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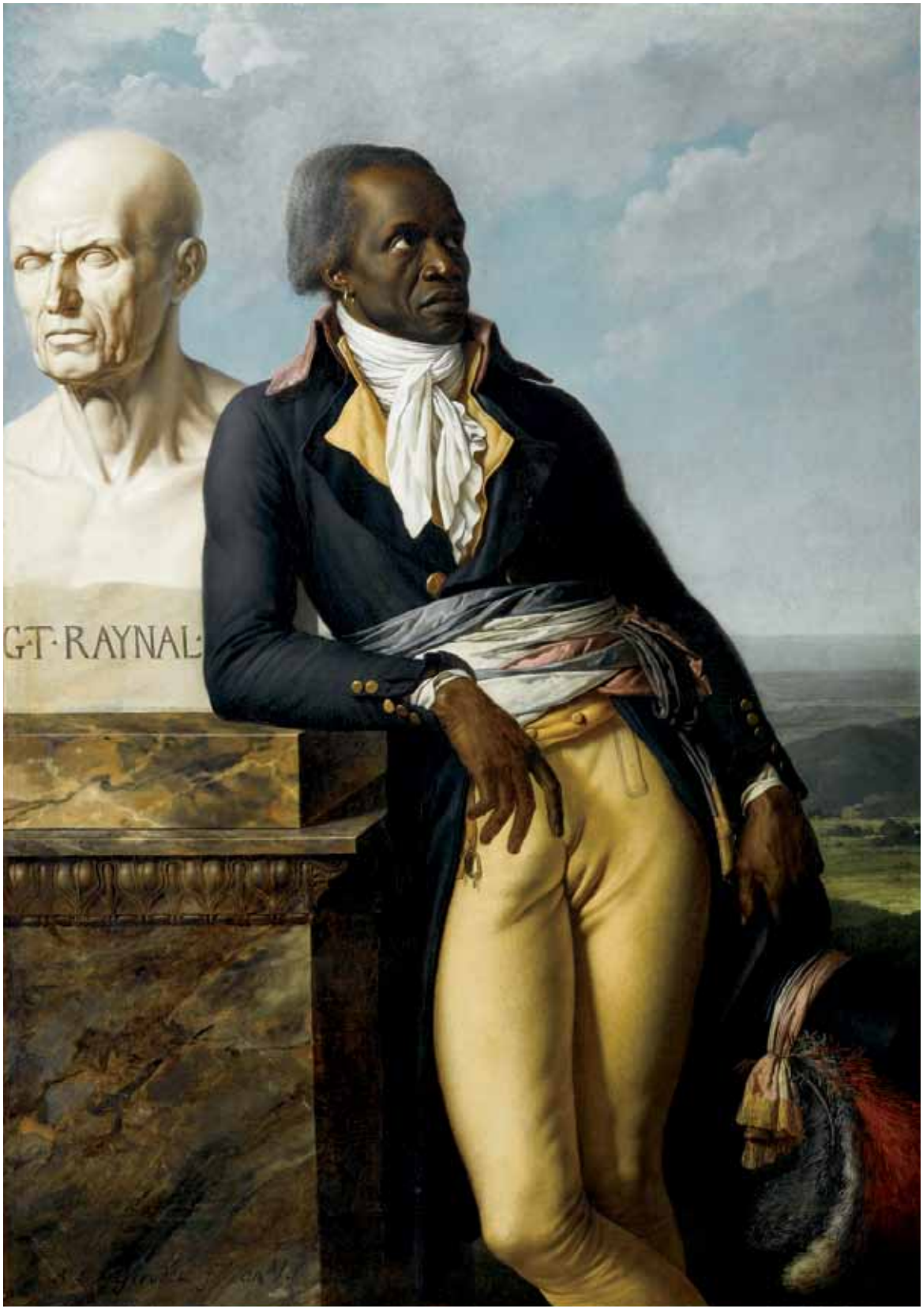

G·T·RAYNAL·

Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson, *C[itizen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, 1797, oil on canvas, 62¼ x 43¾ in. (158 x 111 cm). Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, France (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Gérard Blot provided by Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

How one is seen (as black) and therefore, what one sees (in a white world) is always already crucial to one's existence as an Afro-American.
—Michele Wallace

[N]o one could prevent us making good use of our eyes.
—Hannah Crafts

Krista Thompson

A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States

An early draft of this paper formed the introduction to a panel I cochaired, with Jacqueline Francis, "African Diaspora Art History: State of the Field," at the College Art Association's annual conference in 2010. Thanks to Jacqueline, Huey Copeland, Pamela Franco, Harvey Neptune, and the anonymous *Art Journal* reviewer for their invaluable insights on the paper and perspectives on the field.

The epigraphs are from Michele Wallace, "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture" (1990), in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 40; and Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1853–61; New York: Warner Books, 2003), 14.

In 80 percent of the job advertisements published by the College Art Association over the last twenty years in which the words "African diaspora" appear, they are accompanied by "and/or": "African diaspora and/or African art history" and, in rarer instances, "African diaspora and/or African American and/or Latin American art history."[1] While the latter string of fields warrants critical analysis, I want to concentrate on the former, more common job description. What can we make of the frequent conjoining of Africa and the African diaspora? Would such a geographic breadth and unspecified temporal span be imaginable in other contexts, i.e., "art history of Europe and/or the study of art of people of European descent throughout the globe"? Or do the distinct historical circumstances through which the modern African diaspora came to be formed, those of transatlantic slavery, make that conjunction a necessary and even a political one? That being said, how do we understand the "or" in such job descriptions, that small but resounding indicator not of connection but of substitution, which suggests that the study of the African diaspora can take the place of the study of African art or that art from the continent can conversely overshadow, occlude, or preclude, the diaspora? What does such exchangeability tell us about understandings or misconceptions of African diaspora art-historical studies and their place or their lack of standing within the discipline of art history?

This institutional configuration of the African diaspora in art history job announcements serves as a point of departure in this essay, which sets out to assess historiographically what it means to study art history from the perspective of the African diaspora. I look primarily at African diaspora art history in the United States, where the area of study first developed and continues to dominate characterizations of African diaspora artistic and art-historical practice, even though I am attentive to how concepts, research, and scholars from other parts of the African diaspora have transformed this scholarship. The essay offers an overview of how the field has been interpolated in both art history and African diaspora studies.[2]

I start with an examination of the methodological centrality of art history in early African diasporic scholarship. Associated with the anthropologist Melville Herskovits and carried forth in the work of the art historian Robert Farris Thompson, this strain of African diaspora scholarship sought to trace an African presence in the Americas by analyzing its material and visible remains. After the publication of Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* in 1983, the discipline of art history proved intrinsic to what has been described as the "rebirth of African diaspora studies" in the academy.[3] I go on to explore the reorientation of African diaspora scholarship that took place after the publication of the sociologist Paul Gilroy's

1. Job advertisements posted with the College Art Association from 1991 to 2010 that mentioned the African diaspora totaled 117 listings. Of these only twenty-one positions listed "African diaspora" alone. Ninety-six positions advertised African and/or African diaspora. Twenty-six listings called for a Latin Americanist or African diaspora specialist. Thanks to Patricia Holquist at the College Art Association for helping me obtain access to past job announcements published by CAA and to Emilie Boone for her statistical breakdown of these advertisements.
2. My subtitle references two influential texts from art history and African diaspora studies respectively: Thomas Crow, "The Practice of Art History in America," *Daedalus* 135, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 70–90; and Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
3. On Thompson's association with the "rebirth of African diaspora studies," see Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora

Black Atlantic (1993), which focused on the constitutive, even precursory, role of the African diaspora within the formation of Western modernity. In the wake of Gilroy's work, African diaspora studies increasingly engaged, expanded, and exploded Western notions of modernity and modernism, democracy and citizenship, objecthood and subjectivity, and the beautiful and the representable. African diaspora art history, taking up these forms of critique, increasingly explored how African diasporic art, representation, and ways of seeing offered critical reflection on conventional meanings, teleologies, and ontologies of modern art in the West and interrogated the primacy of vision and visuality more generally in modern Western society. The field not only broadened the parameters of what qualified as the object of study in art history but lingered on the very limits of visibility, the evidence of things not seen and represented in Western modes of visual production. As African diaspora art history increasingly gave Western representation a sidelong glance, Africa—once the focus of scholarly attention in African diaspora art-historical studies—increasingly retreated from view. I argue that characterizations of African diasporic art history as interchangeable with African art history in contemporary job announcements reflect a failure to acknowledge the modern turn in African diaspora scholarship, which has dominated the field of African diaspora studies over the last fifteen years. Such mischaracterizations of African diaspora art history marginalize it, rather than highlighting how this history is intrinsic to modern Western art history.

Ironically, as African diaspora art history moved away from the study of African retentions, it became less visible in African diaspora studies. By the turn of the twenty-first century, scholarship on the diaspora increasingly shifted emphasis from the visual evidence of African roots to the role of music and print culture in the formation of modern African diasporic communities. What might be interpreted as the recent diminished presence of art history in African diaspora scholarship is reflected in several oft-cited genealogies of diaspora studies in which there is a conspicuous absence of any discussion of art historians' work.[4] I conclude by asking what course art historians of the African diaspora should be charting within the shifting terrain of African diaspora studies and art history in order to open up new horizons within and beyond the field.

The African Diaspora: Concept and Context

"Diaspora" is a Greek word, a combination of the prefix *dia-* (meaning "through") and the verb *sperein* ("to sow" or "to scatter"), and refers to the dispersal of people of common origin, background, or belief. "Dispersal" seems like a mild and passive way to describe the processes through which the modern African diaspora came to be formed: through transatlantic racial slavery. Commencing in the fifteenth century and continuing for almost four centuries, slave traders brought more than eleven million Africans to the Americas, and approximately two hundred thousand to Europe and to Asia. An estimated two million Africans died en route. While there were at least three earlier diasporic movements out of the continent of Africa, it was the modern slave trade that inaugurated "the most massive acculturational event in human history."[5]

The concept of the African diaspora as a subject of study gained academic currency in the English-speaking world in the mid-1950s to mid-1960s in the

and the Making of the Modern World," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (April 2000): 12. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983); and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

4. The centrality and marginalization of art history is signaled in Patterson and Kelley's historiography of African diaspora studies. The authors acknowledge the importance of the concept of the "'black Atlantic' coined by Robert Farris Thompson and employed most recently by Paul Gilroy," but they do not consider Thompson's work or the scholarship of any art historian in their analysis. Patterson and Kelley, 12. See also Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," *Social Text* 66 (vol. 19, no. 1, Spring 2001): 45–73.

5. Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 9.

writings of the historian George Shepperson.[6] "African diaspora" characterizes how diverse subjects affected by transatlantic slavery and its aftermaths came to think of themselves as a group, across geographic locations, based on (but not limited to) a shared history, be it of slavery, homeland, ethnicity, colonialism, imperialism, imperiled decolonialization, white racism, or precisely the conditions of dispersal and acculturation.[7] Since almost the beginning of the slave trade, writers, thinkers, travelers, political leaders, and artists in the African diaspora—whom Shepperson describes as "trans-Atlantic men [and women] of African descent"—across the world sought to align themselves with other people of African descent and saw themselves as parts of a larger black international community.[8] In conferences such as the Pan-African Conference in 1900, led by the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams, and in the congresses organized by W. E. B. Du Bois and others in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, 1945, and 1974, people of African descent came together to foster, as Du Bois put it, "intellectual understanding and co-operation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples."[9]

In the art world this internationalized sense of diasporic community was fostered through the travels of the African American artist Robert Douglass, Jr., to Haiti in 1837–39, in the subsequent transatlantic journeys of the American sculptor Edmonia Lewis to Italy in 1865, and in the Cuban painter Wifredo Lam's sojourns in Spain, France, and Haiti in the 1920s through mid-1940s, to the staging of art festivals, like the first World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966, and more recently the Festival of Black Arts and Cultures hosted by the same city in 2010. These events brought together artists, musicians, and cultural practitioners from Africa and the African diaspora. A diasporic sense of identification was not necessarily created through travel but could involve a reconfiguration of location through representation, whether the fugitive slave Harriet Jacobs's projections of herself as a free person as she lay immobile while hiding for seven years in a crawlspace in her grandmother's home; Jamaican Rastafarians' allegiances to Ethiopia generated and sustained through photography, prints, and murals; or the philosopher Alain Locke's understanding and fostering of a "new internationalism," indeed "a new Negro," across and within different African diasporic communities through the arts in the 1920s.[10] Locke's edited volume *The New Negro* (1925), which brought together artists, poets, anthropologists, and authors from throughout the diaspora and indeed from across national, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, enacted his understanding of black internationalism, efforts to "recapture contact with the scattered peoples of African derivation."

African diaspora art history explores the role of art, visual culture, and visuality in African diasporic cultures.[11] It examines in part the visual representations, tropes, technologies, and practices through which diverse internally differentiated groups of people of African descent came to see, understand, and represent themselves as connected to each other or as sharing cultural expressions, religious practices, political views, experiences and conditions, pasts, or imagined futures. Art does not simply illustrate these efforts, but has been an intrinsic part of the ongoing processes through which diverse individuals and groups, under distinct social conditions, forge and express a sense of diasporic belonging.[12] The

6. George Shepperson, "African Diaspora: Concept and Content," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph Harris (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1982), 52.
7. For insightful considerations of the meaning and scholarly uses of the African diaspora, see Colin Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *Journal of Negro History* 85, no. 1– 2 (Winter–Spring 2000): 27–28; Edwards, "Uses of Diaspora"; Patterson and Kelley; and David Scott, "An Obscure Miracle of Connection," in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 106–27.
8. George Shepperson, "The African Diaspora—or The African Abroad," *Africa Forum: A Quarterly Journal of African Affairs* 2, no. 1 (Summer 1966): 86.
9. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Pan-Africa and the New Racial Philosophy," *Crisis* 40 (November 1933): 247, quoted in Edwards, "Uses of Diaspora," 46.
10. Jacobs wrote under the pen name Linda Brent. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861; Minneapolis: Dover, 2001). Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Locke (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925), 3–16. The quotation that follows is from page 15.
11. My essay looks at art-historical scholarship that was African diasporic in its scope and ambition. Therefore many key texts in African American art history, including Cedric Dover's *American Negro Art* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society,1960), Samella Lewis's *Art: African American* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), and Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford, UK, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), that do not explicitly speak to notions of diaspora beyond the United States or black Atlantic modes of critique (which are invested in the transcultural and intercultural intersections with and critical reflections on Western modernity, modernism, and national or globalized art canons) are not addressed at length here.
12. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222; and Patterson and Kelley, 18.

field also takes account of how persons in the diaspora sought to image the subjectivity, modernity, creativity, memory, and humanity of black subjects. The idea and meanings of diaspora are, of course, not preformed or static, nor is art simply illustrative or monadic of a fixed sense of what constitutes diaspora. Rather, African diaspora art history is concerned with the multiplicity of identities that constitute diasporas (and that trouble their constitution), the ever-changing and historical ways that subjects in the diaspora see, see themselves, and are seen, and the conditions of visibility and invisibility in and beyond the art world—from modernization and modernism to multiculturalism and post-blackness—that inform the work, interpretation, circulation, and practice of art in the African diaspora more broadly.[13]

African diaspora art history also reflects on the specific sociopolitical environments, philosophical and aesthetic ideals, and visual regimes that figurations of diaspora take place within and against, the contexts that have (and often continue to) cast black subjects as noncitizens, as nonhumans, as not representable, or as unworthy or incapable of art. It offers an analysis of art and visuality as discerned from the changing historical perspective of people in the African diaspora. African diaspora art history analyzes what the African American sociologist and leader Du Bois so provocatively characterized in the Reconstruction era as a "second sight" into the American world, a view of American and modern Western society from the perspective of those who are seen as a "seventh son." The sight of African diasporic subjects is ultimately the perspective of the observed, those who experienced "a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," and the observers, those often consigned to and actively engaged in the process of looking, beholding, inspecting.[14] Who knew better the meaning and uses of the visual in Western society than those who were defined as black, as other, as property, based on the surface appearance of their skins? Who understood better what art and aesthetics does, affects, and affords, or the importance of being represented than those who were often defined as antithetical to notions of the beautiful, the modern, the visible, the representable? In these ways African diaspora art history grapples with how African diasporic subjects approached, viewed, and visualized the broader environments in which they lived and forged creative lives, both the sociopolitical environment and representational landscapes. It is attentive to how black subjects came to be seen and represented as such and how their lived experiences at the nexus of Western regimes of visuality reveal much about the logic of the visual in modern Western culture and its limits.

The insights of Hannah Crafts, an author who wrote a fictionalized biography of her life as a slave in the nineteenth century, offers a prescient example of the vision of the observed and observer that I focus on here as an approach to representation and a way of seeing in the African diaspora, a perspective analyzed in visual studies of the field. Her narrative highlights too how African diasporic identities and subjectivities were precisely constituted through vision. Crafts's account is written from the perspective of a slave who had "no training, no cultivation," but "fancied pictorial illustrations and flaming colors" and from childhood developed "a silent unobtrusive way of observing things and events . . . wishing to understand them better than I could."[15] Crafts's *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (1853–61) abounds with contemplative and critical reflections on the things that

13. Stuart Hall in his writings about art in the African diaspora aimed "to give it specificity; but also to read it both in its connections with, and differences from, other histories." Hall, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-war History," *History Workshop Journal* 61, no. 1 (2006): 1–24.

14. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Modern Library, 2003), 5.

15. Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1853–61; New York: Warner Books, 2003), 5–6.

comprise her protagonist's world—from the "appearance of wealth and splendor" in her master's house, and the rooms "inhabited by marble images of art, or human forms pictured on the walls," to the questionable whiteness of her master's bride-to-be.[16] She also is cognizant of her and other slaves' intense subjection to observation, to visual scrutiny. Crafts's description of an old woman who met her death when hung alive on a linden tree by her master is her most spectacular description of the potentially punitive consequences and uses of the surveillance of black bodies. Her account calls attention to how she and her peers experienced and negotiated their visual world, its quotidian and violent extremes.

One striking part of Crafts's narrative comes when the protagonist enters a gallery filled with a "long succession of family portraits."[17] As she assesses the portraits of her master and his ancestors, the painted countenances appear to come to life in the sunlight that bathes the room. Crafts lingers over the portraits, attentive to the experience of viewing them and to the changing visual effects of light on the images: "Movements like those of life came over the line of stolid faces as the shadows of a linden played there." Intriguingly, Crafts describes her own transformation: "I was not a slave with these pictured memorials of the past. They could not enforce drudgery, or condemn me on account of my color to a life of servitude. As their companion I could think and speculate. In their presence my mind seemed to run riotous and exult in its freedom as a rational being, and one destined for something higher and better than this world can afford." Crafts's sense of companionship, selfhood, and emancipation among the portraits is intriguing as well as the way that objects (Crafts included) become subjects, and anthropomorphized, in her account. Amid the painted appearances, Crafts could newly imagine and project a future self. Her viewership, as described in the gallery scene and throughout her text, is attentive to a broader ontology of what it means to be represented and its visual and social effects, the authorial claim made through the very act of constituting oneself (or one's ancestors) in art (and representation more broadly) and its relationship to subjectivity, to history, to future possibility. No such gallery of portraits exists for the slaves, even though by calling attention to the way that the linden tree (where the old lady is killed) casts the shadow that animates the portraits, Crafts highlights how her master's status and that of his ancestors, their wealth, subjecthood, and representability, were dependent on her status and production as slave, as property, as "an ignorant thing," incapable of "knowing any thing" about pictures.[18] The story of the woman's death also highlights other modes of representation, memory, and memorialization, the types of images and histories often not traceable in the archives that traditionally furnish art history. Without deemphasizing the historical specificity of the particular context in which Crafts wrote, I want to suggest that African diaspora art history is attentive to the watchful and attentive perspectives of African diasporic subjects, who have often been (and had to be) alert to what representation affords, affects, or renders absent. It takes account of what might be described as the sidelong glances at Western art and cultures of vision cast at different historical moments by African diasporic subjects, a knowing way of looking that is very aware of, and in many regards averting, being seen in over-determined ways on account of "color," to recall Crafts. African diaspora art history offers an optics, an analytical frame, through which to study these particular engagements with representation and visuality, from those seemingly simultaneously cast out of and

16. Ibid., 14.
17. Ibid., 15. The following quotations in this paragraph are from pages 16 and 17.
18. These words are said to Crafts when she is caught viewing the portraits. Throughout the text she demonstrates a keen and retrospective understanding of how pictures function formally and within the visual economy of slavery. Crafts writes, for instance, "We thought our master must be a very great man to have so much wealth at his command, but it never occurred to us to inquire whose sweat and blood and unpaid labor had contributed to produce it." Crafts, 14.

intrinsic to economies of vision in the West. It is also keenly attentive to the forms of art, representation, history, and memory created by African diasporic subjects within, against, and outside the dominant societies' representational and visual frames.

The Anthropological Origins of African Diaspora Art History

I begin this historiography of African diaspora art history by considering the ways in which anthropologists, since the 1920s, first interrogated social, cultural, and ultimately artistic formation among enslaved populations of African descent in the Americas, with an attention to their uses of material and visual cultural traces to investigate black Americans' pasts and their new worlds. Melville J. Herskovits, whose essays appeared in Locke's *The New Negro* and Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), in his *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) was one of the earliest anthropologists to argue that West African cultural retentions could be discerned in cultural and social expressions of blacks in the Americas.[19] Herskovits contended that African traditions thrived, to different degrees, in the New World, at a time when it was widely assumed that blacks had no longstanding cultural heritage—no past, no history—on which they drew. He argued against those who saw the Middle Passage as ushering in an emptiness or a blank slate that erased and estranged New World blacks from the continent of Africa and those with a vested interest in highlighting the Americanness (and not Africanness) of the Negro in the New World.[20]

Subsequently, the anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price and other scholars sought to shift the starting point or the baseline of African diasporic culture away from Africa to plantation society in the Americas. Mintz and Price maintained that the culture, values, and underlying principles that enslaved populations in the Americas shared were in fact "*created by them*" in the initial period of contact following the start of slavery.[21] While Herskovits and Mintz and Price studied a range of forms, visual expression played an intriguing role in their work. (Herskovits produced hundreds of photographs and over a thousand feet of film footage, and Price later co-wrote, with Sally Price, a book on art in Suriname).[22] Mintz and Price, for instance, recounted a striking description of how enslaved Africans emerged from the holds of their ships in Suriname in the late eighteenth century with designs carved into their scalps. As one Dutch-born soldier reported, the captives' hair was "shaved in different figures of Stars. half-moons, &c, /which they generally do the one to the other (having no Razors) by the help of a broken bottle and without Soap/".[23] Mintz and Price used this account to highlight the creative forms that even the newly enslaved produced, despite extremely limited material resources, in the earliest transformative moments when Africans from diverse backgrounds came to terms collectively and aesthetically with their new lives and social deaths.[24] The description highlights the unique contexts and conditions in which African diasporic peoples during slavery expressed themselves aesthetically and how art might be redefined in these circumstances.

The differing perspectives on whether the cultural and artistic forms slaves created reflect the Africanness or Americanness of blacks in the New World—as represented here by Herskovits and by Mintz and Price—would play directly into

19. Herskovits, by 1941, had changed from his earlier position that black communities like Harlem were like any other American community. See "The Negro's Africanism" in *The New Negro*, 353.
20. The sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was one critic of Herskovits who believed that economic and social factors and conditions in the United States primarily informed cultural organization among blacks in the United States. Frazier, "Review of the Myth of the Negro Past," undated and unpublished draft, Frazier Papers, box 78.14, MSRC, quoted in Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr.. E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919–1941* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
21. Mintz and Price, 18 (italics in original).
22. See Sally Price and Richard Price, *Afro-American Arts of the Suriname Rain Forest* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1980).
23. Stedman quoted in Mintz and Price, 48 (capitalization and punctuation in original text).
24. "Social death" comes from Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

the shifting politics surrounding black populations in the United States and other nations in the early twentieth century. But what I want to emphasize here is a point that the anthropologist David Scott makes about the assumptions of both such paradigms. He notes that what animated these two approaches was the conceptual premise that "pasts are such as can be identified in their authenticity and represented in their transparency" and that anthropology offered a theoretical and methodological apparatus for "corroborating such pasts in the present."[25] I recall this early history of anthropology because the conceptual premises and ideological assumptions of anthropologists working on the African diaspora would become influential in the study of art history. I also want to hint at the privileged role of the visual, and of material culture, in this early anthropological work and to suggest that art history with its focus on the visual object might have been especially suited to the task of corroborating a transparently representable past.

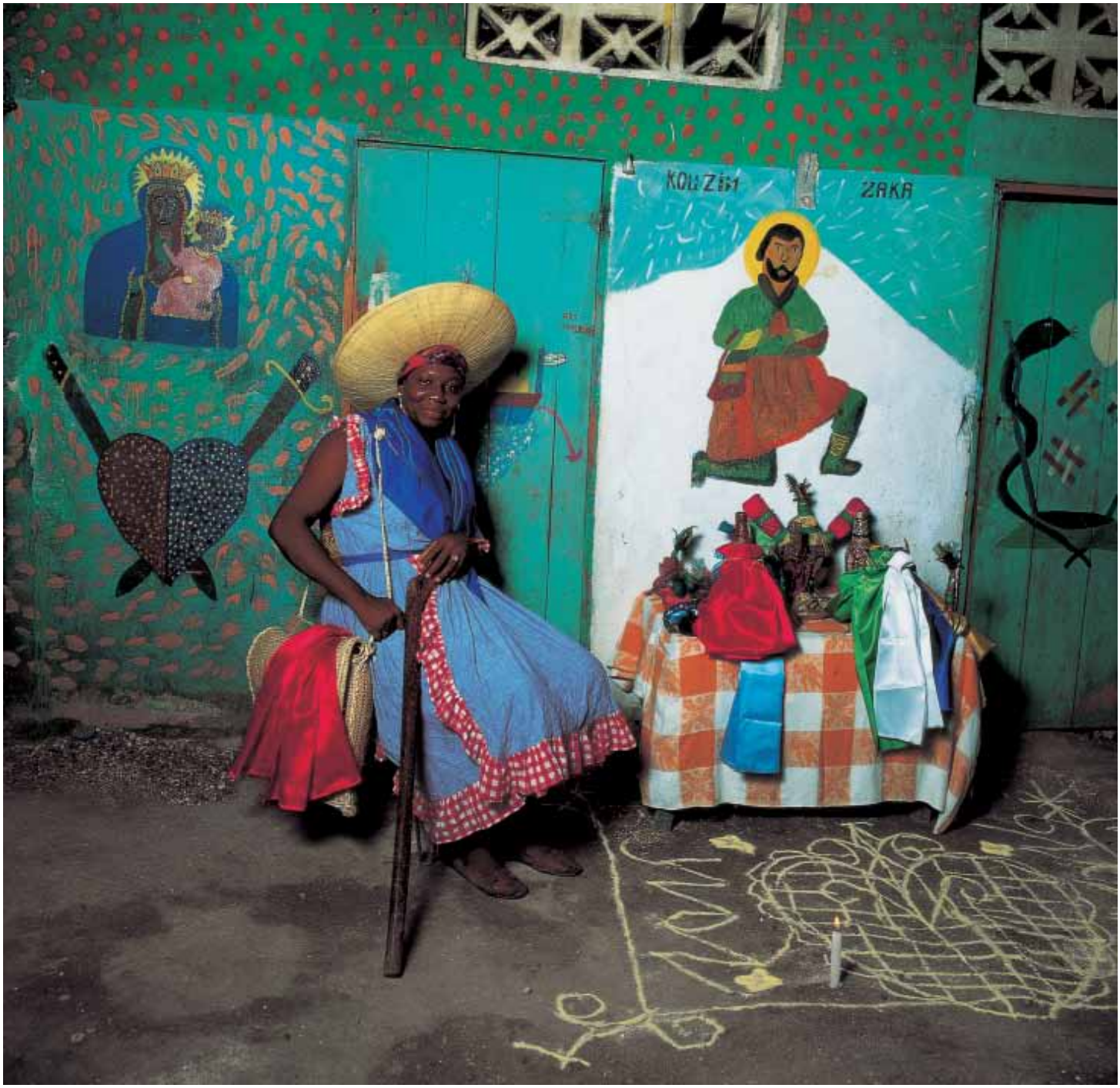
Keywords in Early African Diaspora Art History: "Trans-cultural" to "Black Atlantic" Approaches to Africa

Starting in the 1950s, several scholars, including the anthropologists Roger Bastide and William Bascom, Herskovits's former student, produced publications examining Africanisms in New World creative and religious expressions, such as Santeria in Cuba and Candomblé in Brazil.[26] These sacred and performing arts as well as the objects fashioned in their practice would dominate early scholarship on African diaspora artistic production.

Contemporaneous with these efforts, James A. Porter, an artist and art historian who headed Howard University's art department from 1953 to 1970, addressed what he described as "the remarkable creative contributions that the Negro has made to American life—contributions influenced, of course, by the shaping factor of his African heritage." His essay "The Trans-cultural Affinities of African Art" appeared in 1958.[27] Porter was influenced by the work of the Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, whose term "transculturation" the art historian references in his title. "Transculturation" or "neoculturation," as laid out by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in the introduction of Ortiz's book, refers to a process of change and exchange, "in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take. It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, nor even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent."[28] Porter, like Ortiz, was attentive to these processes in a number of locations to which he traveled, including rural and urban communities in Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba.[29] He viewed the transformation of African gods through the iconography of the Catholic Church, and their "artifactual embodiment" as spirits or *orisha* in Cuban Santeria and *loas* in Haitian vodun as prime examples of transcultural formation. Porter also described how studio artists, such as the Cubans Lam, Mario Carreño, and Teodoro Ramos-Blanco, and the Brazilians Candido Portinari, Lasar Segall, and Maria Martins explored and interpreted "the African presence" in their work and highlighted how African art, through "transcultural affinities," informed and transformed European art. Porter's essay ambitiously laid out what might be seen as the coordinates of an African diaspora art history that other

25. Scott, 108.
26. See William Bascom, "The Focus of Cuban Santeria," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (1950): 64–68; Bascom, "The Yoruba in Cuba," *Nigeria Magazine* (Lagos) 37 (1951): 14–20; Bascom, "Yoruba Acculturation in Cuba," *Les Afro-Américains, Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* 27 (1953): 163–167; and Roger Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia (rite Nagô)* (Paris: Mouton, 1958). A number of scholars, including Pierre Verger, Cuban Rómulo Lachatañeré, and Bascom wrote for *Les Afro-Américains*, published by the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire in Dakar in the mid-century.
27. James A. Porter, "The Trans-Cultural Affinities of African Art," in *Africa from the View of American Negro Scholars*, ed. American Society of African Culture (Paris: Presénce Africaine, 1958), 120.
28. Bronislaw Malinowski, introduction to Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Knopf, 1947), xi.
29. Porter, 121. The following quotations in this paragraph are from pages 121, 122, 125, and 120.

Phyllis Galembo, *Ochosi, Yaimel Garcia, Casa Cabildo Oba Tola Velaide, Matanzas, Cuba*, 1996, ilfochrome photograph (photograph © Phyllis Galembo)



Phyllis Galembo, *Madame Michelina as Azaka, Port-au-Prince, Haiti*, 1993, ilfochrome photograph (photograph © Phyllis Galembo)

scholars would follow in the coming three decades. His work presaged a field that would examine a range of sacred, popular, and studio-art expressions and was concerned with "striking African survivals" and their "visual modifications" in the arts on both sides of the Western hemisphere.

Porter's early writings, which are often overlooked in art-historical scholarship on the African diaspora, would inform the work of Robert Farris Thompson, of Yale University. Thompson is closely identified with the formation of African diaspora art history.[30] He delineated his approach to art and visual culture in his "Introduction to Transatlantic Black Art History: Remarks in Anticipation of a Coming Golden Age of Afro-Americana" (1974).[31] Studying Afro-American visual creativity from a transatlantic perspective, to paraphrase Thompson, involved an identification of strategic West and Central African visual and philosophic traditions that persisted in the Americas, which Afro-American artists interwove and recombined. In the essay Thompson studied the striking "visual parallels" between staffs used for healing in Nigeria and those that appeared in Brazil and Cuba and, through "secondary migration," in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican sectors of the United States; between the masking practices of the Ngbe (leopard) society in Nigeria and that of the Abakuá; between carved decorative motifs in Ghana and those in Suriname. Thompson, using a combination of formalism, connoisseurship, and iconology, often moved effortlessly from a visual analysis of objects to the bodies of African diasporic subjects, which expressed what he characterized as the shared "aesthetic of the cool," a certain manner of bodily and mental comportment. Thompson's abiding interest in the flash of Africanness in African diasporic cultures—flash suggesting a sudden appearance—may explain what critics described as his lack of attention at times to the historical processes of cultural transmission and transformation.[32]

Thompson further elaborated on transatlantic black art history in *Flash of the Spirit* (1983), a key book in African diaspora art history. In it Thompson used the term "black Atlantic"—a phrase used earlier by the historian Peter Linebaugh—which would be taken up and put to use for different and if not oppositional purposes in the field of African diaspora studies.[33] "The rise, development, and achievement of Yoruba, Kongo, Fon, Mande, and Ejagham art and philosophy fused with new elements overseas, shaping and defining the black Atlantic visual tradition," Thompson states in his first invocation of the term in his introduction.[34] The black Atlantic referred to more than cultural fusion but captured as well how African streams of creativity transformed all sides of the Atlantic and the Pacific as well.[35] It emphasized an expanded conceptual frame in which to examine the transformative global influence of African diasporic culture.

It is worth noting, if we chart key terms in early visual studies of African diaspora, that the term "trans-cultural affinities" in Porter (citing Ortiz's unhyphenated "transculturation") was superseded by "transatlantic" in Thompson's earlier work and then became "black Atlantic." One could make the case that the former two terms acknowledged the multiple cultural influences that came to produce new African diasporic cultures, while the latter "black Atlantic," essentially framed "Mother Africa," to quote Thompson, as the source that was "reblended" in the context of the African diaspora.[36] This may explain why Thompson often used terms like "fused," "intermingling," or "involvement" to describe the uses of European culture by African diasporic peoples.[37] These

30. Thompson cites Porter on the opening page of one of his earliest essays, "The African Influence on the Art of the United States," in *Black Studies in the University*, ed. Armstead L. Robinson, Craig C. Foster, and Donald H. Ogilvie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 122–23.
31. Robert Farris Thompson, "An Introduction to Transatlantic Black Art History: Remarks in Anticipation of a Coming Golden Age of Afro-Americana," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 9, no. 3–4 (July 1974): 192–201. The following terms in this paragraph are from pages 192–93.
32. See Mary Jo Arnoldi and Ivan Karp, "Afro-American Art," review of Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, *Art in America*, November 1985, 23–27. While Thompson would write of the importance of "taking pains to scan the horizon for signs of departure" in studying transatlantic black art, his later work would seldom do so. Thompson, "Introduction to Transatlantic Black Art History," 192.
33. See Peter Linebaugh, "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 10 (Autumn 1982): 87–121.
34. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, xiv.
35. See ibid., xiii–xiv.
36. Ibid., 164.
37. Ibid., 165, xii, and 167.
38. Ibid., 191.

language choices suggest that African cultures were conjoined with other cultural forms, that "one universe abuts another" in the Americas, but these descriptions stop short of postulating that African diasporic expressions constituted something altogether new, that they were strictly speaking syncretic or transcultural in Ortiz's sense of the word.[38]

It is likely that black nationalist movements in and beyond the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s informed Thompson's early work and his conceptual move from "transatlantic" to "black Atlantic," what might be considered his Herskovitsian turn. In the United States the 1970s saw challenges to the nonviolent and what some argued were the assimilationist agendas of the civil rights movement, the increased popularity of ideologies of black nationalism and separatism, and protests in the academy over the curricular inclusion of black and women's studies. Independence and postcolonial movements in Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of South America initiated in the late 1950s and 1960s also continued to ignite African diasporic solidarity. Thompson's interest in highlighting the Africanness of black American culture fit into the political aims and purposes of these diverse movements, all of which sought to identify with and identify, to trace physically and materially, African heritage. Thompson's rather dramatic contention in 1969 that it was "dangerous" to "ignore the possibility of African cultural impulses reinstated in these [African American art] works" highlights something of the charged political atmosphere in which his scholarship, with its arguments about a visual link to African art and culture in the diaspora, functioned.[39]

As Thompson published *Flash of the Spirit* in the early 1980s, his work also circulated and gained popularity during the decade of multiculturalism.[40] By the mid- to late 1980s, poststructuralist critiques, which sought to decenter cultural hierarchies, gained currency in the academy and the museum. The avid interest in diversity at the time, however, could reinforce essentialist notions of difference and racial particularity as much as acknowledge cultural and ethnic plurality. Multiculturalism often operated under the assumption that difference could be visually manifest or performed.[41] In sum, Thompson's black Atlantic work acquired further currency at a time in which the difference and the Africanness of African diasporic culture were being recognized, emphasized, and visualized in and beyond the academy.

From the mid-1970s through the early 1990s, a significant number of scholarly texts and exhibition catalogues published in the United States explored Africanisms in a range of visual expressions from self-taught art and quilts, to sacred and festival arts, to their permutations in studio production.[42] Notable among these was David C. Driskell's catalogue *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (1976), the beginning of which examined the similarities between black American walking canes and slave pottery and West African imagery.[43] Driskell, however (recalling the debates between Herskovits and Mintz and Price), was equally attentive to the ways in which black artists shared the concerns and ambitions of other American artists. Dissertations in the field started to be produced in the United States in the 1970s, including works by Allan Gordon, Jeff Donaldson, Floyd Coleman, and Judith Bettelheim.[44] Thompson, who advised some of this early doctoral work, was influential not only in art history but on artistic production in the African diaspora, as some artists used his work as a

39. Thompson, "African Influence on the Art of the United States," 136.
40. See David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6.
41. For an invaluable account of the "burden of representation" placed on artists in the diaspora in the 1980s and early 1990s, see Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). For a discussion of African diaspora arts that sought to undermine the "poorly conceived multicultural policies [that] merely encourage us to look for the recognizable markers of minority difference," see Jacqueline Francis, "To Be Real: Figuring Blackness in Modern and Contemporary African Diaspora Visual Cultures," *Radical History Review* 103 (Winter 2009): 188.
42. This literature is too vast to cite here. A small sample, listed in order of publication date, might include: John Wallace Nunley and Judith Bettelheim, *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference*, exh. cat. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Alvia Wardlaw, *Black Art: Ancestral Legacy; The African Impulse in African-American Art*, exh. cat. (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989); Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Arturo Lindsay, *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Maude Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African American Quilts*, exh. cat. (1993; Atlanta: Tinwood, 2001); Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum for African Art, and Munich: Prestel, 1993); Henry John Drewal and John Mason, *Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yorùbá Universe*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998); and Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yorùbá Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomblé* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).
43. David C. Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Knopf and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 11–58.
44. Some early dissertations with an African-diasporic framing include: Allan Moran Gordon, "Cultural Dualism on the Themes of Certain Afro-American Artists" (Ohio University, 1971); Jeff Richardson Donaldson, "Generation '306': Harlem, New York" (Northwestern University, 1974); Floyd Willis Coleman, "Persistence and Discontinuity of Traditional African Perception in Afro-American Art" (University of Georgia, 1975); Judith Bettelheim, "The Afro-Jamaican Jonkonnu Festival: Playing the Forces and Operating the Cloth (Yale University, 1979); Jontyle Theresa Robinson, "A History of the Haitian Popular Art Movement, 1944 to 1972" (University of Maryland, College Park, 1983); and David Hilary Brown, "Garden in the Machine: Afro-Cuban Sacred Art and Performance in Urban New Jersey and New York," 2 vols. (Yale University, 1989).

roadmap in their explorations of their African roots. The Puerto Rican and Dominican artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, for one, described the influence of *Flash of the Spirit* on his paintings.[45] One could make the case that Thompson's work eventually moved from being a source that investigated African diasporic arts to one that produced them, from examining the flash of African traits to informing the materialization of their form. Subsequent scholarship would at times analyze the Africanness of these studio practices. Thompson's imprint informed the ways in which African diaspora art history came to be seen in the discipline of art history and is likely responsible for the "and/ors" that continue to frame the African diaspora as a window onto and extension of Africa.

A Turn from African Roots: Change as Tradition in African Diaspora Studies

Contemporaneous with the literature on African retentions in the visual arts, a number of scholars in and outside the discipline of art history offered new articulations of the African diaspora that placed a greater emphasis on diaspora as a process rather than a permutation of Africa. Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-born theorist of British cultural studies, is strongly identified with this shift in African diaspora scholarship. This work insisted on the inherently changing and changeable nature of African diasporic cultures, arguing that identity was not a thing, a constant, based on a past that could be restored, but a "matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.'"[46] In the 1980s Richard Price and Sally Price were formative in emphasizing these points in African diaspora art history.[47] In this vein, art historians working on a range of African diasporic expressions, from Jonkunno (or John Canoe or Junkanoo) to vodun, highlighted continuities with Africa but lingered on transformations, innovations, and "relexifications" in the African diaspora.[48] They drew attention to processes of change and the specific local, colonial, and global sociopolitical contexts, conditions, and markets in which cultural syncretism and transmission took place. This work explored a broader range of artistic influences—including American Indian headdresses, Indian chromolithographs, French theater, Islamic religious influences, Mexican murals, and kung fu films, as well as artistic sojourns in locations like Paris and Haiti—that informed the visual landscape in the African diaspora.[49] Africanist art historians, like Suzanne Blier, also complicated and critiqued notions of Africa as a static source, calling attention to processes of cultural syncretism that predated the formation of the African diaspora (though one could argue that in the process they reestablished a syncretic Africa as a baseline).[50] In these studies Africa increasingly became one of many histories that factored into scholarly considerations of the African diaspora. Africa and the African diaspora were no longer tethered in the way they had been before.

These historically situated considerations of cultural syncretism emerged in the wake of attempts by groups to reverse processes of cultural acculturation or dilution in the African diaspora. Influenced by black cultural nationalism in the United States, members of a Cuban American group led by José Miguel Goméz Barberas as well as followers of Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi I, who established the Yoruba-inspired village of Oyotunji in South Carolina in 1970, aimed to splice traces of European cultures from practices like Santeria.[51] Arguably, these

45. See Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money," *New York Times*, February 10, 1985, online at www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/09/specials/basquiat-mag.html.
46. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 222. On change in African diasporic cultures, see also Amiri Baraka, "The Changing Same (Rhythm and Blues and New Black Music)," in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1971): 112–25.
47. See *Afro-American Arts of the Suriname Rain Forest*.
48. For a discussion of relexification, see David Decamp, "Introduction: The Study of Pidgin and Creole Languages," in *Conference on Pidginization and Creolization*, ed. Dell Hymes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 13–39; quoted in Brown, 56.
49. See Judith Bettelheim, "Caribbean Espiritismo (Spiritist) Altars: The Indian and the Congo," *Art Bulletin* 87, no. 2 (June 2005): 312–30; Audreen Buffalo, *Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris, 1945–1965*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996); Donald J. Cosentino, *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995); Henry John Drewal, *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Water Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Christine Y. Kim, *Black Belt*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2003); Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins and Shifra M. Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance: African-American Modernists and the Mexican Muralist School*, exh. cat. (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1996); Theresa Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922–1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Dana Rush, "Indian Imagery in West African Vodun Art and Thought," *ArtAsiaPacific: Contemporary Visual Culture* 34 (April–June 2002): 70–75; Dana Rush, "Eternal Potential: Chromolithographs in Vodunland," *African Arts* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 60–75, 94–96; and Krista A. Thompson, "Preoccupied with Haiti: The Dream of Diaspora in African American Art, 1915–1942," *American Art* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 75–97.
50. See Suzanne Preston Blier, "Vodun: West African Roots of Vodou," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, 61–87; and Edna Bay, *Asen, Ancestors, and Vodun: Tracing Change in African Art* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
51. See Kamari Maxine Clark, "Yoruba Aesthetics and Trans-Atlantic Imaginaries," in *Beautiful/Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*, ed. Sarah Nuttall (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 290–315; Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 278–286.

reafricanizing efforts (described by Thompson as a Yoruba Renaissance)[52] evince the enduring faith in the visual object's ability not only to make the past representable but seemingly to transform historical processes of change that had previously occurred through altering the physical appearance of African diasporic art and visual culture. While many scholars who were attentive to the processes of syncretism frowned on such efforts, such restorative attempts may be seen as parts of the ongoing processes of diasporic becoming that are articulated and rearticulated through visual representation.[53]

Approaches to the Visual and Unrepresentable in African Diaspora Art History

I want to say a word about how methodologies for reading the art object changed with the shift from an emphasis on detecting Africanisms in the Americas to exploring change and transformation in African diasporic art, ways of approaching artistic production and visuality that have application beyond the field. Much of the scholarship on syncretism in the 1990s moved away from earlier formal or iconographic analyses of "histories of formal persistence," to quote Thompson, to come to terms with the sometimes noncontiguous and complicated relationship between appearance and meaning, form and content, and sign and signified in the African diaspora.[54] Particularly in the case of some early forms of African diasporic expression, which were created within the context of slavery, form and content were often strategically not aligned. Subject at times to sanction and a host of social and material conditions, form indeed could hide content.[55] Creators in the African diaspora often negotiated the constraints on visibility, the unrepresentable, and the signified that could not be given visual form. Thus art historians of the African diaspora had to be attentive to the invisible and un-visible (that which is not seen while in plain view), as well as cognizant of that which remained in the realm of the visible.[56]

Art-historical scholarship in the field also investigated the complex signification systems that developed from the amalgam of sources inhabiting African diasporic image worlds. This work highlighted the flawed project of earlier attempts to read the past in any transparent way through diasporic art objects. David Brown, for one, describes the aesthetic density, or syndesis, of objects in *orisha* thrones in Cuba and the United States and calls attention to the layering on and display of different material surfaces in these assemblages, which simultaneously conceal and emphasize depth.[57] His investigations suggest, among other things, that Afro-Cuban Santeria throne creators often compiled materials from multiple cultural sources that they identified as prestigious in their societies and brought them together in dense synthesis to add to and reproduce the power of the *orishas*. Donald Consentino offers another interesting interpretation of the signification systems in African diasporic aesthetics. He maintains that in Haitian vodun the sign becomes real. The saints and other figures depicted on chromolithographs become embodied in vodun; they move from representations of spirits to presences that inhabit the earthly world. In this instance the sign and signifier are made one.[58] I introduce a small segment of this literature here to begin to suggest the ways in which the study of African diasporic art involves keen attention to how practitioners in the African diaspora perceived objects and representations

52. See Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit,* 97.
53. See Brown, *Santería Enthroned*; and Donald Cosentino, "Vodou in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 47 (Spring 2005): 231–246.
54. See Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit,* 192. The poststructuralist approach to the sign in African diasporic cultures of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., was highly influential in this methodological shift. See Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
55. See Bascom, "The Focus of Cuban Santería," 64–68.
56. "Un-visible" comes from Ralph Ellison, introduction to *The Invisible Man* (1952: New York: Random House, 1981), xv. See also Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 17.
57. See Brown, *Santeria Enthroned*, 54. On syndesis, Brown cites Robert Plant, *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1981).
58. See Donald J. Cosentino, "Imagine Heaven," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, 25–55; and Cosentino, "Vodou in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

in their environments. Recalling Crafts, who described how she would "observe things" and arrive at conclusions "by a sort of sagacity," African diasporic subjects often interrogated how things signified, their effects and efficaciousness. They remained attentive to the materiality of objects, dwelling on the matter, manner, and meaning of emptiness, surfaces, depths, and realness, and sought to reproduce these characteristics in their artistic and cultural forms.[59] The scholarship on syndesis, the accumulation, and on the unfinished aesthetic, a piling on, a "too-muchness," interestingly suggests that contrary to early underlying assumptions regarding the representability and transparency of the past through art and visual culture in early African diasporic anthropology and art history, considerations of the art object in African diaspora may ultimately necessitate an exploration of the "aesthetics of opacity," to use the term of the Martinican Édouard Glissant, that which is not easily revealed, made visible, transparently present.[60]

It is important to note that African diaspora scholarship in and outside art history offered an early conceptual site through which processes of cultural syncretism were studied in the humanities and social sciences more generally. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, as postmodernism dominated scholarly discourse in and beyond the United States, the African diaspora (and the Caribbean in particular)—long studied as a site of cultural intermingling—became a "master symbol" for the postmodern condition, for peoples, objects, cultures, and temporalities mixed or/and in motion.[61] Small wonder perhaps that the anthropologist James Clifford, in his influential book *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), would declare, "We are all Caribbean now in our urban archipelagos."[62] There is not space here to examine what is lost and gained when the diasporic experience, often so informed by social marginalization, becomes a central paradigm that the broader society claims. Such pronouncements of and celebrations of syncretism, it is crucial to note, often continue to be enmeshed in specific national, social, and racialized debates about difference. Some parties in hailing creolization and cultural blending may in fact be hostile to the idea of African diasporic cultures. In this broader theoretical claiming of diaspora, the term became less associated with place, i.e., Africa, and more with a process of becoming, one that by the late 1980s characterized postmodern subjectivity writ large.

The Black Atlantic as the Culture of Modernity

In the early 1990s, the field of African diaspora studies underwent another reorientation informed in part by the British sociologist Paul Gilroy's conceptualization of the black Atlantic in his influential book of the same name (1993), one seemingly not reflected in the numerous "African diaspora and/or" job announcements. He proposed the black Atlantic as a single, complex unit of analysis, of the rhizomorphic, fractal formations of African diasporic culture and thought, which could only be understood in a transatlantic frame.[63] Rhizomorphic organisms branch out through filaments, which not only expand the form but also act as conduits that transport and translate nutrients. Fractals refer to broken, often irregular shapes, which reproduce the whole; any element of a fractal is similar in shape to the larger part, and in effect reproduces it when magnified. While Gilroy's description, like Hall's, was attentive to processes of transmission, movement, and change, his work differed in its attention to what a fractal black

59. Crafts, xxxvi. For more on how African diasporic subjects engage the materiality of objects and at times break apart their significatory logic, see Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson, "Perpetual Returns: New World Slavery and the Matter of the Visual," *Representations* 113 (Winter 2011): 1–15.
60. On opacity in the African diaspora, see Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 252–57; and Dana Rush, "Ephemerality and the 'Unfinished' in Vodun Aesthetics," *African Arts* 43, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 60–75. Kobena Mercer uses the term "too-muchness" in Mercer, "Hew Locke's Post-Colonial Baroque," *Small Axe* 34 (March 2011): 6.
61. See Aisha Khan, "Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (August 2001): 271–302.
62. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 173.
63. Gilroy, 4.

Atlantic world reveals about a larger modern Western culture. He was interested in the "affinities and affiliations which link the blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment."[64] That Gilroy describes the black Atlantic as both transcultural and intercultural reveals a further shift from earlier conceptualizations of the African diaspora toward the (long implicit) view that the African diaspora was intimately intertwined with, inseparable from, and illustrative of the modern West. Gilroy's work marked a signal transformation in African diaspora studies, one not without its critics.[65] If there had been a turn away from an originary search for African roots in earlier African diaspora scholarship, in Gilroy's work the continent was all but eclipsed.

Continuing a line of analysis explored since the Trinidadian man of letters C. L. R. James's work in the 1930s and Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Gilroy argued not simply that blacks were internal to the formation of Western modernity, but that African diasporic subjects, because of the transatlantic slave trade, were "the first truly modern people."[66] They experienced the ruptures in space and time, the breaks from tradition, proto-industrialization, and transnationalism, and, crucially, as enslaved subjects they truly and newly imagined the meaning of freedom, democracy, and autonomy, concepts that would come to characterize modern Western intellectual and political thought and society. Who knew the meaning of freedom more than those defined as slaves, the meaning of subjectivity more than those defined as property or as less than human in their respective societies? Gilroy and scholars like Michael Hanchard and Toni Morrison assert that in order to understand fully many categories of knowledge since the Enlightenment, whether ideals of freedom, citizenship, nationalism, nationality, property, capitalism, or the human, one must come to terms with how African diasporic peoples often embodied, expanded on, or evinced the limits of these concepts.[67] These scholars would reorient the scope of African diaspora studies, putting it at the center of humanist inquiry and in conversation with scholars of modernity across fields and disciplines.

Although art history was tangential in Gilroy's text and music-focused analysis in *The Black Atlantic*, his introduction framed the implications of his work for scholars of art and representation. Gilroy argued that Western notions of beauty, taste, and aesthetic judgment since the Enlightenment should be interrogated from the perspective of the black Atlantic. Ideas about cultural value, he maintained, were often constructed in relation to the figure of the black diasporic subject, and that by tracing these "racial signs" in art and aesthetic theory and philosophy—from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche to Karl Marx—we might newly perceive the "aspirations of modernity."[68] The notion of the fetish, for example, so central in discourses of art, ethnography, psychoanalytic theory, and economic theory, stemmed etymologically from an imperial encounter during the slave trade.[69] The concept of the sublime and the beautiful, to cite another example, as characterized by the British philosopher Edmund Burke in 1756, was delineated in part by his description of a white boy's frightful visual encounter with a black female, and his framing of the formlessness of darkness and blackness.[70] Gilroy also made the case more broadly that "thinking about England" and what constitutes British art "is being conducted through the 'racial' symbolism that artistic images of

64. Ibid., 2.
65. Concerning the shift, recall, for one, Ortiz's concept of transculturation, which characterized "both sides," African diasporic populations and the rest of society, as "changed in the equation." Malinowski introduction in Ortiz, xi. For criticism of Gilroy, see, for example, Palmer, 31; Scott, 118–27; and Neil Lazarus, "Is a Counterculture of Modernity a Theory of Modernity?" *Diaspora* 4 (Winter 1995): 323–39.
66. Gilroy, 45, 221. Several texts which explored themes later elaborated by Gilroy include: C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; London: Andre Deutsch, 1964); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985); and Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.
67. See Gilroy, 16; Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture* 27 (1999): 245–57; and Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Vintage, 1993). See also Gilroy, "Living Memory: Meeting Toni Morrison," in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London and New York: Serpent's Tail, 1993), 178.
68. On this score Gilroy cites Sander Gilman, *On Blackness without Blacks* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982); and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The History and Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism, 1773–1831: The Arts, Aesthetic Theory, and the Nature of the African" (doctoral thesis, Clare College, Cambridge University, 1978). See Gilroy, 8–9.
69. See Gilroy, 8–9; and William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, Part 1," *Res* 9 (1985): 5–17.
70. Gilroy 9; Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 144–47.

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, 1840, oil on canvas, 35¾ x 48¼ in. (90.8 x 122.6 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Henry Lillie Pierce Fund (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

black suffering provide."[71] By analyzing African diasporic populations, concepts of nation and citizenship in many Western societies, particularly as defined through representation, could be brought into view.

Gilroy offered a glimpse of what might be described as his black Atlantic art history in his discussion of the British art and social critic John Ruskin's analysis of Joseph Mallord William Turner's painting *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying —Typhoon Coming On* (1840), a pictorial response to the practice of disposing of the enslaved during transatlantic passage.[72] Despite the painting's subject matter, in the body text of *Modern Painters* (1843), Ruskin discussed the work only in terms of its raging color. He sequestered the discussion of its subject matter to a footnote, even though his diaries reveal how preoccupied, moved, and even unnerved he was by what it depicted. Gilroy uses Ruskin's text to describe the marginalized, aestheticized, or ignored presence of blacks in the social and representational landscape and as an instance of the ways in which these erasures become central to national art canons. The painting is an example of the ambiguous visual field that blackness and African diasporic subjects often occupied. Ruskin's resolutely formal analysis also calls attention to forms of criticism and visual analysis that naturalize and universalize the ways of seeing art that erase considerations of race.

71. Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts*, 84.
72. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 13–14.
73. See Ragnar Farr, *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts and Institute of International Visual Arts, 1995); Kymberly N. Pinder, *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi, *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and NAi Publishers, 2001); Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz, eds., *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World, 1660–1830* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003); Timothy Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham, *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press,

2007); Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz , eds., *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Copeland and Thompson, "Perpetual Returns." For precursors to this work, see Ladislas Bugner, ed., *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (New York: Morrow, 1976); Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710–1940* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990); and Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

74. Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997). See also the following anthologies edited by Kobena Mercer: *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts and MIT Press, 2005); *Discrepant Abstraction* (Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts and MIT Press, 2006); *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts and MIT Press, 2007); and *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers* (Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts and MIT Press, 2008).

75. See Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey, *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, exh. cat. (Berkeley: Institute of International Visual Arts and University of California Press, 1997); Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd and M. Franklin Sirmans, eds., *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian and Caribbean Artists in Britain* (New York: Franklin H. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center/ African Diaspora Institute, 1997); and Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, eds., *Afro-Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 8–25. See also Michael D. Harris and Moyosore B. Okediji, *Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art in and out of Africa*, exh. cat. (Chapel Hill: Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999); *Challenge of the Modern: African-American Artists 1925–1945*, exh. cat. (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, 2003); Richard J. Powell, David A. Bailey, and Petrine Archer-Straw, *Back to Black: Art, Cinema, and the Racial Imaginary*, exh. cat. (London: Whitechapel, 2005), 9–27; Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley, eds., *Diaspora, Memory, Place: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z*, exh. cat. (Munich and New York: Prestel, 2008); and Lowery Stokes Sims and Leslie King-Hammond, *The Global Africa Project* (Munich and London: Prestel, 2010).

76. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 19.

77. If, according to Brent Edwards, the preface is important within literary analyses of the African diaspora, the footnote is significant in the study of the relegation and negation of African diaspora art in the discipline of art history. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 16–68.

Gilroy's paradigm would inform new models of African diaspora art history, which were transnational and intercultural in their focus. In the early 1990s, African diaspora art history engaged the intellectual spaces opened by Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* and was influenced more broadly by scholarship in cultural studies, literary studies, and postcolonial studies, all of which emphasized contrapuntal, global, and subaltern-focused analyses. Scholars in the field interrogated how the histories of African diasporic peoples were intertwined with modernity, modern art, the nation and national art canons, and artistic forms that circulate globally as universal visual vocabularies in the West. These black Atlantic art histories were ever attentive to how blacks and the histories related to the diaspora were represented, and cognizant as well of the ways in which their presences were not registered in the realm of the visual or were—as in the case of Ruskin—willfully unseen or unrecognized. These conceptual frames were reflected, for one, in the work of art historians who started to locate art production in Europe and its former colonies—from the work of British naturalists to the museum reinstallations of the contemporary artist Fred Wilson—within the nexus of a black Atlantic visual and political economy, and who contended that such visual production could not be fully understood outside this framework.[73]

In addition, art historians working largely on modern studio art in parts of the African diaspora also viewed this artistic production in the context of a broader transatlantic paradigm. This is evident in publications like Richard J. Powell's *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (1997), a groundbreaking survey text that moved away from a singular focus on the United States, which was typical of art-historical work in the genre, to examine "black diasporal art" and black subjectivity as expressed in visual representation across regional and racial boundaries.[74] Kobena Mercer also produced an influential series of books in his *Annotating Art's Histories* series that looked in part at African diasporic studio art within an expanded global purview on modern art. This transcultural and intercultural African diasporic engagement with modern art was especially manifest in a number of exhibitions, including *Rhapsodies in Black* (1997), *Transforming the Crown* (1997), and *Afro-Modern* (2010).[75] These projects variously sought to rethink the temporality and location of the modern and modernism by considering their different manifestations and periodizations within parts of the African diaspora, and exploring instances in which modern art created by white European and Anglo-American artists had been thought and figured through African diasporic forms and tropes, from Josephine Baker to slavery. None other than Clement Greenberg in his oft-cited account of modernism, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in calling for the maintenance of aristocratic values in the evaluation of modern art, would observe in a footnote "that the culture of slave-owning tribes is generally much superior to that of the tribes that possess no slaves," linking systems of slavery to modern art.[76] Reconsiderations of modern art from a black Atlantic perspective involved more than the construction of a history of art by artists in the African diaspora, which had been relegated to the footnotes of art history.[77] These explorations of different genealogies and geographies of modern art and modernism in the African diaspora and investigations of the perpetual returns of white artists to images associated with the African diaspora offered, demanded, a broader interrogation of the teleology of conventional narratives of Western art history.

Ironically, as scholarship in African diaspora critically interrogated narratives

Kara Walker, *Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred b'tween the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*, 1994, paper, overall 13 x 50 ft. (396.2 x 1524 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the Speyer Family Foundation in honor of Marie-Josée Kravis (artwork © Kara Walker; photograph provided by Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York)

of modern art, it also arguably became more conventional in the types of objects it studied. By the 1990s, the broad set of objects that had long preoccupied African diaspora art historians, the catholic attention to studio art and to popular and sacred arts seen early on since Porter's work, started to narrow or refocus on studio art production. Some of this work, however, did continue to interrogate what qualified as art in and beyond the African diaspora. David Craven's rereading of C. L. R. James, for one, probed how modern art might be redefined in the Caribbean context. James viewed the performing body in the African diaspora in the form of the statuesque cricketer, constituted in relationship to an audience, as an exemplar of artistic practice in the Caribbean.[78]

Scholars whose work engaged Gilroy's black Atlantic art history also interrogated conventions around particular genres of art in the modern Western societies. The art historian Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby offers a well-documented example in her study of the painting *C[itizen] Jean-Baptiste Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies* (1797) by the French Neoclassicist painter Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson.[79] She uses the work to interrogate postrevolutionary ideals of liberty in France, which depended on slavery and openly acknowledged forms of racism.[80] Moreover, Grigsby reexamines the representational strictures in history painting and portraiture, subjectivity and objecthood, light and darkness, corporeality and marble statuary, blindness and foresight, the representable and unrepresentable that Girodet had to transcend and redefine in order to give the black figure of Belley form as a painted subject. Grigsby also calls attention to the black subjects who were not memorialized through paint, who were not "visualizable" according to prevailing conventions of art. She describes a black woman, Jeanne Odo, for instance, who like Belley made vocal calls for changes in the French National Convention and the Jacobin Club, but never made it into painterly representa-

78. See C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); and David Craven, "C. L. R. James as a Critical Theorist of Modernist Art," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 146–67. Richard J. Powell has been unique in his analyses of modern art in the African diaspora. He has consistently explored a range of objects, from film to sartorial self-fashioning, that informs and constitutes modern artistic practice in the diaspora. See his *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* and *Cutting the Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
79. The painting is also known as *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley (1747–1805), Deputy of Santo Domingo, at the French Convention, 1797*.
80. See Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 8–63.

tion.[81] Odo's ephemeral performance, alluded to in written accounts, calls attention to the different forms of representation to which one must remain attentive in the context of the African diaspora. In other words, by considering the rare portrait of the black French figure and the scant archival traces of Odo, Grigsby's work highlights how through the study of the African diaspora many conventions of citizenship and art have to be freshly reconsidered, along with the connections between what is representable on canvas and what is imaginable as part of the national body interrogated.

Recalling Gilroy's interest in the ways in which a black Atlantic critique puts pressure on national histories and histories of art that erase a black presence, Darby English's examination of the silhouetted figures that inhabit the contemporary artist Kara Walker's wall installations similarly involves such an interrogation of conventions of American landscape genres. Walker's life-size silhouettes, which invoke but fail to represent in any clearly discernible way the era of slavery, remove the ground quite literally on which the field of vision in landscape, both history painting and the "inner landscape" of abstract work, is produced and consumed.[82] Walker's work "undermines the witness function that conventional silhouettes and landscapes perform, both historically and ideologically, on their creators' behalf." In other words, her silhouettes refuse and call attention to the ways in which landscape accomplishes itself, its linear narrative history, its relation to the viewer, its unity, order, progression. Moreover, Walker's crafting of her imaginative figures through silhouette form, a type of representation derived from the absence of light, also points to the irrecoverable nature of certain histories, the nonrepresentability of particular pasts. In contrast to earlier investments in the transparency of African diasporic pasts through the visual object evident in Thompson's work, English argues that such histories are "retrievable only as lost."[83]

81. Ibid., 14.
82. Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 101. The following quotation is also from page 101.
83. Ibid., 82. English cites the historian Robert Stein.

Glenn Ligon, *Rückenfigur*, 2009, neon and black paint, 24 in. x 12 ft. 1½ in. x 4 in. (61 x 369.6 x 10.2 cm), edition of 3 (artwork © Glenn Ligon; photograph by Brian Forrest provided by Regen Projects, Los Angeles)

Grigsby and English align with and may be seen as part of contemporary practices of African diasporic art history that are less preoccupied with reading manifestations of Africa in the diaspora, and more engaged in an interrogation of the broader ontology of modern Western aesthetic and representational practices, in making visible conventions and constructions that are otherwise "un-visible," naturalized, erased, and even universalized. The field highlights (in Walker's case through a stripping away) histories of seeing and representation that sometimes go unseen or uninterrogated. Walker describes her perspective on slavery and its related forms of visualization (and occlusion) as a "sidelong glance": "It's my answer to the male gaze. It's the little look and it's full of suspicion, potential ill-will, or desire."[84] It is a furtive, sagacious, critical, and yet desirous way of looking at things, a form of observation in which one is not seen to be looking, a perspective of "the Negress," as Walker describes it, which is mindful variously of being seen as racialized and gendered.[85] The sidelong glance (or is it the gaze, look, eye roll, or averted eye?), I would suggest, also characterizes a reoriented perception—like the light source set to the side that produces the silhouetted form—that illuminates a broader outline and context of what is seen and not seen.[86]

84. Jerry Saltz, "Kara Walker: Ill-Will and Desire," *Flash Art* 191 (November–December 1996): 82.
85. For more on the perspective of the Negress and how it opens onto a broader critique of modern art, see Huey Copeland, "In the Wake of the Negress," in *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 480–97. See also Judith Wilson, "Hagar's Daughters: Social History,

Caspar David Friedrich, *Woman at the Window*, 1822, oil on canvas, 17⅜ x 14½ in. (44 x 37 cm). Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Joerg P. Anders, provided by BPK, Berlin/Art Resource, NY)

This sidelong vision, which scholars working in African diasporic art history are attentive to, allows for a broader purview on representation and may be further explained by considering Glenn Ligon's recent neon work, *Rückenfigur* (2009). *Rückenfigur* presents the word "America," in caps, in letters wrought of neon lettering that together measure two feet by twelve feet. Ligon, however, presents each letter—seemingly backlit by a glowing white light—as if seen from behind, as if viewers apprehend it from the inside of a book, from the flipside of a billboard, from a representational interior. The word is not reversed; rather each letter, each part that constitutes "America," is turned or reoriented. The artist sprayed the letters with black Plasti-dip on their front and placed them facing the wall. A few of the letters are bilaterally symmetrical and can be read from both directions. Ligon's *Rückenfigur*, I would maintain, produces a sidelong glance at modern modes of art-making, of visuality and its attendant ideologies. The work highlights modern techniques and technologies of vision from aesthetic and social conventions of light and blackness to the language of advertising and the neon art of Bruce Nauman. It also critically reflects on the meaning of America as a global brand, which shines bright but remains shadowed by its history of race relations at home and abroad.

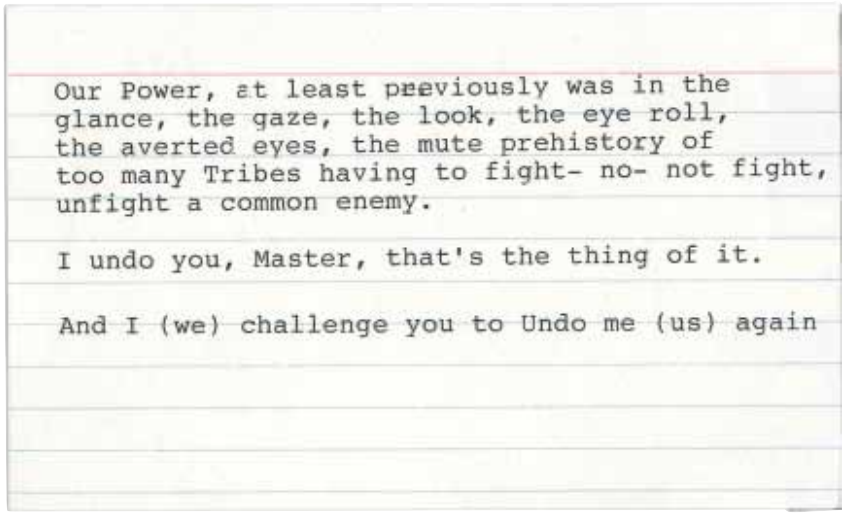
Cultural Heritage, and African-American Women's Art," in *Bearing Witness: Art by Contemporary African-American Women*, ed. Jontyle Theresa Robinson (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), 95–112; and her "One Way or Another: Black Feminist Visual Theory," in *Theorizing Feminism and Visual Culture*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22–26.
86. See Saltz, 82.

The word *rückenfigur* specifically refers to a figural trope in art, the representation of a lone figure depicted from behind in artwork.[87] The *rückenfigur* typically occupies and stares out at the landscape before it, as in the well-known paintings by the German artist Caspar David Friedrich. Ligon reproduces that figure but locates it beyond the picture plane. His *rückenfigur* occupies the exterior and interior of the image simultaneously, viewing the letters of the word "America" at a spatial remove and from inside looking out, a sidelong glance from two directions, if you will. It is a perspective that is vigilant of what representation does, what it affords and affects, even as it is an observing presence that is often not seen, recognized, or figured in the landscape. Light, I want to suggest, also calls attention to modern technologies that inform the ways in which African diasporic peoples are seen, see themselves, or are rendered invisible. Neon light, composed of an otherwise undetectable gas that can only be seen when contained in a tube structure and ignited with an electric charge, precisely spotlights how black subjects were and continue to be seen as such based on the surrounding conditions that structure notions of visibility. It is such viewing positions and critical purviews on representation that Ligon's work constitutes and that I want to spotlight as emblematic of an African diasporic approach to representation. Recent scholarship in the field has been concerned with tracking such sidelong glances historically.

This reoriented view on art, representation, and its attendant ideologies in African diasporic art-historical scholarship also assesses the boundaries of visuality and representation in modern Western culture. Examining the performances of enjoyment on slave auction blocks and minstrel stages, photographs of lynching or the visual production of blacks as shiny commodities, this work highlights how African diasporic subjects have often inhabited a representational space in which they were simultaneously hypervisible and disappeared, spectacularly present and not seen.[88] This location at the boundaries of visibility reflects on the limits and excesses of modes and means of visuality in Western societies. The emphasis in contemporary African diasporic art-historical scholarship on the cut, the silhouette, the surface, the scar, and shine as figures, tropes, or modes of production in the African diaspora highlight the liminal spaces of representation. They all emphasize the role blackness and African diasporic subjects play, to use Maurice Merleau-Ponty's words, as "the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, renders it visible, its own interior possibility, the Being of this being."[89]

Precisely because regimes of vision in the West often pose challenges to the seeing or representation of black personhood, recent scholarship in African diaspora art history, much of which is interdisciplinary in nature, also explores the formation of different forms of representation in the context of the African diaspora. This work considers the ways in which the sonic, the multisensorial, the performative, the textual or embodied and ephemeral forms of vision conjoin with and differently inform representation in the African diaspora.[90] This scholarship lingers on visual fugitivity, the fissures, failures, and chiasms between the visual and other forms of enunciation. This perpetual escape from the visual is something highlighted in Ligon's text-based work; in his use of a German title that further resists legibility and transparency, for some audiences; or in Walker's retreat to typewritten text on an index card. Ultimately, a part of African diasporic art history's critical purview involves not only an attention to historical

87. Glenn Ligon, interview with the author, New York, September 27, 2010. See also Scott Rothkopf, "Glenn Ligon: America," in *Glenn Ligon: America*, exh. cat., ed. Rothkopf (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011), 47.
88. See, for example, Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jacqueline Denise Goldsby, "Through a Different Lens: Lynching Photography at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," in *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Krista Thompson, "The Sound of Light: Reflections on Art History in the Visual Culture of Hip Hop," *Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (December 2009): 481–505.
89. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 151. See also English; Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Romare Bearden," *Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 673–80; Kobena Mercer, "Romare Bearden, 1964: Collage as Kunstwollen," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 124–46; Fred Moten, "Black Mo'nin' in the Sound of the Photograph," in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 192–209; Michael Chaney, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Thompson, "The Sound of Light"; and Powell, *Cutting the Figure*.
90. See Kellie Jones, "In their Own Image," *Artforum* 29 (November 1990): 133–38; Moten, *In the Break*; Chaney; Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sarah Blackwood, "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology," *American Literature* 81, no. 1 (2009): 93–125; and Huey Copeland, "Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects," *Representations* 113 (Winter 2011): 73–110.



Kara Walker, typewritten index card, 2001 (document © Kara Walker; photograph provided by Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York)

conventions, limits, and boundaries of visuality interrogated by African diasporic subjects and an expansion of the notion of visual to include more synesthetic and bodily forms of representation, but an attentiveness to seeing absence, the bodies, histories, and subjectivities not captured by visual representation.

Conclusion

This essay has offered an overview of transformations that have taken place in African diaspora art history in the United States in the last fifty years. While different approaches to African diaspora art history continue to coexist (at times in the same publication), the field has largely shifted away from a preoccupation with tracing African presences in art and visual cultures to an interrogation of modern and contemporary African diasporic studio art and Western art and society. Visual objects once central to the process of corroborating cultural inheritance and historical (and ultimately political) claims in Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* became sites through which scholars questioned the ability of the visual to make the past available, transparent. African diaspora art history, in the wake of Gilroy, increasingly analyzed African diasporic reflections on modernity and modern art and on the broader parameters of genres of representation in Western art and its histories. It also brought into view what remained unrepresentable or had to be figured through alternate means. Moreover, the field was attentive to how people in the diaspora negotiated historically specific and ever-changing regimes of visuality and representation to create art. In all of these ways African diaspora art history is part of and offers invaluable perspectives on the range of scholarship that might fall under the rubric of Western art history. Like Gilroy's assertion about the study of modernity, this essay demonstrates that Western art history and any histories of art concerned with issues of modernization, modernism, globalization, nationalism, colonization, cultural mixing, and movement can be more fully understood through considerations of the African diaspora. African diaspora art history is the story of Western art.[91]

Despite this centrality of African diaspora art history to Western art history, some departments of art history conceive of the field of African diaspora studies

91. For insightful reflections on the relation of diaspora to histories of Western art, see Steven Nelson, "Diaspora: Multiple Practices, Multiple Worldviews," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 296–316; and Kobena Mercer, "Erase and Rewind: When Does Art History in the Black Diaspora Actually Begin?" in *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, ed. Saloni Mathur (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2011), 17–31.

as non-Western. The African diaspora art historian Pamela Franco has called attention to this in her consideration of distribution credit in art history departments. She noted in 2008 that it was not unusual for her African diaspora art history classes to be characterized as non-Western or even premodern.[92] Such framings of the field of African diaspora art history seem indicative of outdated ideas about what African diaspora art history entails, its temporal coordinates, what and who are its subjects and objects of study. The same misunderstandings may explain the widespread tendency to view Africa and the African diaspora as interchangeable in job descriptions. It may also be a function of universities' interests in diversifying their departments, without any appreciation or interest in the scholarly substance of different fields. It may stem too from the fact that "diaspora" is often used as a catchall word for many different types of movement, and may refer to contemporary artists of African descent not living on the continent (an increasingly visible part of African art history). Scholarship on these artists has also substantively expanded and critiqued narratives of modern art. While it is useful to be attentive to multiple definitions of diaspora, to offer a sidelong glance at the ways in which the experience of diaspora in the Americas dominates conceptions of the field, it is also important not to empty the word "diaspora" of its historical specificity. Lumping migration, exile, and cosmopolitanism under the term may render invisible and trivial the movement of people under distinct conditions of force, removal, and dispossession, and their aftermaths that continue to shape African diasporas.

The disciplinary collapsing of Africa and the diaspora and its conceptualization as unmodern may be related to the construction of modern art in art history and the presumed, often not interrogated, hegemonic whiteness of that field. Only within narrowly defined configurations of modern art could the African diaspora be defined as not modern or as premodern. Indeed, conventional framings of modern Western art history and modernism might still depend on conceptions of other cultures as unchanging, geographically undifferentiated, and visibly distinct and recognizable in their difference, in order to define these fields' temporal distinctiveness. Of course, African diaspora art history aims precisely to put pressure on such particularized configurations of art and art history that do not get seen as such, and which masquerade as universal.

While the reasons behind the discipline's miscasting of African diaspora art history are numerous and complex, the practice of wedding the African diaspora and Africa puts African diaspora art history at odds with much of the scholarly work in contemporary African diaspora studies. In the last five years African diasporic scholarship has moved even further from its focus on African continuities and processes of syncretic formation to interrogate the diaspora as constituted by difference and disjunction between these communities, and to attend to the strategic uses of the notion of diaspora for local purposes. Scholars like Brent Edwards and Kenneth Warren call attention to the political, social, and linguistic gaps inherent in the process of diasporic formation. For Edwards, the *décalage*, the traces and indelible effects of the difficulties, mistranslations, and failures involved in forging the idea of a diaspora across complex and diverse communities, times. and spaces, forms the very weave of diasporic cultures.[93] Interestingly, for Edwards (as for Gilroy), music offers a privileged domain through which diasporic cultures are constantly made and remade, one that bridges gaps inherent

92. See Pamela R. Franco, "African Diaspora: A Vexing Issue in Art History," paper presented at *Art History and Diaspora: Genealogies, Theories, Practices*, Clark Center, Williamstown, MA, April 25–26, 2008.

93. See Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 15; and Kenneth W. Warren, "Appeals for (Mis)recognition: Theorizing the Diaspora," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 392–406.

in print culture and in cross-linguistic translation. Within this more recent literature, if Saidiya Hartman's book *Lose Your Mother* (2007) may be considered indicative of this turn in the field, Africa has retreated further from the horizon of African diaspora studies.[94] Hartman and others explore the impossibilities of return to Africa for diasporic subjects and the complicated ways in which the ideal of Africa disappears the more that it is pursued. Art history's positioning within the contemporary diasporic scholarship that examines gaps in diasporic formation is further complicated by the fact that art history's focus on the visual might be antithetical to the examination of absence and gaps in diasporic translation in African diaspora studies. In sketching these recent developments in the field, I do not aim to suggest that art-historical work in the African diaspora should follow the same theoretical path as the rest of the African diaspora studies. I am trying to highlight how the configuration of African diaspora art history as connected to Africa or as non-Western renders the once-central discipline of art history invisible within certain contemporary theoretical currents in the field. As such, African diaspora art history is somewhat precariously positioned between a broader disciplinary view of it, which seems unchanging, and a rapidly transformed field of African diaspora studies.

The challenge and opportunity for art historians of the African diaspora is to further explore and pursue what the field may uniquely offer African diaspora studies and the discipline of art history. Given that art-historical scholarship in the African diaspora has long addressed issues of absence, for instance, how are art historians poised to examine gaps in diasporic translation while remaining attentive to the unique traces left in the realm of the visual? How might notions of the African diaspora, which are heavily focused on music and print culture, be further expanded through understandings of diasporas as constituted through ways of seeing, histories of visuality, and visual tropes? What places and forms of artistic production have been left out in the growing attentiveness to the modern and the West in African diaspora studies? How might art history of the African diaspora, ever alert to the ways in which African diasporic subjects sought to escape certain forms of capture in modern Western visual regimes, contribute further to critical perspectives on the history of art, in ways that are attentive to the conditions of appearance and disappearance, the visible and the unrepresented, and in ways that linger on what the absences in representation and art history make present?

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94. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).