008), 176–208. While we can only gesture toward it here, an exhaustive survey of this literature would include signal texts by Albert Boime, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Hugh Honour, James Smalls, John Vlach, and Robyn Wiegman.
14. See, for example, Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, eds., *Slavery and The Literary Imagination* (Baltimore, 1989).
15. On Turner's *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying*, see Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 11.
16. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago, 1986), 19.
17. This information is derived from several sources: Eleanor Early, *Ports of the Sun* (Boston, 1937), 189–90; Oscar Plummer, *Gleaner*, 21 July 1911, 14; and James H. Stark, *Stark's Jamaica Guide* (London, 1898), 66.
18. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Dublin, 1793), 1:61–62; Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750–86* (London, 1989), 107.
19. Stark, *Stark's Jamaica Guide*, 66.
20. "Kendal School Children are in Kingston," *Gleaner*, 19 December 1927, 17.
21. William L. Patterson, "The Role of the Institute as . . . Jamaica's Cultural Centre," *Gleaner*, 21 April 1957, 9.
22. Wilson quoted in Copeland, "How You Look Is How You Look," 1019–20; 1035.
23. A discussion of various expectations for the monument may be consulted in Annie Paul and Krista A. Thompson, eds. *Special Issue: Caribbean Locales and Global Artworlds*, *Small Axe* 16 (September 2004).
24. See Chaney, *Fugitive Vision*, 2–13.
25. Kara Walker is doubtless the most well-known example, but there are a whole host of others, including Magdalena Campos-Pons, Keith Piper, and Carrie Mae Weems. Many of these artists were represented in the exhibition *Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery* (New York, 2007).
26. James A. Snead, "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 213–30.
27. Our thinking here is informed by Robin D. G. Kelley, "Burning Symbols: The Work of Art in the Age of Tyrannical (Re)Production," in *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness* (New York, 2008); as well as by Frank B. Wilderson III's comments in Saidiya Hartman, "The Position of the Unthought: An Interview by Frank Wilderson III," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003): 188–89.
28. Christopher Cozier, "Terrastories," *Small Axe* 14 (September 2003): 120–26.