

**Artists, Aesthetics, and Migrations:  
Contemporary Visual Arts and Caribbean Diaspora in Miami, Florida**

**by**

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## Abstract

*Artists, Aesthetics, and Migrations: Contemporary Visual Arts and Caribbean Diaspora in Miami, Florida*, is an ethnographic study about Miami-based visual artists, and the relationship between Miami and the Caribbean as it is realized visually. Miami is a diasporic city that has been built on the labor and visual culture of the Caribbean, and shaped into a transnational city by its role as a hub of Latin American and Caribbean migration and trade. However, a Caribbean presence is made to be invisible in much of the contemporary visual arts scene. In the political economy of cultural production, artists are rendered in different degrees of visibility based on their social location (e.g. race, gender, class) and suppositions about Caribbean art practice including expectations for “craft” artwork or subject matter (e.g. tropical landscapes). I argue that artists counter these practices by crafting their work to enact performances in the archive; making visible what is often made to seem invisible. While most studies of immigration attend to farm labor, domestic work, and familial relationships, this project turns attention to the field of artistic production. With attention to artists’ work and the socio-geographic terrain of the city, I detail the historic and contemporary relationship between Miami and the Caribbean, and show how artists’ works reflect and produce this experience in several ways: engaging the landscape; rethinking migrations; building practices based on diasporic legacies; and intervening in archives. Although tropes of tropicality attempt to silence the full range of visual realities, the works artists produce are not resigned to be exotic items in collections akin to the cabinets of curiosities of early scientists and explorers. Instead, artists act to render themselves visible. The very existence of the artwork changes the possibilities for how we understand migration and visibility, not only in Miami, but globally.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction



Figure 1-1. Exiting 195, photograph by author, 2010.

Sitting in my car at the traffic light as I exited 195 on my way home I looked onto dense foliage, a fence, and a traffic light surrounding a sign pointing slightly askew. 'Welcome to Miami's Art Districts,' the sign reads. Below, it points toward two nearby art districts, Design District and Wynwood Art District. The sign offers a greeting, a welcoming to this area, but around this small sign is the scene of a landscape gone awry.

I saw this sight over and over again as I traversed Miami during my fieldwork. The scene fascinated me because of its mix of the natural and urban landscape. The roadway in the foreground is washed out, or lighter, than the rest of the photograph. Just beyond the washed out roadway is a grassy patch and then a fence. The fence in the foreground blocks entry to the majority of the landscape, and the opening in the center of it reveals a place where the greenery has taken over. One could not enter through the opening because it is still blocked. On the upper portion of the frame, there is a billboard with a small CBS logo on the bottom, but otherwise it is completely black, or blank. Peeking out from behind the Royal Palms, one marker of South Florida's tropicality, is an indication of contemporary South Florida - high-rise condo buildings that reach far above the terrain. The sky is a clear blue on this day, and contrasts with the rich green of the bushes and the black of the blank billboard. This intersection is on North Miami Avenue, as one exits the highway 195, which connects the major interstate I-95 to Miami Beach to the east and the airport to the west. Geographically, this intersection sits at the crossroads of Little Haiti, Wynwood, and the Design District - arts districts and Caribbean neighborhoods. Such a meeting point represents many of the things I experienced and saw during my fieldwork. Miami's terrain is in flux. Its history is continually erased as new narratives compete for attention. The landscape in disarray mirrors this intersection or crossroads, and pictures it as a collision between Miami's tropical terrain and its dreams of being a culturally significant global city.

The concept of 'terrain,' meaning a landscape, environment, or the ground in which things occur, is an apt metaphor to consider artists' work and the context in which this work is produced. 'Terrain' alludes to the geographical and cultural contours of sites and

spaces in Miami, the visual imagery that is produced in and about Miami creating a visual terrain, and the fact that as an anthropologist I navigated these terrains in order to learn something about how artists are producing work in Miami. In this socio-geographic terrain there is new ground to cover in understanding the city of Miami, its relationship to the Caribbean, contemporary visual arts, and how the arts produce experience and culture.

In looking at the relationship between migration and the arts, and specifically, Caribbean diaspora and the work of women contemporary artists in Miami, Florida, I asked the questions: What is the relationship between migration and contemporary art in a diasporic hub? How is migration articulated through contemporary artists' work? What insight do we gain from studying the aesthetics and politics of contemporary artistic production in relationship to migration and diaspora? How do the art works and life stories of immigrant and diaspora artists help us to understand the changing landscape of art and women's work in the United States and the Caribbean? How do the artists use their roles as artists and their artistic works to examine the terrains of political and cultural economies within which they work? How do we understand the relationship between Miami and the Caribbean, especially in terms of visual culture and artistic production?

I argue that artists respond to the cultural politics by crafting their art practice and enacting performances in the archive; making visible what is often made to seem invisible thereby creating actions and documents that inform our future archives. Artists etch themselves into history through the production of their work. Artists' works are performative acts within a supposedly stable archive.

*“If you can’t go to the Caribbean”*

Miami is a diasporic hub of Caribbean people. To understand the city and the way it functions, it is necessary to understand it from this perspective. The city (and the larger South Florida region) is a destination or a pit stop for many Caribbean people is because of the continuity and familiarity of the terrain - geographically and culturally - and Miami’s culture has been deeply influenced through its role as a Caribbean outpost.

Caribbean culture and visual art in Miami are closely linked, though not often acknowledged. In my own work as an artist I have worked with artists and organizations in Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and the US. I have connected with artists similarly interested in concepts of space, culture, and memory. My personal experiences as an artist were primary factors in my decision to research artists and the connection between arts and the Caribbean in Miami. In addition, many cultural phenomena in Miami point to high levels of engagement with the Caribbean including large populations of Caribbean descent, neighborhoods called Little Havana and Little Haiti, cultural events including Trinidadian Carnival and Bahamian Jonkonnu, businesses like *botanicas* selling items for Haitian Vodou and Cuban Santeria, foods like *diri ak pwa*, conch fritters, *cafe con leche*, and tropical fruits like mamey and mango which are standard fare, not isolated in ethnic enclaves, and languages of English, Spanish, Kreyol, and Portuguese that are interspersed regularly on the streets, on the radio, and in advertisements.

Miami is a Caribbean city. A trans-Caribbean city encompassing characteristics from many places. This makes many people from the Caribbean feel at home in the city. Miami operates as a third space (Bhaba 1994), liminal space (Turner 1986), or in-

between space (Stoller 2009), that is neither the Caribbean nor the US, providing a city in which people seek to remake themselves.

Historic art centers like Coconut Grove and newer arts districts including the Wynwood Arts District<sup>1</sup> have Caribbean roots. Arts districts are continually changing, in both place and character as artists, galleries, art organizations, businesses, and real estate developers seek opportunities. For artists, galleries, art organizations, and the like, this would mean affordable work and exhibition space. Businesses seek new markets and affordable rent. The real estate developers and other investors look for profitable land and buildings, and perhaps the cache of the arts on which to build their investment. Some of the arts districts in Miami include Wynwood, the Design District, Bird Road, Little Havana, Little Haiti, Collins Park/Lincoln Road, and Downtown Miami. Though the definition of an “arts district” is malleable, characterized by the presence of artist studios, galleries, arts organizations, dance studios, and performance spaces. Many of these neighborhoods host regular events like monthly art walks that further define them as “arts districts.” Coconut Grove’s beginnings are linked to Bahamians who settled in the area in the 1800s (Dunn 1997). At first, Bahamians in the area migrated seasonally for farm work, and later a more established community developed as evidenced through local businesses and street festivals like Jonkonnu. At the time of the official founding of Miami as a city in 1896, the population was more than 40 percent black, and the majority were likely Bahamian (Dunn 1997). In Wynwood, the 1940s - 1950s brought change to the neighborhood by way of Puerto Rican migration from New York (Shell-Weiss 2009). Most people came to the area for work in garment factories, and as they settled in the

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<sup>1</sup> The neighborhood of Wynwood is not new, but the Wynwood Arts District was formed in the early 2000s. See Chapter 3.

neighborhood they made a mark within it through community centers, parks, and local businesses and organizations. Many more neighborhoods in Miami have similar histories and linkages with the Caribbean as well as Latin America.

Miami-based writer Edwidge Danticat, who lives not far from where the photograph was taken, likens life in Miami to living “on the hyphen.”<sup>2</sup> Miami is that place between here and there, however multiple here and there may be. The hyphen is an “island that floats with you . . . sort of the hyphen as its own island” (interview with author, May 2, 2011). As an outpost, an in-between space, Miami is a place of contradictions.<sup>3</sup> In her explanation of the hyphen as an island metaphor, Danticat referred me to an essay by Julia Alvarez, “Doña Aída, with Your Permission,” that she thought could speak to the questions I had about living and working as an artist in Miami with connections to the Caribbean. In the essay, Alvarez writes about reconciling her Dominican American identity and her role as a writer who does not fit easily into either the Dominican Republic or the United States. “I’m mapping a country that’s not on the map, and that’s why I’m trying to put it down on paper. It’s a world formed of contradictions, clashes, cominglings- the *gringa* and the Dominican, and it is precisely that tension and richness that interests me” (2000:822). The photograph that I shot sitting at the exit of 195 pictures the “contradictions, clashes, [and] cominglings” Alvarez describes in its mixing and mashing of the sign welcoming people to the arts districts with a fenced off landscape that seems at once to invite and repel.

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<sup>2</sup> Other scholars and writers have also invoked the metaphor of the hyphen. See for instance, Gustavo Perez-Firmat (1994) *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

<sup>3</sup> Charo Oquet’s *Boat for Yemaya* (2004) could be brought into conversation with Danticat and Alvarez. Work by Oquet as well as Edouard Duval Carrie, who pictures traveling *loas* could be compared as well. Danticat mentioned Duval Carrie’s work in our interview.



Patricia Saunders, Professor of English and Caribbean Literary Studies at University of Miami also described the unique position of Miami in relation to the Caribbean. In a July 2007 article in the *Miami Herald*, writer Nancy Ancrum asked her,

Q [Nancy Ancrum]. Where are you from?

A [Patricia Saunders]. I was born in Trinidad and grew up in Washington, D.C. But Miami is the ideal place to be doing this kind of work. If you can't go to the Caribbean, Miami is as close to it as you're going to get. (Ancrum 2007)

This question was one in a series of questions and answers between Ancrum and Saunders that was printed in a short Q&A style article, "Jogging Caribbean Memory" At the time Saunders was preparing to host a conference about Caribbean culture and memory at the University of Miami.

Saunders's response points to the everyday lived experience of people in Miami, and the presence of Caribbean-ness within the city. If one cannot go to or live in the Caribbean, "Miami is the as close to it as you're going to get." Miami has familiar climate, foods, languages, and culture. From the loud blasts of cars honking their horns as people drive down the road for no other reason than to say, 'I'm coming,' to the curry and the conch and the *cortaditos*, the *bonjou* and the *oye*, Miami is an outpost containing common elements of life in the Caribbean. When Saunders remarks that "Miami is as close as you're going to get," she sums up the feeling of Miami as a terrain closely linked with the Caribbean, yet also distant. They are not one in the same. Some of these differences mark Miami as "el norte" to the islands in the Caribbean; a place promising better opportunity. Whether or not that opportunity, be it education, material goods, income, or political freedom, is realized depends on who you ask. But, the idea that

Miami is so close to the Caribbean that it is a part of it permeates the city's consciousness.

Yet, while everyday life during my fieldwork was filled with Caribbean influence, I did not find a bustling contemporary Caribbean arts scene in Miami. At least not the kind of arts scene I had expected to find. Through my research I came to learn that “contemporary Caribbean art” in Miami is more elusive and more hidden than one might expect from knowing about the city's history, culture, and geographic proximity to the region. The ‘work’ of contemporary artists, therefore is variegated. On the one hand, the ‘work’ is the artwork that they produce to show us, visually, how they interpret and experience the world. On the other hand, the ‘work’ is the labor of producing work in spite of the structural and historical pressures that make it difficult to even survive as an artist. The artists produce works that are not only reflective of their experiences, but formidable actions that disprove their invisibility.<sup>4</sup>

### *Visibility and Invisibility: Cultural Politics and Artwork*

After visiting with an artist one afternoon, we walked together toward my car. Once inside the elevator she told me, “You know, if I was a guy and my last name wasn't \_\_\_\_\_, then maybe I would have a chance at this.”<sup>5</sup> The comment struck me, but more so, it was the timing. I had been visiting with the artist all afternoon. We talked for hours about her work, teaching, and life in general. Then, in the enclosed space, seemingly private space of the elevator, she revealed her critique and doubts about the art world.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on disproving invisibility, see Michele Wallace (2004) *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Comment anonymized.

The artist is employed at a job she seems to enjoy and regularly shows work – typical markers of ‘success’ in the art world. Yet, she felt the raced, gendered, political, and regional dynamics at play.

Cultural politics and political economy of cultural production affects how art is exhibited, which artists receive grants, awards, and even free studio space. These political currents are shaped by those with the financial power to make significant changes in cities’ arts worlds - real estate developers, art collectors, and museum boards. These decisions are often based on personal motivations and tastes. In Miami, these dynamics have shifted since the early 2000s because of increasing global attention.

Beginning around 2002, Miami has been deemed the hot new global art destination by the media, arts fairs, and general art world buzz. Arts writers claim that “the Miami art scene is, quite simply, on fire” (Feinstein 2003: 49), “The art world’s discovered Miami” (Brady 2004), and Miami is having its “art moment” (Hoban 2007). However, as Gean Moreno pointed out in his 1999 critique of Miami art world institutions, there is a lot of boiling in the fire below the glitzy surface of art in Miami including racial and ethnic tensions that are “all but neglected by the art world” but “burden the city” (Moreno 1999). He suggests the cultivation of young, heterogeneous, local talent and encouraging them to express their perspectives on the city; something he says that few institutions in Miami have done within their exhibitions, preferring instead to focus on trendy Latin American painters or benign topics that do not address everyday life in Miami. In the quest for global recognition, the artwork that has gained most attention is that which deals with Latin America, neglecting the role of and art related to the Caribbean.

In gallery and museum shows as well as in scholarly writing, Cuban artwork has dominated the Miami art scene, especially since the 1980s. A number of shows each year revolve around the themes of Cuba and exile (Blanc 1984, 1990; Wride 2001; Bosch 2004). However, Cubans are not the only Caribbean group of artists working in the city. The *Global Caribbean* shows organized by artist Edouard Duval-Carrie from 2009 – 2013, sought to widen the scope of Caribbean art discourse in the city. I will return to this project in Chapter 3. There are also projects that encompass broader definitions of Caribbean-ness such as the University of Miami sponsored project, “As far as the eye/I can see.” It is an online archive project that “shares artist's visions, voices and vantage points, a space where critics offer perspectives on current exhibits and critical debates in contemporary [Caribbean] visual art and culture” (Saunders 2009). Universities including the University of Miami, Florida Atlantic University, and Florida International University have played large roles in facilitating discussions and exhibitions of artist’s work from across the Caribbean, even as Cuban art predominates in the city’s galleries. Finally, just as artists working in the Caribbean address themes outside of the national frame. Artists in Miami address topics that go beyond their own national, cultural, or ethnic identity, moving toward diaspora aesthetics; an aesthetic that locates their work and lives as rooted inside and outside of specific places.

Artists and their work are affected by these suppositions about race, class, gender, age, and nationality. Many artists are rendered largely invisible because their race, class, gender, age, and/or nationality are not in line with what culture brokers including curators, gallerists, and others deem as valuable. When they are visible, suppositions about Caribbean women’s art practice including expectations for “craft” artwork, subject

matter (e.g. tropical landscapes), and the idea that they are not as “professional” or “serious” as other artists supersede the work itself.

These erasures are “subaltern silences,” that are produced, not merely overlooked. Krista Thompson explains that typical narratives of the Caribbean as portrayed through “tropicalized West Indies postcards have contributed historically to what can be described as subaltern silences” (2003:295). Drawing on Trouillot, “silences here to point not simply to absences of subaltern voices in postcard archives but . . . to the production of silences. Early postcards did not just evade subaltern narratives; they also produced silences” (2003:295). Tropicalization “describes the complex visual systems through which the islands were imaged for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on actual physical space on the islands and their inhabitants” (2003:5). I will discuss tropicalization further in Chapter 4. The point here is that ideas about what constitutes “Caribbean art” shapes what we actually get to see under the category of “Caribbean art.” Contemporary artists are at once silenced and blinded by tropicalized images and interpretations of the Caribbean that construct ways of seeing and representing. This is why it is critical to view and interpret Caribbean artists’ work from multiple perspectives based on subject matter, style, form, context, history, and the artist’s life, not based on presupposed notions of what constitutes a Caribbean object or aesthetic.

### *Migration and the Arts in Miami*

Migrations are a constant reality in Miami. As the locus of continual transnational flows, Miami is a critical place for understanding social and cultural effects and processes

of global circulations of people, ideas, cultural forms, technologies, and economies (Sassen and Portes 1993; Appadurai 1996; Mahon 2000; Slocum and Thomas 2003; Stoller 2003). Scholarship on peoples' movements and interactions has re-imagined and redefined theories about how people move and interact, from the daily life to the Internet: as "imagined community" (Anderson 2006[1983]), "contact zones" (Habermas 1989; Pratt 1992; Clifford 1997), a world of 'cosmopolitans' (Appiah 2006), "global flows" and "-scapes" (Appadurai 1996, 2006), and through new definitions of 'diaspora,' (Clifford 1994, 1997) and 'transnationalism' (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995). I use the term 'migrations' as a way to discuss the various ways people move from place to place, as I detail further in Chapter 4.

Geographically speaking, Miami is located along the southeast tip of the Florida peninsula with the Everglades to the west and the Biscayne Bay and Atlantic Ocean to the east. Miami-Dade County is comprised of more than 2,000 square miles, with one-third of its land located in Everglades National Park. (Miami-Dade County 2013b) Approximately 2.5 million people live in Miami-Dade County. The city of Miami, proper, is in Miami-Dade County, but many people refer to the entirety of Miami-Dade County as 'Miami.' It is only when asked, 'What part of Miami?' do people specify a city or neighborhood within the county.

The Caribbean presents a more challenging task of definition because it lacks clear land borders. The Caribbean region, generally speaking, consists of an island archipelago that stretches across the seas from Florida to the Yucatan toward Venezuela, and is enclosed by the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. (Richardson 1992) According to Verle Poupeye, the "Caribbean region is quite large, but its land mass is small and at once

fragmented and united by the Caribbean sea” (1998:12). Though the region consists of many individual countries with unique histories, politics, and social life, they are linked through their history of colonization, the slave trade, and for some, revolution and independence.

Central to the Caribbean are the movements of people, goods, and commerce across pathways of land, air, and sea. Due to these movements “the Caribbean” can be located both within the regional spaces and outside of it - in diaspora, exile, or abroad. The Caribbean has often been noted and studied as a region of migration. Even the landmasses themselves are in constant motion. The indigenous populations who settled on the islands, also moved between them. The slave trade and colonization brought many more people to the region. Later, revolutions and independence (for some countries) propelled further migrations both in and out and sometimes back again.

Individuals and groups respond and construct meaning based on their experiences of immigration, defining their positions and identities accordingly (e.g. immigrants, exiles, diasporic). For example, many Cubans (Garcia 1996) and Sudanese (Abusharaf 2009) who have migrated view themselves as “exiles”- generally defined as feeling forced to live outside of one’s country of origin (Rushdie 1991). Definitions are also shaped by the interaction between former and current places of dwelling (Richman 2005). Relationships forged in contact zones are unequal and oppressive - regulating the people’s movements and creating hierarchical value (Graeber 2001). Divisions are heightened, in Miami, for example, because of assumed linguistic (English/Spanish/Kreyol) and physical differences (skin color) linking power and capital to national origin despite great variation within and across groups (Portes and Stepick

1985; Grenier and Stepick 1992; Grenier and Perez 2003; Stepick 2003; Richman 2005; Pedraza 2007). A prime example is the 1994 Cuban Adjustment Act, known as the Wet Foot Dry Foot policy. It enables Cubans to seek political asylum and citizenship if they reach dry land, but it does not apply to other groups including Haitians seeking asylum because their impetus for immigration is deemed to be economic. Haitians are often detained and repatriated (Danticat 2007; Richman 2005).

While most studies of immigration attend to farm labor, domestic work, and familial relationships, I turn attention to the field of artistic production. It has been noted that artists and intellectuals arrived in waves of immigration differing from others of the same origin, but this has not been studied in-depth (Sutton and Chaney 1987; Camnitzer 1994; Chancy 1997; Poupeye 1998; Pedraza 2007). Gender is at the center of my analysis and the text draws from the lived experiences of the artists in the study, with particular attention to transnational feminist practice, gendered discourses, and gendered ideologies of work. Through analysis of the artists' lives, practice, and artwork, I consider the intersections of race, gender, place, migrations, history, and archives, especially as these concepts relate to Caribbean diasporic culture and history.

Miami is a significant site for research on migrations because it is a transnational city shaped by its role as a hub. A hub of migration, tourism, and trade. This relationship has been persistent throughout Miami's history, from its early days as an economic and real estate outpost in a warm climate, winter tourist resort town, and busy urban center. Much of Miami's transformation has been built on the labor of migrants to the city, including a large proportion of Caribbean people. The city's visual imagery, its outward visual culture, portrays tropicality and a close kinship to the Caribbean. More recently



this city has defined its culture by its visual culture, drawing attention to contemporary artists and new arts museums and institutions. However the intersections of immigration and art, and how this affects both artists and the city has not been a focus of much academic or public discussion.

While migration was once thought of as a permanent action, studies such as those by Karen Fog Olwig (2007) examine the continually transforming nature and reasons for migration. Olwig also contends that the nation-state as a frame is a fairly new construct, but the tendency in migration scholarship has been to ascribe identity based on national identity. Paul Gilroy (1993) put forward the notion of the Black Atlantic as a cultural and geographic space that does not rest on national frames. The Black Atlantic is a transnational construction of the broad set of culture and geography affected by the transatlantic slave trade. Gilroy suggests ‘the Black Atlantic’ framework is a counter-narrative to the standard practice of constituting spaces and histories based solely on positivistic European discourse that would attribute one space to one people and one culture. Gilroy suggests that our thinking about the region move beyond nationalistic perspectives because little takes place strictly within and affecting only a particular national unit (1993:7). He directs attention toward “expressive culture” because words often fail to communicate the feelings and politics people desire to express (37). Forms such as music and dance are analyzed “not simply as a succession of literary tropes and genres but as a philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics” (39). Building on the Black Atlantic model, Stuart Hall writes that “Caribbean culture, in particular, has not been well served by the national frame. The imposition of national frontiers within the imperial system

fragmented the region into separate and estranged national and linguistic entities from which it has never recovered” (1999:9). This framework brings to light the “exchanges and ‘family resemblances’ across the region as a whole which a nationalist history obscures” (ibid.). These exchanges create frictions between areas that are in close relation to one another, both within the Caribbean and also between the United States and the Caribbean.

Miami is a frictional space. The frictional spaces can also be thought of as ‘borderlands’ like those theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) - real and imagined spaces with strong emotional attachments driving the production of new cultural forms such as visual art. Liz Balmaseda, a writer who was born in Havana and lives in Miami reflects on her experience living and working in this kind of frictional space. She writes that “the salty air from the sea . . . connects the island and the diaspora” (2003:17). The salty air is the connective bridge that ties together two spaces that seem distant yet are connected. She further reflects that Miami is “at its most luminous stretch, a reflection. In its lights and arches, in its shrines and labyrinths, in its exuberance and anguish, it is a reflection. Havana twinkles in Miami, its music echoes along the streets of exile, its spirit moves throughout the parlors of the elite, the kitchens of the working class.” (2003:17) Other writers including Richard Blanco, Edwidge Danticat, and Ruth Behar have also written about Miami’s culture as interconnected with the Caribbean (Behar 1996, 2008; Blanco *in* Behar and Suarez 2008; Danticat 2011). The space of Miami is an imaginative one as much as it is a city that is lived in.

This diasporic culture is a characteristic that has come to be associated with what it means to be Caribbean or in a Caribbean place. In diasporic cultures people, things, and

ideas move around and are influenced by each other. New forms develop. George Lipsitz writes about music in Haiti and Jamaica and discusses how “diasporic intimacy” has contributed to musical forms such as *tipico* guitar and troubadour traditions which came to Haiti from Cuba, perhaps as the result of migrations of cane cutters moving between Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the United States.<sup>6</sup> This kind of diasporic exchange persists. In the late 1990s, the Fugee’s version of Bob Marley’s original “No Woman, No Cry” included Haitian and Jamaican cultural cues like that of *lakou* or yard that were not in the original version (40). Much has been written about hip-hop, rap, and globalization (Gilroy 1991; Decker 1994; Gates 1996; Mahon 2004). But, even as diaspora blurs boundaries, Lipsitz writes, “old geographies do not disappear” (2007:52). While the nation is a newer phenomena, it is a powerful one. As Lipsitz claims, “national boundaries and municipal borders still matter a great deal, even at a time of tremendous transformation and change in spatial and social relations” (2007:53). Diaspora aesthetics and what Lipsitz refers to as “diasporic imaginaries” speak to both local and global concerns simultaneously (2007:53). It is in artistic practices and in the imagination that we see examples of the ways diaspora aesthetics functions.

### *Caribbean Art and Caribbean Artistic Production*

The category of ‘Caribbean art’ is defined loosely based on an artist’s place of origin, place of residence and/or the artwork’s site of production, not on a specific form or style. These boundaries are as fluid as the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea that surround the region. “Caribbean-ness” is not a fixed location or identity. I think

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<sup>6</sup> See also Moore, Robin D. (1997). *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920 - 1940*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, for further writing on Cuban music and cultural influences and exchanges.

of Caribbean arts and thought as a discourse that artists engage in, whether because they are from the region or feel some connection to it through family history or personal experience. This Caribbean discourse is also one that I bring to this project through my goal of finding the linkages or disconnections between Caribbean diaspora and contemporary art in Miami.

The grouping of “Caribbean” instead of only identifying artists by nation (e.g. Haitian) remains useful because it grasps the idea that there are overlapping concerns among artists in the region and takes into account the persistence of mobility in the region. A more inclusive marker helps to broaden the reach of documentation, analysis, and recognition of central issues in the lives and works of contemporary Caribbean artists. In terms of form, the category of Caribbean art extends across a broad range of artistic practices from music to dance to visual art. Caribbean art also includes artists no matter their current geography. Artists move around, and many artists live outside of their place of birth. “Caribbean” could also include artists who were not born in the region, but who have lived there for a significant amount of time or whose work deeply relates to the region and other artists’ work.

As much as possible, I refer to individual artists’ identities based on what the artists told me during my fieldwork or how they identify themselves on their resumes or websites. For instance, ‘black artist,’ ‘Cuban artist,’ or ‘artist.’ Most artists use some combination of identity labels and while many recognize the importance of their work within certain identities, there is a general consensus that they would rather not be grouped according to their identities. The problem of associating artists with a particular identity is that the artist is then expected to produce work that provides information or an

expression of that identity. For example, women artists are expected to make work about being women, or a Cuban artist is expected to depict imagery associated with exile. Caribbean art is often expected to depict tropes of tropicality, as I discuss in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Expectations about “Caribbean” art or art by Caribbean people also includes themes of religion, tropical landscapes, market scenes, and bright colors (Cosentino 1995; Lindsay 1996; Poupeye 1998; Sheller 2003; Thompson 2006), or that their work reference identity and national culture or origin (Camnitzer 1994; Paul and Cozier 1999; Philogene 2004; Largey 2006; Paul 2012). These expectations are expressed in the general public, news media, galleries, and museums either directly (e.g. someone says they expected to see x in the work of y artist), or indirectly (e.g. galleries and museums not showing works of artists whose work does not seem to fit in line with other ‘Cuban works’ for instance). Instead of relying of expectations of Caribbean art, I argue that paying attention to the work the artists *are* producing offers the best insight we have into what defines Caribbean diaspora and artistic production.

My aim in writing about Caribbean artistic production as a group is to use the discourse and geography of Caribbean-ness as a lens through which to understand the artists and their work in connection to one another. This broad, but also defined category helps me to see the connections between the artists in my study who live in Miami and artists who live in the Caribbean or elsewhere in diaspora. Further, the artists’ work responds to broader diaspora and Caribbean concerns. As Leon Wainwright explains, Caribbean art “demand[s] a sharper sense of the spatial overlapping or entwining of the Caribbean with the wider Atlantic” (2011:3). We must also analyze this work with an eye to the future, and propose a framework that might encompass new generations of artists.

Wainwright continues that “[t]his consideration of space may illuminate the experiences of the later generations of artists with Caribbean backgrounds who have demanded a stake and an equal place in the canon of modernism and contemporary art” (2011:3). Looking at artists’ works and lives from the lens of Caribbean art is only one way to consider their work and their contribution to contemporary life and culture. This needn’t section them off from broader art worlds. In fact, all of the artists I write about operate within an American art context. As much as their work can be considered “Caribbean” it must be considered “American.”

I focus on “contemporary art,” which I define as artwork that is being produced now or in the recent past. I center on art works that were produced or shown during my in-depth fieldwork from 2009 – 2011. Howard Becker defines contemporary visual art as art that is produced more with the intention for circulation than sale (1982), and this definition held true for my study as well. My focus on contemporary art potentially reifies the category of ‘art,’ because I did not focus on the many forms art can take. In Miami, Caribbean arts can also include dance, music, performance, hair braiding and styling, baking, sign painting, graffiti, costume design, fashion, and more. This dissertation offers a particular focus on the relationship between contemporary art and artists and Caribbean diaspora, but there is certainly more research to be done in this area.

Contemporary art could be distinguished from commercial art in most cases because the latter was produced expressly for the purpose of selling it. Contemporary art is generally about ideas and expressing those ideas in visual form. Annie Paul distinguishes between avant-garde art and contemporary art explaining that contemporary art pushes limits and boundaries. Avant-garde art aims to shock people and destroys

notions of beauty. Contemporary art functions as social criticism. (1999:58) In the Caribbean, debates about what counts as art are on-going. Christopher Cozier and Annie Paul (1999) draw attention to colonial histories that placed emphasis on “high art,” and that this categorization has remained post-Independence in countries like Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica where expectations for art in museums revolve around portraying a national identity. Cozier and Paul point out the different trajectories across the Caribbean, and highlight Cuba and Haiti as countries where artists have pushed the boundaries in terms of producing contemporary art that is not solely about the nation.<sup>7</sup>

### *Diaspora Aesthetics*

On January 17, 2011, I met with a group of scholars from Miami area universities, including University of Miami, Florida International University, and Barry University. In a group of about 30 people, we scattered around George Yudice’s living room on an unseasonably cold and rainy day. Yudice is a professor at the University of Miami, and his research focuses on Latin American cultural studies including urbanization and the arts. The group was part of an Interdisciplinary Research Group focused on culture in Miami. We met to share stories and insights about our current cultural scene. What is here? What is missing? How do we understand it? What do we want to do as a group to learn more and share it with other people? As an anthropologist in the midst of fieldwork about Miami’s contemporary arts, this was a place full of ideas. Yudice talked about the need to organize across groups and showcase the work that is happening in Miami. He

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<sup>7</sup> See also Annie Paul’s 2012 essay “Visualizing Art in the Caribbean” *In Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art*. Tumelo Mosaka, ed. Pp. 18-32. New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, for a historical overview of Caribbean visual culture and different schools of art in the region.

has spearheaded a project and website called the Miami Observatory. Lillian Manzor, also a professor at the University of Miami, has been working on projects detailing the history of Cuban theater in Miami from the 1960s to the present. One component of that project is website called the Cuban Digital Theater Archive. Celeste Fraser Delgado, a professor at Barry University and the founder of ArtsBurst - a website about Miami's performance arts scene, made the point that "people don't look at cultural production in Miami as a whole – a *conjunto*. They look at 'Cuban,' 'Haitian,' etc., but we need to look at cultural production from Miami."<sup>8</sup> The various voices in the room were attuned to the phenomenon of cultural production in Miami, a diasporic space. They were echoing the ideas that I had about the arts here from fields of cultural studies, theater, dance, geography, and literature.

Artists working across the Caribbean and its diasporas are seeking to redefine contemporary art practices in their own countries and in the larger region. One indicator is their consistent activation of social networks, the Internet, and exhibition opportunities outside of the national frame. For instance artist-run organizations like Alice Yard in Trinidad and Tobago and Fresh Milk in Barbados invite artists from around the world to present new works and ideas in their spaces. Both of these spaces maintain an active online presence, through Facebook, Twitter, and their websites, which helps to expand the reach of their on-site programming. The print and digital magazine, ARC (Arts Recognition Culture) is run by artists in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and features the work of Caribbean-based artists, Caribbean diaspora artists, and artists of any nationality

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<sup>8</sup> Field notes from Interdisciplinary Research Group Meeting at George Yudice's house, on January 17, 2011.



whose work addresses the region. ARC has also worked with galleries and art fairs to show artists' work in places such as London and New York.

The artists' work that I discuss in the upcoming chapters relates to themes of migration by broadly invoking diaspora or diasporic aesthetics. Research in "contact zones" or places where different cultures occupy the same space (Pratt 1992; Clifford 1997; Kasfir 2000; Price 2007) and scholarship on the arts of the African diaspora (Farris Thompson 1983; Gilroy 1993) have contributed to theories about art arising out of and referencing immigration and diaspora. Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer posit that artists produce a "diaspora aesthetic" when their artwork is based on a "diaspora awareness" (Hall 1990; Mercer 1994). Yet, how artists render and think about diasporic connections and aesthetics is a question that remains. In Miami, home to people of multiple diasporas (African, Caribbean, Jewish, etc.), do artists adhere to nationally bound notions of work (e.g. "Cuban art"), or is there a move toward Mercer and Hall's notion of a "diaspora aesthetic" or "Miami aesthetic"? According to Donald Cosentino (1995) and Luis Camnitzer (2004), artists born and trained outside the US developed professionally differing expectations for their artwork and practice. However, Myriam Chancy (1997) and Lynette Bosch (2004) suggest that Caribbean artists who now live in the US may have shifted their artistic perspective in accordance with their new location of dwelling. Sydney Kasfir's (2000) research on contemporary African art shows how artists work in the shadow of dominant ideologies about what is desirable while trying to produce unique work. Sally Price (2007), in her research on male Maroon artists in the Guianas articulates that "external culture brokers" shape aesthetics based on expectations of 'authenticity' (see also Rasmussen 1995; Kasfir 2000; Steiner 2004). Martin Stoke's

review of the study of global music shows similar trends: parsing out how and why music is produced, circulated, and made meaningful across cultures and borders (2004). Jerry Philogene writes about how two Haitian-born artists' work creates a "visual diaspora" by evoking cultural memory in their artwork. Yet, the memory the artists evoke blurs national boundaries signaling a shift to the diasporic.

In the chapters that follow I analyze how artists' work articulates diasporic aesthetics through reflecting and interacting with the landscape, public engagement, and producing new meanings for archives. In my research, artists' work, overall - as a body of work - is usually not oriented within a particular national culture, aesthetic, or ideology. Generally, artists' work deals with their experiences or their interpretation of experiences through visual means. Framing artists' practice in a diasporic aesthetics framework means that artists draw inspiration and ideas from many places, not only a country of origin, and their work similarly reflects ideas about peoples' movements on a global scale.

Artists in Miami, and many other places to be sure, are constantly on the move. Migrations from country of origin to a new country are only one of many kinds of movement. Migrations for family reasons, jobs, artist residencies, exhibitions, new experiences, grants and fellowships, research, and more all compel artists' constant movement. In a place like Miami, which acts as a hub of transnational migrations, it is useful to consider artists' work in relation to broad themes of diaspora or diasporic aesthetics, and consider what it means to *live in* a place rather than only what it means to *leave* a place. Confining artists' work to its place of production or the artists' country of origin is only useful in a limited way. It can elucidate the artist's biography or the work's

provenance, but by analyzing the work as part of a global arts network, we are able to make more solid connections and expand the focus from the local to the global.

At the same time that this diasporic aesthetic framework applies to artists' work and practice, it was not as evident in social and cultural aspects of the art world, where divisions are often drawn on lines of national origin among other factors including gender. For instance, a museum show may be based on 'Cuban' artists, and the artists selected for that show would have work in the show that represents some aspect of 'Cuban-ness.' There is increasingly more awareness of this kind of pigeonholing, but many shows still do revolve around some aspect an artist's origin or biography. Gender is more elusive, since contemporary arts professionals are consciously aware of sexism. But, there remains gender imbalance in major exhibitions, commissions, or coveted grants.

While I find a diaspora aesthetics framework useful in thinking about artist's work in a global context, I analyze artists' works and the arts scene within the framework of Caribbean discourse. Not that the work is necessarily 'Caribbean,' but that I was looking at Caribbean diaspora and contemporary art in Miami as parallel social-cultural dynamics that come together (or do not) in the space of Miami. In this dissertation, connecting artists' work with the larger Caribbean region is theoretically important as it continues long-standing conversations about art, subject matter, style, form, and artists' practice throughout the region.

## *Art and Anthropology*

Art is a historic topic of inquiry in anthropology and includes studies of objects as well as art practice. The study of art in anthropology did not begin with art objects, however, but more broadly with the notion of exploration and collecting. Anthropology's history as well as the history of modern art is intertwined with ventures in understanding the world from a Western/EuroAmerican/colonial point of view. That is, from the perspective of 'us' and 'them,' where the 'us' has been largely white, male, and European, and the 'them' is foreign, native, exotic, and other. James Clifford explains that a "history of anthropology and modern art needs to see in collecting both a form of Western subjectivity and a changing set of powerful institutional practices" (220). Clifford also argues that the basis of ethnography, "cultural description" is "a form of collecting" (1988:215). The histories and practices of ethnography and collecting in museums and elsewhere show how social groups situated themselves in relationship to other people. Over time understandings of objects also changes. Whether something is considered an 'artifact,' 'fine art,' 'craft,' or 'decorative art,' for instance. Clifford points out the example that in the "mid-nineteenth century pre-Columbian or tribal objects were grotesques or antiquities. By 1920 they were cultural witnesses and aesthetic masterpieces . . . The boundaries of art and science, the aesthetic and the anthropological, are not permanently fixed." (1988:228) Objects that seem ordinary today may be the treasures of the future.

Early anthropology of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries includes many instances of researchers, explorers, and collectors who would collect, order, and display objects and sometimes people considered to be 'exotic.' Margaret Hodgen writes that when

Christopher Columbus returned to Lisbon in the late 1490s, he brought with him seven indigenous people, likely Taino, who he had captured from his expedition to the “New World.” Many flocked to see the people that looked so little like anyone they had seen before. They remarked about the texture of their hair and skin, and the physical characteristics of their bodies. (1964:111) Hodgen writes that in the years following, other indigenous people were captured and displayed throughout Europe. People from other parts of the world, including Africa were also exhibited throughout Europe. In 1810, Saartjie Baartman, who was 20 years old at the time, was taken from her home in South Africa and sent to London, where she was put on display as a freak show attraction known as the “Hottentot Venus.” Baartman was later sold to a Frenchman, and in France she continued to be displayed. Upon her death, her body parts continued to be exhibited in France. It was not until 1974 that her remains were removed from display in France, after a large worldwide public campaign. In 1999 Nelson Mandela aided in the return of her remains to South Africa. (see Garland-Thomson 1997; Willis 2010)

Display practices also involved objects, which were mounted in ‘cabinets of curiosities’ or books.<sup>9</sup> The cabinets of curiosities were often physical objects with shelves, providing space to display all sorts of items including books, coins, bones, and botanical specimens. (Hodgen 1964:114–115) Many of the collectors were members of scientific societies in Italy, France, and England, and intended for their collections to help “goad universities out of their sterility, to supplement inadequate curricula, and to help in

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<sup>9</sup> For more on display historically and contemporarily see Fusco, Coco (1995) *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. New York: The New Press, and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara (1998) *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

resisting the conservatism of official scholarship” (ibid. 115). Hodgen argues that these collections served as “little museums” and that many of the men who held these collections viewed them as scientific in purpose. To many, however, the collectors seemed “eccentric, or even a little cracked” (ibid.), not because of what or whom they were collecting, but because they were collecting, classifying, or exhibiting at all.

However, while some may have thought the collectors to be eccentric, these collections and cabinets of curiosities “had an important bearing on ethnological thought” (Hodgen 1964:120). Much care was taken to decide how to preserve, classify, arrange, and display items. Small cabinets or whole rooms were specially crafted out of wood and glass. Sometimes items were displayed on furniture borrowed from apothecary shops. The attention to detail in display weighted the items with great import and also marked them as incredibly unusual. These collections began to influence ethnological thought when scientific systems of categorization were developed on the basis of these collections. For instance, as Hodgen points out, Johann Boemus wrote about his collections in order to inform and instruct people about “‘what orders and institutions’ were ‘fittest to be ordained’ in their own lands for the establishment of perfect peace” (ibid. 132). Boemus’s writing was published around 1520, the same time as Niccolò Machiavelli wrote and distributed *The Prince*, a tale about order and control in society.

Collections could also be viewed as displays of wealth and possessions. Within collections items are grouped and ordered according to hierarchies of value. Clifford argues that “Some sort of ‘gathering’ around the self and the group—the assemblage of a material ‘world,’ the marking-off of a subjective domain that is not ‘other’ —is probably universal” (1988:218). But, “in the West . . . collecting has long been a strategy for the

deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity” (1988:218). The display of items as reflective of one’s self, Clifford argues, is an idea that develops in Western thought in tandem with a growing capitalist system based on individual wealth. It is further through this system that objects become imbued with value, not only social but economic as well. Clifford refers to this Western system of the acquisition of objects, value, and contextualization as the “‘art-culture’ system” (215). George Marcus’s research on 20<sup>th</sup> century American families and wealth led him to art, when he originally had not intended to study anything related to art. While researching the families he “found that he was regularly being led to art collections and museum endowments” when what he had been seeking was information regarding families and specific people. (Marcus and Myers 1995:2) Marcus was shown art institutions as a kind of evidence of the family’s wealth and power, and also signaling the art exists within the global system.

Anthropologists studying art in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Franz Boas and Ruth Bunzel, focused on ‘primitive’ or ‘decorative’ art with the aim of describing the kind of art being produced in societies and cultures that seemed different than that of the anthropologists, who were considered ‘modern.’ Here anthropology of art functioned along the same lines as other anthropological studies – showing difference. Franz Boas’s book, *Primitive Art*, published originally in 1927, is an ethnographic and visual study of work made by people in the Pacific Northwest of North America. He wanted to provide an examination of the traits of primitive art. In addition to writing about the art, there are numerous illustrations analyzing patterns on two and three-dimensional works. In the conclusion, Boas remarks on some of the differences between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ art and culture:

I believe we may safely say that in the narrow field of art that is characteristic of each people the enjoyment of beauty is quite the same as among ourselves: intense among a few, slight among the mass. The readiness to abandon one's self to the exaltation induced by art, is probably greater, because the conventional restraint of our times does not exist in the same forms in their lives. What distinguishes modern esthetic feeling from that of primitive people is the manifold character of its manifestations. We are not so much bound by a fixed style. The complexity of our social structure and our more varied interests allow us to see beauties that are closed to the senses of people living in a narrower culture. It is the quality of their experience, not a difference in mental make-up that determines the difference between modern and primitive art production and art appreciation." (1955[1927]:356)

Boas frames the differences between primitive and modern art as marked by variances in social structure and culture. It was important for Boas to assert that it was not a fundamental biological difference in "mental make-up," as this reflected the overall gist of his work – to prove that people were similar biologically. His writings about race argued along the lines of people as different and not less than one another as well. In a 1931 speech titled "Race and Progress" Boas explained, "I believe the present state of our knowledge justifies us in saying, that while individuals differ, biological differences between races are small. There is no reason to believe that one race is by nature so much more intelligent, endowed with great will power, or emotionally more stable than another, that the difference would materially influence its culture." (Boas 1931)

Ruth Bunzel's study, *The Pueblo Potter: A Study of Creative Imagination in Primitive Art* was published in 1929. Bunzel begins with the premise that art and creative expression is fundamental to human behavior. She writes, "Like language and social organization, art, the embellishment of objects and activities beyond the requirements of their ostensible purposes, has accompanied man since the dawn of history" (1929:1). Bunzel explains that the book is not a comprehensive study of primitive art, but an attempt to detail some aspects of form, style, and symbolism of pottery in the



Southwestern region of the United States. The book ends with an extensive illustrated chart of pottery patterns and symbolic meanings.

Objects like those that Boas and Bunzel studied have been considered ‘artifacts’ because they are outside of the Western art world context. Clifford writes that artifacts that were “contextualized ethnographically were valued because they served as objective ‘witnesses’ to the total multidimensional life of a culture” (1988:228). These objects took on an aura of value and desirability, perhaps because of factors of difference and unattainability (see also Benjamin 1968; Hansen 2008).



Figure 1-2. Picasso in his studio in in the Bateau-Lavoir, Paris, Photograph, 1908, ARTStor Slide Collection, University of California, San Diego.

Artists from the US and Europe, like Pablo Picasso started to incorporate ‘primitive art’ objects into their ‘modern art’ in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Clifford argues that these shifts in Western art practice led to a questioning of “the proper place of non-Western objects” (1988:228). He claims, “in the eyes of a triumphant modernism some of these artifact at least could be seen as universal masterpieces” (228). Viewing the artworks as universal masterpieces also undermines the work of the people who made them, and the objects become once again parts of a collection. In this case, appropriated into other works of art as exotic, valuable, and marking difference. A classic example is *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* by Pablo Picasso. The painting was made in 1907 and marks a significant shift in visual aesthetics of the time. The painting features five nude women, and the composition is jagged in its geometrical configuration. The female forms are based on Iberian sculptures and several of their faces bear likeness to African masks. According to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Picasso painted African masks into his work because he “assumed [the masks] had functioned as magical protectors against dangerous spirits” (MoMa 2004[1999]:64). Picasso said this was his “first exorcism painting” (ibid.). Including the masks in his work, Picasso hoped to imbibe their power and protect himself from sexually transmitted diseases that were on the rise in Paris at the time (ibid.). Picasso’s studio was adorned with various African masks and sculptures, and these forms are visually evident in his works during that time.

Anthropologists were also collectors of artwork. In the 1930s, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson collected thousand of paintings while conducting fieldwork in Bali. They planned to use these paintings for a Freudian-type analysis. They never completed this type of study, but they did keep the paintings as part of their collection. About forty

years later, in 1973, Hildred Geertz returned to these works in order to understand the paintings and the reason for their production. In 1981, she traveled to the village of Batuan to delve into the context surrounding their creation. The book and an accompanying exhibition, *Images of Power: Balinese Paintings Made for Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead* (1994) presents a core group of twenty artists and their works. Geertz views this book as an “imaginary gallery” and the works as “ethnography of Balinese imaginations” (3, 2). Geertz’s main premise is that the paintings are “bicultural products” influenced by Balinese and Western culture (3). Mead and Bateson also used photography in the field, and their aim was for the photographs to serve as evidence of their hypotheses about Balinese culture (Geertz 2000). What is unique about the paintings is that they were produced by the people Mead and Bateson were researching. The paintings depict the ethnographic experience of being “researched” and some of the paintings include likenesses of the anthropologists. The paintings were then exhibited together creating a cross between display of ethnographic object and museum exhibition of artworks.

Collecting formed the basis of anthropology of art, and it is closely linked to “salvage ethnography,” or ethnographic study that seeks to rescue and preserve aspects of a “disappearing” culture. Clifford claims “Collecting—at least in the West, where time is generally thought to be linear and irreversible—implies a rescue of phenomena from inevitable historical decay or loss” (1988:231). Salvage ethnography sought to document cultures by collecting objects (artifacts) as well as cultural forms including languages, dances, and music. Jacob Gruber writes that salvage ethnography centered on “man’s own role in the disappearance of nature’s products” (1970:1291). Gruber explains that

this “came as some surprise, a surprise overlaid with guilt, which continuing attempts at conservation could hardly expiate” (ibid). Through methods of observation, documentation, and collection, anthropologists including Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others aimed to create records of peoples and cultures they feared would soon be gone. Gruber writes, “The loss of the savage, so real to the anthropologist, pointed up his value. Salvage provided the opportunity for human contact and human contrast. Here savagery met civilization, the presumed past met the present, stability met change” (Gruber 1970:1298). The feared loss also pointed to something in the self, “the idea that . . . in the stress for salvage, we feel that in the disappearance of the savage, in the irrevocable erosion of the human condition, we inevitably lose something of our own identity” (ibid.). Salvage ethnography, then, served to preserve, assuage guilt, and soothe fears of one’s own mortality.

Visual documentation played a large role in salvage ethnography. For instance, the photographic works of Edward S. Curtis reinforced studies of indigenous people in the US. Native Americans were “disappearing” due to settlement and colonization. In over 2000 photogravure plates, Curtis depicted eighty Indian tribes.<sup>10</sup> Yet, these depictions are controversial. Curtis wanted to portray native folkways and customs. As he explained, he documented “Indian life and environment . . . habitations, industries, ceremonies, games, and everyday customs” (1907:xiii). He aimed to document their ways of life because he, like others at the time, thought they maintained “primitive customs and traditions” and also that they were “rapidly losing traces of their aboriginal character” (ibid). Curtis viewed this photographic series and accompanying texts as his personal study of Indian

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<sup>10</sup> See the online resource, Edward S. Curtis’s The North American Indian, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/> (Accessed May 21, 2013), for more information and the entire collection of images.

life before eventual assimilation. While Curtis claimed that the “pictures show what actually exists or has recently existed,” it was later learned the Curtis in fact staged many of the photographs based on his own ideas about native life. The staging of the pictures through costuming, posing, and framing served to collect and capture imagery of Native Americans from a colonial, if romanticized, point of view. Nevertheless, this work of thousands of images and texts provides a good example of the work of ethnographers and photographers in the service of documentation and collection.

There is also a dynamic relationship between the discipline of anthropology and the production of art by anthropologists.<sup>11</sup> In the 1930s, anthropologists Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham conducted fieldwork, and then used that material in their respective artworks. Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) based on her own experiences growing up in Eatonville. The book is noted for its portrayal of black life and culture in the town, including her use of language in a manner more akin to speaking, throughout the novel. In *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938), Hurston recounts her fieldwork in the Caribbean with voodoo practitioners through a series of vignettes. Hurston was also active in Florida, documenting folk songs and cultural facts through her work with the WPA, many of which are accessible online through the Library of Congress. Her fieldwork informed her art practice which revolved around writing novels, ethnographic texts, autobiography, and theatrical dramas based on the practices of everyday life, particularly black life in the US and in the Caribbean.

Katherine Dunham also conducted fieldwork in the Caribbean in the mid-1930s – in

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<sup>11</sup> There is also writing on the artist as ethnographer. For instance, Hal Foster’s essay (1995) *Artist as Ethnographer*. In *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. G.E. Marcus and F.R. Myers, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, and Trinidad and Tobago. Dunham focused on dance performance and dance technique. Dunham recorded dance in the Caribbean on videotape, showing movement and sound. Many of these have been digitized as well, and can be accessed online through the Library of Congress. Dunham's own dance technique was informed by her fieldwork. While she originally intended to study dance forms of the Caribbean with the sole purpose of writing her thesis at the University of Chicago, it soon became apparent to her that she wanted to also develop her own methods of dance based on connections between movement and African diasporic roots. She incorporated choreography and rhythms she encountered in the Caribbean and in the US into her work. The Dunham Dance Technique is credited as being one of the first African American concert dance techniques. (Risner 2007) Dunham also wrote several books including *Touch of Innocence: A Memoir of Childhood* (1959) and *Island Possessed* (1969). Contemporary anthropologists including Jose Limon (1994), Renato Rosaldo (1993[1989]), Ruth Behar (1993, 1996, 2007, 2008), and Clifford Geertz (2000[1979], 1989) have all combined ethnographic research with the art of writing.

The study of art objects contemporarily includes studies of form (Myers 2002), objects as part of systems of exchange and exhibition (Steiner 1994; Gell 1998; Myers 2002; Adams 2006), and as capable of producing and mediating ideas of "culture" (Clifford 1988; Marcus and Myers 1995; Adams 2006; Schneider and Wright 2006). George Marcus and Fred Myers's edited volume, *The Traffic in Art and Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* is a text that gathers essays together on the theme of contemporary art within a Western-centered tradition of "fine arts." In the volume, the essays speak to the central place of the study of art in anthropology and foreground how

art practices “are put to work in producing culture” (1995:10). Ongoing debate revolves around how ethnographic research should connect the artist, artwork, and sociocultural dynamics surrounding production, especially art produced by people considered “subaltern” (Fusco 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Plattner 2003; Stoller 2003; Price 2007). Engagement with visual art that relies upon the object limits our understanding of art to a museum piece or ethnographic relic.

As an ethnographic project about art and artists, I found that combining ethnographic research about artists and the *processes* of production and circulation along with visual analysis of artwork is a critical avenue for advancing the anthropological study of art (Steiner 1994; Plattner 1996; Winegar 2006). Discussions in the anthropology of art have encouraged research about how artistic production is changed locally by artists from elsewhere (Kasfir 2000; Stoller 2003; Stokes 2004; Price 2007). Other studies ask how artists function in relation to institutions such as galleries, museums, and fiscal sponsors (Foucault 1979; Bourdieu 1987, 1993). Recent anthropological studies of visual art globally include contemporary Egyptian artists in Egypt (Winegar 2006), Aboriginal painters in Australia (Myers 2002), and the politics of art, identity, and tourism in Indonesia (Adams 2006). Maureen Mahon’s (2004) study of black rock is a good example of the study of another art form. These and other studies have provided insight into the creation and functioning of local art worlds across the world. There are numerous studies that call for more research on the globalization of art in a world that seems increasingly mobile and global (Gates 1996; Clifford 1997; Plattner 2003).

I focus on the intersections of immigration, gender, and art - what happens when artists migrate and enter a new local art world. Anthropology is a discipline with deep roots in the study of “non-Western” or “foreign” things (including people, art, cultures), as I discussed earlier in this section. This research focuses on a US city and the influences of diaspora and art within in and within artists’ work. Stuart Plattner’s (1996) study of the art world of St. Louis proved instructive as a study of a US-based contemporary arts scene. I combine threads of migration with the study of art in order to analyze contemporary artists from the Caribbean who are now living and working in Miami as part of the local “art world” (Becker 1982).

### *Gender, Feminisms, and Art*

Prior anthropological research shows that gender has a disparate impact on women’s lives with regard to central facets of this research - migration, income, social networks, and professional advancement (di Leonardo 1985; Caplan 1988; Scott 1988; Behar 1993; Behar and Gordon 1995; Ross and Rapp 1997; Visweswaren 1997; Chamberlain 1998; Ho 1999; McClaurin 2001). Most studies of women migrants have focused on labor and familial relationships (Sassen-Koob 1984; Kearny 1986; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Malkin 2004), yet there are many women migrants’ lives are not described in those studies. An analysis of more women’s lives is important for the advancement of theories of migration, gender, and cultural production (Pessar and Mahler 2003). Placing gender at the center of analysis (Rasmussen 2003) enables in-depth insight into gendered discourses (Foucault 1994[1970]), gendered ideologies of work, and how gender mediates contradictions of sexuality, status, and location. Analyzing gender in migration



studies enables an articulation of processes previously unexamined yet central to debates about migration (Pessar and Mahler 2003), such as how women immigrants lead lives as artists, what kind of work they produce, and why. Due to the role artists play as social commentators (Winegar 2006; Lipsitz 2007) a study of art and artists' lives is a particularly fruitful avenue for understanding the immigration (and vice versa).

Unfortunately, women artists of all backgrounds, and in particular Caribbean artists, have been overlooked by those who have written about art in Miami (critics, journalists, art historians), leading to a general lack of theorization about the production of art by women and their role in the economy of production and circulation. In the larger field of study about art, women, especially non-white women, have historically received less critical scholarly attention than men (Pollock 2003 [1988]; Woodmansee 1994; Bloom 1999; Blocker 1999; Wallace 2004), and this underrepresented group of women provides a scenario that is critical to advancing anthropological theory and policy.

Feminisms varies from place to place, person to person, and across time.

Frequently, definitions of feminist art have focused on representations of women only, but it is possible to do work that could be considered feminist even if it's not portraying women. Arising out of the feminist movement of the 1970s in the US, 'feminist art' tended to include primarily white women artists and focused on representations depicting women or themes related to the feminist movement such as the intersection of the personal and the political. Sexism played a large role in framing feminist art, as scholars like Linda Nochlin theorized about the now infamous question, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1988). As Jayne Wark explains, "The feminist movement . . . provided women--and women artists--with a context in which to articulate their

individual and collective concerns within a reconceived notion of the political. For feminist artists, this resulted most significantly in a new conception of the relationship between art and politics.” (2006: 23) Often shut out of art institutions due to gender discrimination, the feminist movement in art encouraged many women to present their own ideas visually, find venues to circulate this work, and create their own audiences and critical dialogue. Many discussions of ‘feminist art,’ however, have not included artists of color in the US or artists living and working outside the US. Scholars, curators, and artists including Gloria Anzaldúa, Ruth Behar, Ella Shoat, Coco Fusco, Chandra Mohanty, bell hooks, among others, have pointed to this critical exclusion in our conceptualization of feminism within visual art. While recent formulations of feminism and its relationship to art have turned to the ‘global’ most of the artists represented, even within these transnationally focused exhibitions, live in the US or Europe. Furthermore, the thematic focus tends to hone in on women’s representation of women, rather than analyzing the work of artists as it relates to gender or feminism as a practice more broadly.

Transnational feminisms involves practice as much as it involves theory and visual representation. Whether or not artists identify as feminist, and many artists do not, we can still understand their work and practice in relation to transnational feminisms. Patricia Hill Collins has explained that to “look for Black feminism by searching for US Black women who self-identify as ‘Black feminists’ misses the complexity of how Black feminist practice actually operates” (Collins 2009[2000]:31). The same could be said about feminisms in general. It operates though how we do what we do. For scholars it means drawing attention to methodologies of practice in research, writing, and citation.

For visual artists this means an awareness of how we practice, who we represent, and who we envision as our audience. As bell hooks has described feminism is a movement. It changes and it is about doing rather than coming up with the proper definition (hooks 2000). Writer Edwidge Danticat argues that it would be worthwhile to maintain the word ‘feminism’ and describe what it means; to clarify it, to qualify it, to make it more meaningful. As Danticat put it, we should “footnote our feminism” (interview with author, May 2, 2011).

In my fieldwork with contemporary artists in Miami, I found that very few artists used terminology of feminism in their everyday lives or in discussion of their artwork. There was a sense of ambivalence because their work does not always conform to what has been considered ‘feminist’ (e.g. it does not always portray women). By expanding our understanding of feminisms in relationship to art, we can consider how women artists visualize their perspectives; recognizing what they have to say, whether or not it fits into the model currently in existence.

### *Scope and Method*

This ethnography focuses on Miami-based women contemporary artists with roots or long-standing personal connections in Cuba, The Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, including Noelle Théard, Donnalyn Anthony, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, Yomarie Silva, Charo Oquet, Antonia Wright, Alette Simmons-Jimenez, Vickie Pierre, Elizabeth Cerejido, Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, and Maria Martinez-Cañas. Some of the artists challenge definition of what it means to “be from” a place or have “roots” connected with one place over another. Miami in and of itself is a

Caribbean space, and it could be argued that the region, whether or not they have familial origins in the Caribbean proper, influences many artists in Miami. For the most part, I selected artists who articulate their connection, whether fully or ambivalently embraced, with the Caribbean in their work or in their personal narratives. I interviewed many more artists than I could include within the chapters of this text. Every artist I spoke with and interviewed has informed my thinking about this research, but I was not able to include each artist's narrative and work within these pages. This is a limitation of time and space. At the end of the main text, there is a section of artist biographies. This section is for reference and also to make a space for the artists whose works and stories influenced this research, but whom I may not have been able to include in the text.

The artists I interviewed and write about work in a variety of media from painting to photography to performance. They all participate in the field of contemporary art, meaning in the most general sense, art that is being produced now. I focused on artists who were actively participating in contemporary arts worlds in Miami or elsewhere, but from their base in Miami. Participation meant producing work, showing work, writing about their work, applying for grants and residencies, and attending various art functions such as art openings or viewing exhibitions. The contemporary arts world is its own peculiar world, and has been written about by scholars including Howard Becker (1982), Pierre Bourdieu (1987), Coco Fusco (1995), Stuart Plattner (1996), among others.

Sarah Thornton's 2008 book *Seven Days in the Art World* looks at various aspects of the art world from an ethnographic meets journalistic perspective. Thornton's whirlwind tour of the art world reflected many of the things I encountered during my research. For instance, how the politics of the art world influence what viewers see in

museums. In many cases, this is predicated not on the art work itself, but on the funding needs of the museum or the whims of the board of directors. Thornton's writing about the art world does not address many issues of race, class, and gender within the art world, nor does the book delve into analysis of artists' works. Her book focuses on rather large institutions and well-known artists and collectors, giving a certain perspective on the art world from one point of view. Stuart Plattner's 1996 study of the art market in St. Louis, *High Art Down Home: An Economic Ethnography of a Local Art Market* remains a valuable resource for understanding art world actors and economic forces at work in the US art market. Platter's ethnography details the prominence of New York in the US and perhaps international art world, and then discusses different art world actors including artists, dealers, and collectors. Platter's study focuses on the economic and social forces at work in the art world, and not much on the artwork that is produced out of this world.

My research focused on the relationship between Caribbean diaspora and art in Miami, and in particular, on the artist's lives and works. My analysis of the politics of the art world focuses locally with the goal of providing detail for a larger global story of the arts. The structures of the art world did frequently provide fodder for artist's work, and it is in those contexts where I analyze what this might mean.

One way the politics of the art world was evident was in terms of the gender dynamics. Well-known male artists in Miami including Jose Bedia and Edouard Duval-Carrie are recognizable within and outside of Miami. This was one reason for my focus on women artists. Their careers are much more hidden than men artists. The women artists I write about have not garnered as much professional recognition, though their work is certainly deserving. As much work as it takes to become an artist and make work,

it is difficult to remain an artist. The art world is an often-frustrating world of producing work that few people will see, watching others succeed and fail, applications and rejections, and a lot of self-doubt. My focus on contemporary artists who operate in this world means that this study did not include other talented artists who may not have been participating in this field at the time of my fieldwork.

To address my research questions, I utilized ethnographic methods including participant observation, interviews, archival research, and visual analysis. From 2009 – 2011, I conducted in-depth ethnographic fieldwork throughout Miami-Dade County. In addition to the fieldwork in Miami, a large part of my fieldwork also took place online in the transnational space of the Internet. I followed artists on Twitter, ‘friended’ them on Facebook, read blogs, and signed up for news alerts on topics related to my research including, ‘Caribbean,’ ‘Miami,’ ‘Art,’ and so on.

I focus on women artists who were living and working in Miami during the period of my fieldwork, 2009 – 2011. As such, this ethnography offers a particular portrait of contemporary art production in Miami. This was a time period in Miami that experienced financial difficulty as the recession affected Miami’s economy. Real estate had been rapidly growing from 2004 – 2007, and started to plummet in 2008, with home values dropping drastically. Miami’s economy has largely relied on real estate and tourism, and this downturn in the economy was felt throughout the city. Large, brand-new condominiums along Biscayne Boulevard were dark, as there were few people living in them. Yet, at the same time, the spotlight on the arts continued to shine brighter. At a time of economic scarcity, more real estate developers and philanthropic foundations turned their attention to the arts as a method of revitalization. This was not without its

problems, as I discuss in Chapter 3, as ‘revitalization’ goes hand in hand with ‘gentrification,’ which usually means sweeping changes for communities, neighborhoods, and people. However, with more attention on the arts, the period of 2009 – 2011, was filled with artistic activity.

Most of the interviews for this research were conducted in homes - more specifically, my home or the artist’s home. In the course of my research, this seemed natural to me. After all, we were going to talk for a few hours (or more) and I wanted to have a conversation in whatever place would make the artists the most comfortable. Many of them chose their own homes, where they also have studios. Some artists came to my home. A few of the artists chose to meet at their studios outside of their homes. In the two years of fieldwork, I had not paid particular attention to the meaning of the location. Moreover, I was pleased when the artists invited me into their homes as I was able to get more of a sense of how they lived: the kinds of art they had in their own living spaces (if any at all), the other people in their household, the books on their shelves, and even the way they set up their homes including the furniture layout and the location of their workspace inside the home. All of this, of course, was rich ethnographic material, and gave me insight into them as people and as artists. When I began to consider how the artists’ lives and work reflected themes of migration, particularly in relation to work and gender, the fact that almost all of the artists have studios in their homes, began to come into clearer relief. Home as a key symbol of security and stability amidst migrations effects of dislocation and alienation, was also the site of the artists’ work production.

Working at home is also a striking image in relation to understanding gendered migrations and women’s work. Where labor and work have been considered in women’s

migration in terms of domestic care, cleaning, and child-rearing, the artists this study make new meaning out of working at home. In this case, I am looking at the labor is that of the imagination and artistic production. Of course, this does not mean that the artists were exempt from other kinds of household duties such as child rearing. In fact, for one artist, Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez, having a young child was one of the motivating factors for her to start working at home when she was an emerging artist in San Francisco. She recalls rushing back and forth between home and the studio with her young daughter. Then, she decided to consolidate work and life space and started working out of her home. That practice has continued today at her home in Miami Beach, where Rodríguez's studio occupies a small part of her home. It's in the back of her house and is approximately 6 feet deep and 10 feet wide. The area of the house is what we, in Miami, call the Florida room.<sup>12</sup> Rodríguez is now a grandmother and now she often looks after her grandson, showing him her art equipment and teaching him how to create pictures and films on the computer. The shared space means more time with her family, but it also means less time and dedicated space for her own work.

Understanding home as the site of their lives and work is not meant to romanticize the combination of these two things. Some of the artists work out of their homes because of necessity. Renting a studio costs money. During the time of my field research (2009 – 2011), studios could cost upwards of \$300 per month, and may or may not include utilities, security systems, Internet access, or artistic tools (such as a printing press or darkroom). Several of the artists own their homes and decided that the best financial decision would be to parse out a working space within that home. The home studios

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<sup>12</sup> It is an enclosed porch-type of area, which often lacks insulation of the rest of the house. Sometimes they are completely enclosed and other times they are screened



varied in size from ‘Florida room’ size (like an enclosed porch) approximately 6 feet by 12 feet to ‘garage’ size to large ‘loft-like’ open spaces. The artists who maintained studios outside of the home usually rented spaces in group studio buildings including Art Center South Florida, located on Lincoln Road, 801 Projects located on SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street in between Little Havana and Brickell, and Fountainhead Studios located in Little Haiti. When artists do work in studios, they often have to move every few years as rental prices shift and artists need to move to seek more affordable areas. For instance, between the time of completing my fieldwork in 2011 and writing in 2012, the Wynwood area, which I discuss in Chapter 3, is no longer the most affordable area for artist studios. Artists and organizations are now seeking space in Downtown Miami.

In relation to the Caribbean, this period also was significant. On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake shook Haiti. Instantaneously people rallied to raise money and gather supplies for people in Haiti, and those that would leave and come to settle in Miami. Art raffles, exhibitions, performances, poetry readings, film screenings, and concerts played a large role in the efforts to raise money and support. In March 2010, the large art fair, Arteamericas donated space to the Haitian Art Fund to host an art auction to raise funds.

I point out these things that occurred during the major part of my research to say the narratives and analysis in this text are related to the people present in the city at the time and to the global events that occurred. Yet, many of the conclusions drawn from the analysis are applicable to other sites and times. The stories I relate are drawn from the Miami context, but rely on the larger framework of diasporic aesthetics.

## *Overview of Chapters*

The chapters are generally about three main ideas: 1) Miami and the Caribbean have a close relationship on the basis of geography, migrations, and visual representation. Contemporary life in Miami is deeply affected by this relationship, and yet in significant ways, aspects of Caribbean identity and history are erased from the landscape, especially in terms of the visual arts; 2) analyzing artists' work and practice using the framework of diaspora aesthetics<sup>13</sup> shows how artists draw inspiration from and connect to many ideas and places. Their country of origin does not wholly define artists' practice and artwork. A diaspora aesthetics framework facilitates an analysis of their artwork and practice open to the multiple connections that are possible; and 3) the political economy of cultural production has shaped the art we see, and sometimes the work that gets produced. Artists use their roles as artists to visualize these challenges and often to resist them. Artists work functions as a performance in the archive.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2 – “Art and Visual Culture in the Country’s Tropical Paradise,” I discuss the history of contemporary art and arts scenes in Miami. I begin my analyzing how particular narratives have become primary, while others have been in the margins. For instance, most people mark the 1980s as the beginning of contemporary art production in Miami. I show a longer trajectory of artistic activity in Miami.

Additionally, I discuss aspects of the longstanding connection between Miami and the Caribbean as noted by anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, among others. In the second

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<sup>13</sup> Transaesthetics is becoming increasingly popular as a way to move beyond the notion of ‘diaspora’ and toward ‘trans,’ meaning a crossing that could be associated with transnationalism, and also gender identities like transgender. I use ‘diaspora aesthetics’ here specifically to address migration and diaspora in the context of art. In Chapter 4 I show how ‘diaspora’ is relates to migrations through practices of being and becoming, and is not thought of as one-way dispersals as it used to be. It is the idea behind this concept that I am most concerned with rather than the phrasing itself.

half of the chapter I analyze Miami's tropicality in relation to Caribbean visuality and visual culture.

Chapter 3, "Making and Unmaking Caribbean Art and Space," analyzes the Caribbean terrain in Miami's geography, arts, and culture, and how the work of Vickie Pierre, Yomarie Silva, and Charo Oquet reflect these dynamics. The beginning of the chapter details the geography of contemporary Caribbean art in the city, noting galleries, museums, and cultural venues in operation during my fieldwork. Then I analyze how the Caribbean presence in contemporary art made (visible) and unmade (erased). I discuss key moments and events including the *Global Caribbean* exhibition at the Little Haiti Cultural Center, which marked a moment of making Caribbean space in Miami. I also discuss Wynwood, one of the central arts districts. It is a Puerto Rican neighborhood, but that fact goes unnoticed by many, and points to one of many Caribbean erasures throughout the city. The work of Pierre, Silva, and Oquet visually reflects the tension between visibility and invisibility.

In Chapter 4, "Migrations, Landscapes, and Becoming - Diaspora and Transnationalisms," I address the core theme of migration. Transnational migration, diaspora, and immigration are central themes in my dissertation and in Caribbean/US scholarship more broadly. In this chapter I analyze what migration means for the artists and how they reflect these concerns in their artwork. For example, artists Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez and Antonia Wright each make filmic interventions into public spaces including city parks, oceans, and public pools. Kristie Stephenson uses found objects in her mixed media painting of women and girls. One such painting *HIBI Girl* specifically addresses the feeling of being constricted by the politics of migration. Lydia Rubio

creates sculptures and works on paper that address her feelings about migration. In particular, I discuss how artists approach this topic by engaging with the landscape - making their mark and participating in the space of 'being' and 'becoming' in diaspora.

Chapter 5, "Race, Gender, Photography, and Public Space," focuses on two artists Noelle Théard and Donnalyn Anthony. I analyze how their photographic work and practice re-envision black representation, their role as artists who work in public spaces, and how their work produces documents for the future archives. I consider how the artists develop a 'black photographic practice,' that builds on the legacy of other artists, particularly artists of the African diaspora. The chapter focuses on portraiture as a particularly powerful site of representation given the legacy of black portraiture globally (e.g. its use in cataloging enslaved people). I also address the role of gender in Théard and Anthony's practice as their photographic work takes them into the streets of urban environments in transnational spaces from Miami to Cape Town.

In Chapter 6, "Memories and Archives," I discuss artists who incorporate archival objects (found moving picture reels, negatives uncovered in a family's collection, and love letters from the 1970s) into their artwork. These artists include Maria Martinez-Cañas, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, and Elizabeth Cerejido. In the process of using archival objects in their work, they transform the materials and offer insight into how history and memory is produced and their thoughts on our contemporary moment. By identifying how artists talk about archives, memories, and history in addition to seeing how they use these ideas in their artwork, I analyze where these concepts converge.

Chapter 7, “Performance in the Archive: The End and the Beginning,” returns to notions of archives, performance, and visual art through a discussion of ‘performance in the archive’ in more depth. I recall how I began writing my dissertation as a Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution, and how that shaped how I situate and think about Caribbean art in the United States. I discuss the limitations of the research and future directions for my own research and the possible research for other scholars.

In the Afterword, “Anthropology at Home,” I reflect on “going home” to do ethnographic research. Born in Miami, I have often left and returned to the city, inspired by its diasporic culture and contradictions. In the afterword I share some aspects of my family’s history and my connections to the city and the Caribbean.

My dissertation ends with two appendices. The first, “Artist Bibliographies,” includes brief artist biographies for each artist that I interviewed. While I was only able to include several artists in the in-depth analysis of my dissertation, each of the artists played a role in the Miami arts scene and my research. A “General Miami-Caribbean/Art World Timeline” is also included for reference, and to schematically draw connections between events in the local, regional, and global context.

## Chapter 2

### **Art and Visual Culture in the Country's Tropical Paradise**

#### *Miami's Art Scene Through the Years*

Two stories of Miami's art history are often told. The first is that there "was no art scene before Art Basel" arrived in 2002. The second is that Miami's art history begins in the 1980s. The first narrative is usually the one told by recent Miami arrivals or visiting journalists. Their vision of Miami and the arts is totally dependent on the major contemporary art fair, Art Basel. Most artists who lived in Miami pre-Basel resent the characterization of the city as one devoid of arts until Art Basel arrived. There were artists working in the city in the years before Art Basel. The fair has just turned up the volume on the attention the international arts scene has paid to Miami; though not necessarily to artists living and working in Miami.

Maria Martinez-Cañas who moved to Miami 1986, and was working as an artist in the city thinks of the "arts scene" of that time as a "smaller art community." In her words, Miami was very different than what it is today. It had a much smaller art community. You know it drives me crazy every time I go to panels now and I hear people say that before Art Basel nothing was happening in Miami which was not true at all. But, you hear that mostly from people that are recent arrivals. As they say. I meant that in the art world. Not recent arrivals by Cubans or Haitian or anything. Recent arrivals by people who move here because Art Basel is here and they know nothing about Miami. You know there were people here getting into the Whitney Biennial, getting NEA grants, Guggenheim grants, working as artists, but the difference was that the media was not paying attention to us, and there were no parties. you know. but other than that, there was a community. (Interview with author, 12 17 10)

Cañas makes the point that there were artists living in Miami prior to Art Basel, and they were also being recognized by the national art world through grants and exhibitions. Miami's art scene in the 1980s was small, but thriving.

People who know more about Miami's cultural arts history than Art Basel often mark the beginning as the 1980s. One of the most frequently discussed projects of the 1980s is *Surrounded Islands*, by Jeanne-Claude and Christo. In 1983, the New York-based artist pair wrapped various islands in Biscayne Bay with pink woven polypropylene fabric. Ephemera of that project continue to circulate today, including sketches of the piece and bits of the pink fabric.



Figure 2-1. Jeanne-Claude and Christo, *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, 1980-83.

The 1980s were indeed a critical time for Miami's art scene, especially an art scene that was beginning to include more artists from the Caribbean, and particularly from Cuba. The Mariel Boatlift in 1980 brought hundreds of thousands of Cuban people to Miami, including visual artists like Carlos Alfonso, and writers including Reinaldo Arenas and Mirta Ojito. The city's population grew as did its cultural arts scene. That same year, the Bass Museum on Miami Beach was remodeled and reopened. Cuban art was flourishing in Miami with exhibitions including *The Miami Generation*.<sup>14</sup> Several artists I worked with in my research worked in Miami during the 1980s including Maria Brito, whose work was in *The Miami Generation*, and Maria Martinez-Cañas. Martinez-Cañas described the arts scene in the late 1980s as a tight knight community compared with the larger and more disjointed arts scene of today (interview with author, December 17, 2010). Artist Ana Mendieta, whose work I will discuss in Chapter 4, enacted several works in Miami in the 1980s, including *Ceiba Fetish* in 1982, and a series of installations for the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami in 1982.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Miami Generation: Nine Cuban-American Artists/La Generacion de Miami: Nueve Artistas Cubano-Americanos*, October 10, 1983 – January 15, 1984, Giulio V. Blanc, Guest Curator, Margarita Cano, Project Director. Organized by the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture, Miami, in cooperation with the Miami-Dade Public Library System.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Andre's work was exhibited inside the museum during the same show.





Figure 2-2. A photograph of the artists included in the *Cuban Artists of the XXth Century* exhibition, September 1993 / unidentified photographer. Giulio V. Blanc papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This idea that the 1980s marked the beginning of the arts scene in Miami was repeated so often that if I was not thinking critically about it, I might have believed it to be true. Yet, my own and my family's history, as well as my research on the history of Miami, compelled me to look for better answers. Miami was founded as a city in 1896, so it just could not be possible that "the arts," were not active in the city for about 90 years. I also knew from the stories I heard while I was growing up that there was a lively scene of music, dance, and theater. My grandmother had saved programs, written notes, and

compiled pictures in a scrapbook that I poured over looking for insight into her past and the history of the city.<sup>16</sup>

In 2010, I visited with Helen Kohen, former art critic at the *Miami Herald* to learn more about Miami's art history. Kohen was the sole art critic writing for the *Miami Herald* for almost twenty years, from 1979 – 1995. She began writing for the paper in 1978. We met in the Vasari Project, a tiny nook inside the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor office spaces at the Miami Dade County Public Library in Downtown Miami. The Vasari Project archives Miami's arts history through ephemeral material (all the material surrounding art work that is not art work itself) from 1945 to the ever present. Kohen started this archival project along with other longtime Miami Dade County Library staff including Margarita Cano and Barbara Young. When we met, Kohen said that the main problem in Miami's arts scene, in the past and present, is that if there is no writing about art then there is no knowledge about art, and not many people have written about Miami's art trajectory. (Interview with author, September 2, 2010) Kohen herself donated papers to the Archives of American Art; two boxes of materials with letters, notes, and pictures from the arts scene of the 1970s - 1990s. Then she decided that Miami needed this kind of archiving too.

In addition to the archiving project, Kohen has presented her ideas about Miami's arts history in essays and lectures. One essay in particular, "Miami: A Cultural History," was part of an exhibition catalogue for *Extended Boundary: Latin American and*

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<sup>16</sup> The history of the arts in Miami and other cities is the aim of another project, the Mapping Arts Project. I developed the Mapping Arts Project originally as Mapping Miami in 2009 after realizing that the lack of information about the cities artistic past was glaring, and also that people in Miami wanted more. The Mapping Arts Project is a largely digital project, with the main platform existing online. Each city in the project will map places where artists have lived and worked historically. The project connects often hidden histories, as is the case in Miami.

*Caribbean Artists in Miami* in 2008, at the InterAmerican Development Bank in Washington DC. This talk also formed the foundation of a talk she presented at the Miami Art Museum in 2009 titled, “In the Beginning, Mostly the Sun.” Kohen writes about the formation of Miami’s cultural arts scene based on tourism. The railroad arrived in Miami in 1896, and by 1912, the city had built a municipal airport.<sup>17</sup> As Kohen describes, a lot of the tourist activities revolved around sports like tennis and polo, but some of the activity involved the arts as well ranging from music to souvenirs. “Think of it this way,” Kohen writes, “By the evening hours the hotel guests were entrenched in Culture. They danced to real orchestras in rooms decorated with real paintings” (2008). Kohen uses the capital ‘C’ ‘Culture’ as a marker of art, music, theater, schools, newspapers, and libraries, as opposed to ‘culture’ akin to popular culture or “entertainment lite” as she put it (2008). Writers, photographers, painters, singers, dancers, and musicians were among the people living in or visiting Miami. Kohen points out that “whereas most people who lived outside Florida still thinking that Miami’s permanent residents live in a caricature of a fun-in-the-sun metropolis, even the earliest citizens of the City of Miami were not Culture-starved” (2008).

While Miami was promoting itself as a tropical vacation destination throughout the early 1900s (see Chapter 2 for more on this), there was also a lively arts scene that included many genres. Coconut Grove, a neighborhood settled by both white Americans and black Bahamians in the 1800s, was a hub of activity including writing, theater, and music, not all of which has been documented and written about. It later became known as an avant-guard artists’ hangout. A library was built by writer Kirk Monroe in 1901.

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<sup>17</sup> The airport was only the 3rd airport in the country at the time.

Another neighborhood that was flourishing as a cultural arts area was then known as Colored Town, and now, Overtown. In 1913, The Lyric Theater, opened. Activity around the Lyric Theater and other area venues along Avenue G prompted this area to be called “Little Broadway.”

The 1920s and 30s experienced a land boom pre-1925 and bust, following the 1926 hurricane. Nevertheless, this time period saw the development of new buildings and facilities including the Olympia Theater, which opened in 1926. The Olympia Theater was built as a silent movie house during the Depression. It is known for its ornate styling that included a ceiling painted to look like the night sky. It was one of the first buildings in the country to have air conditioning, which likely made it a draw during Miami’s hot summers. The theater was accessed by a mixed race audience throughout the era of segregation, though there was a separate section on the second floor which was designated for use by black people.

The 1940s arts scene was bolstered by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Artists and writers including Marion Post Wolcott and Zora Neale Hurston worked for the WPA to document Miami’s culture. Wolcott’s photographs include two formal series - *June in January* and *Horse Races - Hialeah Park* - along with many other single images. In *June in January*, Wolcott photographed around Miami Beach, picturing people in bathing suits at the beach, playing cards, and sitting in lounge chairs. This series portrayed the leisure time of people visiting the city to escape the northern winters. In *Horse Races - Hialeah Park*, Wolcott photographed people participating in the horse races at Hialeah Park. People are pictured watching the races, placing bets, and waiting in lines. Among the images not associated with a formal series are migrant workers in the

picking vegetables in the fields in Homestead and cityscape shots including the one of the Federal Theater, below.

The Federal Theatre in Miami was one of dozens of theaters operating with federal assistance from the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930s. It was one of the smaller operations, with the largest projects in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The Miami Federal Theatre featured works by both local and national playwrights and performers. Among the productions were “Green Grow the Lilacs” in 1937 by Lynn Riggs and “It Can’t Happen Here” in 1936 by Sinclair Lewis.



Figure 2-3. Marion Post Wolcott, Federal Theatre, Miami, Florida, photographic negative, 1939, Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

In 1939, Hurston proposed a field recording expedition with the Works Progress Administration. The text proposes that Hurston will accompany researchers and record folk music and sounds throughout Florida. Hurston prepared the proposal, and wrote that each part of Florida had a special character and history that she would record. South Florida, Hurston writes, “is the foreign culture area of Florida” and this “foreign culture has not yet absorbed into the general pattern of the locality, or just beginning to make its influence felt in American culture” (1939:5). Within South Florida, Hurston identifies five different geographic areas: Tarpon Springs; Tampa; Miami; Everglades; and Key West to Palm Beach. In each of these areas, she lists what she sees as major features, and each one includes reference to the Caribbean, including Bahamian folk songs, Cuban dances, and African influences by way of the British West Indies. Among who and what she proposes to record in Miami she includes: “More than 30,000 Bahamans with their songs, dances and stories, and instrumentation” and “Haitian songs, dances, instrumentation and celebrations” (5).

Proposed Recording Expedition  
#5

South Florida: This is the foreign culture area of Florida. That is foreign culture has not yet absorbed into the general pattern of the locality, or just beginning to make its influence felt in American culture. This foreign area really should be designated as a collection of areas. The Sanctified Church is strong in this area with its rebirth of spiritual and anthem making.

A. Tarpon Springs - A Greek sponge-fishing area with its Greek Orthodox ceremonies and other folk songs and customs.

B. Tampa - With the largest latin colony in the United States. Here the Cuban songs, dances and folk ways color the soil and flavor the air.

C. Miami - A polyglot of Caribbean and South American cultures.

1. More than 30,000 Bahamans with their songs, dances and stories, and instrumentation.
2. Haitian songs, dances, instrumentation and celebrations.
3. American Negro songs, games and dances.
4. American white songs and stories.
5. African songs, dances and instrumentation. There is a pure African colony there.

D. Everglades - Raw, teeming life of the frontiers and mining or construction camp type. A hot mixture of all the types of material of the area. Worth the whole trip alone. The life histories, Social, Ethnic studies would be rare and vital.

E. Key West to Palm Beach - Bahaman and Cuban elements in

Figure 2-4. Zora Neale Hurston, Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas, 1939, Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections: 1937 - 1942, Library of Congress.

By the 1950s, art galleries, artist clubs, small theaters, large theaters, a film society, and an opera company were all operating in Miami (Kohen 2008). Miami's population grew after World War II, as many veterans who had been based in the city during the war decided to stay. In 1952, the Lowe Art Gallery (now the Lowe Art Museum) opened on

the campus of University of Miami. The university was founded in 1925. The Lowe was the first art museum in South Florida. In 1956, the Coconut Grover Playhouse re-opened with stagings of works by Samuel Beckett and Tennessee Williams. Williams staged *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the playhouse in January of that year. Williams was already a frequent visitor to the city as his home was in Key West. During rehearsals for the play, tensions rose between Williams and Talullah Bankhead who was cast as Blanche DuBois. Williams frequently left town, traveling between Miami, Key West, and Havana. In the 1950s, many nationally known artists such as Billie Holiday were regulars in the city. Holiday maintained a room at Georgette's Tea Room, a boarding house in Brownsville. She also spent time in Miami as a jumping off point for visits to Havana. Langston Hughes read poetry in Overtown (then Colored Town), and also traveled to Port of Spain, Trinidad to participate in programming by the Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>18</sup> Miami-based artists were also showing work in the Caribbean. In 1954, fifty-five Miami-based artists were included in an exhibition at the Palace of Fine Arts in Havana.<sup>19</sup>

The 1960s saw increased participation and exhibition of works by artists of Latin American descent in Miami's gallery and contemporary arts scene. There had persistently been ongoing interactions and travels between Miami, Latin America, and the Caribbean. In the previous paragraph, I noted some artists that traveled between spaces. After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, there were more Cubans living in Miami, rather than the business or leisure trips of the previous decades.

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<sup>18</sup> Information about Langston Hughes's work in Trinidad was gathered from the Langston Hughes Collection at the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Life at the New York Public Library. Archival research in July 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Information about this show was gathered from "Miami Art Timeline," compiled by Helen Kohen and Barbara Young, Vasari Project, Miami-Dade County Library.



The 1950s and 60s were also trying times. Laws and customs based on race separated people to specific parts of the city as well as limited equal access to resources and activities. Even beaches were policed based on race. Then, changes in the geography of the city through the construction of I95 in the late 50s and early 60s, further heightened race and class divides. What had been developing in the arts was also stifled by the construction of the highway, which cut through sections of what would become Overtown and Little Havana. Small arts venues as well as private homes that catered to artists were demolished, and it is no doubt that there was an overall dampening of spirit along with this construction and demolition.<sup>20</sup> But, Miami remained and remains a hub of Caribbean migrations and cultural production.

The 1970s began with the passing of a government bond issue called “A Decade of Progress,” which greatly expanded the cultural arts institutions and programming. In the 1970s, twelve new libraries and the Historical Museum of Southern Florida (now HistoryMiami) were built.<sup>21</sup> The Main Library and the Historical Museum were built in the Metro-Dade Cultural Center Plaza, which would later (in 1984) include the Center for Fine Arts (now Miami Art Museum). This plaza was located in downtown across the street from the county government offices. The library played a large role in developing Miami’s cultural arts scene. Some of the key people in these projects were Barbara Young, Margarita Cano, and Helen Kohen. Another project funded by the local government, the Miami-Dade Art in Public Places program began in 1973, and continues to operate today. In 1977, the Art Gallery (now the Frost Museum) at Florida

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<sup>20</sup> See Nathan Connolly (forthcoming) *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida*; University of Chicago Press.; Lillian Manzor, Cuban Theater Digital Archive, <http://cubantheater.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> Information about “A Decade of Progress” was gathered from “Miami Art Timeline,” compiled by Helen Kohen and Barbara Young, Vasari Project, Miami-Dade County Library.

International University was established. In the same year, Dorothy Jenkins Fields established the Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida. Also in 1977, Marta Gutierrez opened Forma Gallery in Coral Gables. It was the first gallery in the US primarily dedicated to showing works by Latin American artists.<sup>22</sup> Frederic Snitzer opened Opus Gallery in North Miami in 1977. He later moved to Wynwood, and shows the work of two artists I worked with including Maria Martinzez-Cañas and Cristina Lei Rodriguez. Throughout the decade, artists organized into groups for artistic support and the produce exhibitions, such as GALA (Grupo de Artistas Latino Americanos).<sup>23</sup> This decade ended with the first Calle Ocho Festival in Little Havana in 1978, with an attendance of over 100,000 people, and the establishment of the Miami Beach Art Deco District on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. Barbara Capitan spearheaded the establishment of the Art Deco District.<sup>24</sup>

The 1980s were a period of tumultuous change and activity in Miami, and also a period that is marked as the beginning of ‘contemporary art’ as I discussed earlier. Cultural, linguistic and demographic shifts were phenomenon that shaped the arts scene that was developing. In the 1980s, Miami’s population grew because of increasing immigration from Cuba and Haiti. Many people who came were seeking political and/or economic refuge in the city. By the 1980s, the area of Miami called Lemon City became known as Little Haiti. At this time, many of the white (or Anglos as some texts say) people were fleeing the city for destinations further north. In 1980, the category of

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<sup>22</sup> Email correspondence with Elizabeth Cerejido, May 2, 2013. Also, the webpage Manta, which displays business information. Forma Gallery no longer operates as a physical gallery, but does operate online.

<sup>23</sup> Hortensia Soriano, personal communication via Facebook, May 2, 2013. Her father, Rafael Soriano was a member of GALA, as were some in the group were Salinas, Mijares, Riveron, and McCallister, among others.

<sup>24</sup> Information about Calle Ocho Festival and Art Deco District was gathered from “Miami Art Timeline,” compiled by Helen Kohen and Barbara Young, Vasari Project, Miami-Dade County Library.

‘Hispanic’ was added to the US Census. Since Miami was increasingly a majority ‘Hispanic’ city, this categorical change affected the city’s identity as well. The same decade, however, was also a period of fights over English-only policies. Some of the strongest proponents of English-only policies were in Miami, possibly because of the dramatic linguistic and cultural shifts in the 1980s. (See Castro 1992; Grenier and Stepick 1992; Portes and Stepick 1993)

Ethnic and cultural tensions were present throughout the city, but the arts scene continued to grow as more people moved to the city, bringing their ideas and experiences. Artist Maria Martinez-Cañas recalled that she felt very comfortable when she moved to Miami in 1986 because of her comfort speaking Spanish, not only out of necessity, but because she likes speaking Spanish. Part of her decision to move to Miami was because she wanted to live in a city where she could speak Spanish. Martinez-Cañas explains, “I have to tell you, I don’t speak English anymore . . . If I didn’t teach I would probably forget the language” (Martinez-Cañas 2010).

Businesses and organizations played a role in fostering artistic production and public interaction with all art forms. Mitchell Kaplan, who grew up in Miami Beach, founded Books and Books in Coral Gables in 1982, and later opened stores in Miami Beach and Bal Harbor. The independent bookstore is the only one of its kind in Miami, and was originally modeled on the Tattered Cover that Kaplan visited in Denver when he was a college student. Hosting author events with writers from around the world, the stores are hubs of literary activity, with much attention to the Caribbean. Kaplan now also has a store in the Cayman Islands. The store on Miami Beach is located on Lincoln Road. Also on Lincoln Road is the Art Center/South Florida. It opened in 1984 when the

pedestrian mall was struggling to maintain even a few stores and restaurants. The organization purchased the building, securing more affordable artist studio and exhibition space. The Art Center is still in operation today, in the same three buildings that were originally purchased. Now, Lincoln Road is a busy shopping area, and the Art Center says that they regularly have over 100,000 visitors a year. Dozens of artists maintain studios in the Art Center, and the majority of the artists are of Latin American or Caribbean descent.

The publicly visible cityscape was reflecting the culture, and its changes, through visual arts. In 1986, Carlos Alfonso was commissioned by Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places to create an installation called *Ceremony of the Tropics* at the Santa Clara Metrorail Station. The installation references the neighborhood around the station, especially its wholesale produce markets. Alfonso also incorporated his own iconography, making reference to rituals and the tropics through his use of color. (Miami Dade County 2013a) The piece also bears resemblance to earlier works by the well-known Afro-Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam.



Figure 2-5. Carlos Alfonso, Ceremony of the Tropics, Art in Public Places, Miami-Dade County, 1986.

In 1985, Jan Mapou moved to Miami and founded Sosyete Koukouy with the goal of maintaining the vitality of Haitian traditional culture and the Kreyol language. In 1990, Jan Mapou opened Libreri Mapou, a bookstore, in the Caribbean Market Place in Little Haiti. He had previously sold books out of his basement New York. Libreri Mapou continues to operate today as more than a bookstore, but as a cultural center. The back courtyard hosts dance rehearsals as well as performances. The upstairs rooms host readings, conferences, meetings, and community discussions. Mapou also teaches Kreyol classes and hosts a Kreyol language radio show on the local NPR station, WLRN. In 2007, he was awarded a Florida Folk Heritage Award.

In the 1990s, some aspects of Miami's Caribbean communities and the art scene were solidifying through organizations and institutions that had been formed in the previous two decades. The Miami-Dade County Library continued to play an important role through exhibitions, educational programming, and archiving. The Historical Museum of Southern Florida increasingly turned attention to the aspects of history that mattered most to the local communities. In 1996-1997, they began a project to document local religious and festive traditions with particular attention to percussion. One of the main goals was to share information about lesser known musical forms. While the musical forms may have been known within particular communities, there was not broad public awareness. As Stephen Stuemple writes, "As a crossroads of the Caribbean, South Florida has a multifaceted music scene, including not only such popular forms as salsa, merengue, konpa, reggae, and soca, but a wide range of drumming and other percussion traditions that play key roles in religious rituals and festive celebrations within Caribbean communities." Since little archival information existed, the museum conducted a fieldwork project. They visited "Cuban Orisha and Haitian Vodou ceremonies, Trinidadian Carnival and Bahamian Junkanoo celebrations, Trinidadian Hindu weddings and festivals, Cuban rumba and Puerto Rican plena sessions, and other occasions involving percussion" throughout Miami (Stuemple 2008). Through the fieldwork project, they collected "1800 photographs, approximately 60 audiotapes of interviews and musical performances, miscellaneous video footage, and a collection of research reports" (ibid. 2008). Various exhibitions about Caribbean culture and the arts were organized based on this research including *Visions of the Caribbean*, *Calypso: A World Music*; and *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami*. The exhibitions not only featured the

material artifacts, but rich and varied programming that aimed to include Miami's various publics. Some of these materials were also organized into online exhibitions.

Along the same lines of music and performance, the organization IFE-ILE was founded by Neri Torres in 1996. The organization is dedicated to the preservation, promotion, and cultivation of Afro-Cuban culture and folklore (IFE-ILE 2009). They host classes, workshops, and performances, and are well-known for their annual IFE-ILE Afro-Cuban Dance Festival, which began in 1998. Katherine Dunham visited with the group in 2004,<sup>25</sup> and was also awarded the keys to the city of Miami. Torres still runs IFE-ILE, and in 2013 she was awarded the Florida Folklife Award.

Rosie Gordon Wallace brought more attention to Caribbean visual arts through the founding of Diaspora Vibe Gallery and the Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator in 1996. She began Diaspora Vibe Gallery with the intention to show and sell the works of Caribbean artists. She took on this task because she saw it as an urgent need. Wallace was born in Jamaica and began her career in the sciences, not expecting to turn her attention to the arts. But, as a Miami resident from the Caribbean who enjoyed the arts and artists, she was prompted to action when she saw little of this represented in the city. Caribbean artists' work was not being shown in Miami, and she wanted to change that. Wallace sought to meet these goals by running both a gallery, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, and a 501(c)3 non profit organization, Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator. Programming consisted of exhibitions, residencies in Miami and in the Caribbean, artist talks, and film screenings. Additionally, Diaspora Vibe's programs and space provided a central hub of Caribbean-related artistic activity in the city. The gallery and the organization began out

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<sup>25</sup> Library of Congress, Katherine Dunham timeline, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/dunham/dunham-timeline.html>, accessed May 2, 2013.

of Wallace's home in the Morningside neighborhood of Miami. Then, she moved into the Bakehouse Arts Complex in Wynwood. The Bakehouse Arts Complex is a shared studio space that was built in building that used to house a bakery. In 2002, when the arts scene in Miami really started to pick up, Diaspora Vibe Gallery was offered a reduced-rent space from the design group DACRA, owned by Craig Robbins, in the Design District. The gallery and the organization operated out of that space from 2002 to 2010. Now, Wallace has moved to the virtual space of the internet, while still organizing exhibitions and residencies in Miami and throughout the Caribbean.

Art Basel Miami Beach, an international art fair, was scheduled to start in December of 2001. However, after the incident at the World Trade Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, the show was postponed for one year. Art Basel debuted in Miami Beach in December 2002 at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Art Basel Miami Beach is the sister fair to the original Art Basel in Basel, Switzerland. The fair in Miami Beach features international galleries in addition to special projects. While the fair itself attracted a lot of visitors and attention, the satellite fairs that developed surrounding Art Basel have become what many look forward to. Some people never go to the actual Art Basel, but attend events and exhibitions during the time that the fair is in town. Art Basel is selective and prestigious, and though the fair is hosted in Miami, very few Miami-based galleries participate each year. Art Basel, the fair itself, can be thought of as a convention. Like the annual Boat Show, Art Basel provides the space for art dealers to sell works to collectors. While that is the primary goal, the fair also provides an opportunity to view and experience the global art world in one setting - both through the fair itself and through the surrounding events. As of 2013, Art Basel is scheduled to



continue in Miami Beach, but it is undetermined how long it will continue to be hosted in the city.

The fervor around the arts that accompanied the arrival of Art Basel is seen through the sharp spike in openings of galleries and other arts spaces. Just prior to Art Basel's arrival, in 2000, Bernice Steinbaum relocated her gallery from New York to Miami. She moved to be closer to her family. Both of her daughters were living in Miami, and her son in Tampa. The Bernice Steinbaum Gallery became a flagship arts space, located in a 2-story building on North Miami Avenue. Steinbaum showed the works of artists from Latin America and the Caribbean in addition to other places, including Elizabeth Cerejido (see Chapter 6) and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons (see Chapter 3). Steinbaum closed the gallery in 2012. In 2003, artist Charo Oquet founded Edge Zones and began curating shows in the World Arts Building in Wynwood. Oquet showed the work of many Caribbean artists, including artists from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Jamaica. Oquet also produced books documenting artists' work in Miami. Edge Zones and Oquet hosted shows in the World Arts Building from 2003 – 2008, and then moved to a new space in Wynwood. As of 2012, the exhibition space is closed, but Oquet continues to organize programming like a Performance Festival and artist exchanges. Also in the early 2000s, Tina Spiro who lived between the US and Jamaica, operated Chelsea Galleria in Wynwood Gallery, which is now closed.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, private collectors in Miami opened their collections to the public. This phenomenon of private collections that are open to the public in museum-like settings has been called the "Miami model." Whereas collectors in other cities like New York and Los Angeles may eventually donate artworks to museums,

many collectors in Miami made their own museum-like spaces instead. The Marguiles Collection opened to the public in 1999. Marty Marguiles has also donated sculptures and other artworks to Florida International University. In 1993, Don and Mera Rubell opened the Rubell Collection. It is housed in a former Drug Enforcement Agency building in Wynwood. As of 2013, they are also working toward building a new space in Washington, DC. In 2009, Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz opened the de la Cruz Collection, moving art work out of their private home in Key Biscayne to a space in the Design District. The building was built specifically for the de la Cruz Collection, and a work by Felix Gonzales Torres was installed on the exterior of the building for the first few years it was in operation. The collection includes a lot of work from Germany, Russia, and other parts of Europe in addition to works by select Latin American artists including Carlos Alfonso, Ana Mendieta, and Felix Gonzales Torres, each of whom Rosa de la Cruz had been friends with during their lifetimes.

Numerous galleries opened and closed during the 2000s as arts districts in Miami expanded (more on this in Chapter 3). Many are or were located in the areas surrounding these collections. In 2010, the Little Haiti Cultural Center, a center funded and operated by Miami-Dade County, opened in the heart of Little Haiti. The center hosts a monthly music and arts night called “Big Night in Little Haiti,” film screenings, dance classes, art classes, and other events.

### *Tropicality: Sun, palm trees, and a dose of danger*

A large part of Miami’s visual culture has relied on stereotypes and expectations, revolving around selling fantasies based on sex, sun, sea, and sand to tourists and

investors (and sometimes to future residents). Many of these ideas--the beach, palm trees, and women in bathing suits-- emphasize Miami's local flavor, which are greatly informed by the Caribbean and Latin American region as well as the United States. However, these stereotypical images stand alongside another set of images of Miami, which rely on violence, drug trade, and general illicit activity that acquire its power precisely because of its geographical and cultural proximity to the northern edge of the Caribbean and Latin America. Visually, Miami has been portrayed as both within and outside the U.S. national frame; it is different enough to be a tropical getaway, yet it is not in a foreign country. These two, somewhat opposing visual imaginaries, comprise what I think of as tropes of tropicality that have solidified the visual terrain of Miami as beautiful and seductive, yet illicit and dangerous. These visual tropes have been powerful enough to preclude dissonant portrayals or to render them invisible.

In her study of postcards and photography of the Bahamas and Jamaica, Krista Thompson defines 'tropicalization' as "the complex visual systems through which the islands were imaged for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on actual physical space on the islands and their inhabitants" (2006:5). Thompson shows how "certain ideals and expectations of the tropics informed the creation of place-images" and that even with the number and diversity of places within the Caribbean region, "a very particular concept of what a tropical Caribbean island should look like developed in the visual economies of tourism" (2006:5-6). These tropes of tropicality repeat time and time again, making reference to specific imagery such as palm trees or the ocean, and highlighting beauty, oddity, or foreignness (Sheller 2003). The exotic. This repetition of visual imagery is not unique to Miami, and the

particular kind of imagery that shows up bears a close resemblance to tropes of tropicality throughout the Caribbean<sup>26</sup>. As I show in this chapter through my use of tropicality, what a tropical location should “look like” is shaped by dynamics of race, class, and gender, and is at play within Miami. Tropicality encompasses not only the ‘beautiful’ or ‘idyllic’ imagery of foliage like palm trees, but also includes imagery of ‘danger’ - violence, crime, drugs. The portrayal of ‘danger’ as fantasy aligns with ‘beauty’ as idyllic escape; both portray desire. Tropicality, thus, aligns with the idea of the grotesque - that which is beautiful, but also odd. Although I will delve more into the ways in which this idea is discernible and traceable in the work of contemporary artists, I want to momentarily turn to the large scale images that Miami has exported that align with this idea, namely those exported as postcards, photographs, posters, and moving pictures.

### *Postcards, Photographs, Posters, and Moving Pictures*

Postcards show how Miami has been visually represented. The University of Miami Special Collections has a set of 290 South Florida postcards from the 1920s - 1970s representing Miami, Miami Beach, Coconut Grove, Coral Gables and other South Florida locations. Surveying them reveals some common visual themes:

- Aerial views
- Palm trees
- Use of blues, greens, off-whites, and pinks
- Buildings, especially hotels

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<sup>26</sup> See also Kottak, Conrad P. (1992) *Assault on Paradise: Social Change in a Brazilian Village*. New York: McGraw-Hill, for analysis of tourism and change in Brazil.

- Water, including ocean, rivers, and pools
- Very few people

The postcards in this collection show a picture of Miami that is idyllic. New hotels with manicured landscaping await tourists, and the aerial views suggest that the landscape is open for the taking. The color scheme, picturing of palms and the ocean, show an idyllic and picturesque setting. Few people appear in the postcards encouraging the viewer to imagine themselves in the empty chair or amidst the small group of people on the beach.



Figure 2-6. Bathing at Lummus Park, Miami Beach, Florida. Published by E.C. Kropp Co., date unknown, Florida Postcard Collection, Special Collections, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

This postcard shows Lummus Park on Miami Beach. The reverse side of the card reads, “Thousands enjoy the surf-bathing here throughout the winter as there is never a day in the entire year that surf-bathing cannot be enjoyed. The winter temperature of the water is 74°, its even temperature being caused by the nearness to the Gulf Stream.” The postcard illustrates an ideal day of “sun-bathing,” through the inclusion of palms, the sea,

and the pastel colors of the sunrise. It also contrasts the city with the rest of the United States through the description of the temperature of the water, 74°, even when locations further north they would have been experiencing the colder temperatures of winter. This temperature is explained as being caused by the “nearness to the Gulf Stream,” pointing to the oddity that exists in this place; its tropicity full circle.

Absent from this collection are postcards that show anything less than idyllic such as race relations or labor. Contrasting the postcard above and others like it, were visually similar yet distinctly different postcards, some produced by the same company during the same time frame. These reveal the racial tensions in Miami, and the visuality that was put forth to the public. For instance, the postcard below was sent by Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten in 1932.<sup>27</sup> The postcard shows a young black boy in a palm tree with open-mouthed alligators below. The text reads, “Honey, Come Down! We’s Waitin’ Fo’ You’ --in Florida.” Langston Hughes, a black poet and writer who was well-known for his relationship to the Harlem Renaissance, was in Miami for two readings of his work. It is likely that he sent this postcard as his own critique of race politics in Miami and other southern states. Segregation laws and practices at that time foreclosed black people’s access to the beaches, the very imagery and geographical place Miami was trying to sell to other people. As Joanne Hyppolite, chief curator of HistoryMiami explains, “The reason they decided to [prohibit access to the beach] was because tourism and image were so important in Miami, and they did not want any of us [black people] to be seen on any beach” (Roby 2010). In this postcard, the same blues, greens, a pinks are present in this card as are the palm tree and the ocean. However, this ominous (though it was likely

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<sup>27</sup> Thank you to Cookie Woolner for locating and sending me this postcard during her own research in the collection.

meant to be funny) postcard imagines black bodies not in the picturesque beach scene, but in a tree being taunted by the alligators below.



Figure 2-7. Postcard from Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, 1932, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

In addition to postcards, widely circulated photographs also portrayed Miami, and especially Miami Beach, as eternally warm and open for business. One of the iconic photographic portrayals of Miami pictures “bathing beauties” - women posing in bathing suits on the beach. The photograph below is one example by Gleason Waite Romer from 1925. Photographs such as these were used on billboards in northern states during the cold winter months to entice people to visit Miami, and especially the hotels and bathing

casinos in Miami Beach. The mid-1920s were a challenging time in Miami due to an economic recession that followed a building boom as well as two severe hurricanes that swept through the area. By portraying Miami as an exotic location so drastically different from the rest of the United States, photographs such as these helped to bolster not only the economy through tourism, but the visual economy of Miami as a tropical destination.



Figure 2-8. Gleason Waite Romer, Young women enjoying a day at the beach together - Miami Beach, Florida, Black and White Photograph, 1925. State Archives of Florida, Florida Photographic Collection.

Though people of African descent have represented a significant portion of Miami's population since the 1800s, few items of popular visual imagery have been widely circulated. While looking through various archival collections, the bulk of the material reveals Miami through marketing materials for tourism, and few items represent daily life and culture of Miami as a place (vs as a tourist destination). For instance, a



search of the Florida Photographic Collection revealed only two photographs tagged with the keyword ‘Bahamian,’ and they were from the 1990s, showing a Junkanoo performance during the Caribbean percussion festival at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida in 1998 (now HistoryMiami). Other photographs that do depict black people do so in the context of racially specific institutions or collections, such as the Black Archives, sectioning off this history from the larger narrative. The absence of people of African descent in predominant visual culture, or their portrayal as caricatures, points to the perceived audience of the images and also to the type of image that those involved with marketing Miami wanted to show to the world. It seems that it is ok for Miami to be foreign so long as it is white (or tan, but not brown or black). This is not to say that representations of blackness were not apparent in other spheres such as music and dance, because they were.<sup>28</sup> But, they were still marred by racial politics that shaped people’s interactions within and movement around the city.

During the 1920s, Colored Town (now Overtown) was known as the Harlem of the South. Singers, musicians, and performers including Lena Horne, Billie Holiday, Katherine Dunham, Louis Armstrong, and Etta James all performed in Miami. Lena Horne was born in Miami. Some, like Billie Holiday stayed for longer periods of time, renting rooms or homes in the area. Writer and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston, lived in Miami on and off from the 1930s until she passed away in 1960. However, Miami’s segregation laws severely impacted black residents as well as visiting black artists. Until 1960s black people needed to carry identification cards when staying on Miami Beach

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<sup>28</sup> This material comes from my project, Mapping Arts Project. The project is a public art and archive project based on places where artists lived and worked from the 1920s - 1950s. A website is in development. Other materials such as Mapping Miami cards and a map are currently available for distribution.

past dark.<sup>29</sup> The only permissible reason to be on Miami Beach, if one was black, after dark, was for work.<sup>30</sup> Black people were also not permitted to stay in hotels.<sup>31</sup> Thus, while Miami and Miami Beach attracted some of the best singers, musicians, and dancers of the day, these artists always had to return across the water to the Miami side for the evening. One particular example shows how artists thought about these issues. In 1955, Lena Horne had been scheduled to perform in Miami Beach. Horne was born in Miami, but not living in the city at the time. A hotel room had been booked for her stay. When the hotel would not honor her reservation, she decided to cancel her performance. The headline in a March 3, 1955 article in *Jet Magazine* reads, “Singer Lena Horne cancelled an \$8,000-a-week night club date at Miami Beach’s Copa City because the Royal York Hotel refused to honor her reservation” (1955a:58). Lena Horne declared that ““Jim Crow is too inconvenient when you can’t live where you work”” (58). Two weeks later, *Jet Magazine* followed up this incident with a three-page story asking artists whether they should fight or avoid Jim Crow laws. The headline question was, “Should Artists Avoid Jim Crow Fights?”(1955b:60) Some artists declared that they had not experienced the same kind of treatment, or if they had, said they preferred not to get involved. Sammy Davis, Jr. opted for a quieter resistance by staying at the Lord Calvert Hotel or among friends. Pearl Bailey, though, agreed with Lena Horne’s actions to publicly denounce racially motivated segregation explaining, ““After all, we in show business are the ones who’ve opened doors to Negroes in many, many fields. We wouldn’t be honest with ourselves if

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<sup>29</sup> Legal segregation ended in 1954, but de facto segregation continued in Miami and Miami Beach. Oral history interview with Alissa Pardo Stein, by HistoryMiami also confirms the 1960s.

<sup>30</sup> “Any person of color had to be finger-printed and go to the police station before you could even work on Miami Beach” (Oral History Interview, Alissa Pardo Stein, HistoryMiami, July 2011).

<sup>31</sup> See Nathan Connolly (forthcoming) *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida*, University of Chicago Press. Also, Marvin Dunn (1997) *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

we didn't put up a fight when someone tries to close one of those doors'" (1955b:60-61).

Bailey and Horne used their platforms as artists to call attention to issues of race and segregation. This stance came with significant risk, especially to their careers as artists which depended on booking and performing shows.

Segregation laws supported and upheld the expansive paradise depicted on postcards and in photographs. The absence of black people and other people of color from this kind of popular imagery (the idyllic) was precisely what made the area so appealing: minus the black faces and bodies, minus the aggravating racial politics that was taking over the media at this time. Without the black bodies, the white and tan bodies would have a chance to take a break. Tayana Hardin posits that this visual and physical separation may have meant "a vacation from questions of ethics and morality. They could pretend that the color line didn't exist--or that it wouldn't impede upon their own desire for rest and relaxation" (personal communication with author, April 10, 2012).



Figure 2-9. Poster, c. 1954, Pan American World Airways, Inc. Records, Special Collections, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

The Pan Am World Airways poster above from 1954, highlights the collision of race, gender, class, and space in the visual portrayal of the region. The poster shows a woman that appears racially divided as half of her body is darkened by the shading effect. William E. Brown, Jr. understands this to symbolize “the multiracial Caribbean population” (1998:158). But, for its use in advertising I understand this image to show potential travelers that the region is “exotic,” “tropical,” and “alluring.” The use of red and white stripes on her dress and the blue of the water that fills the frame marks the image as ‘American’ as the colors and shapes mirror the American flag. She straddles Jamaica and Puerto Rico, showing their easy connection, and also further sexualizes this encounter as one of tropical desire. The ship in the bottom right of the image portrays a

stereotypical “pirate ship,” but its size pales in comparison to the woman who dominates the poster and thereby the region. Her wide brimmed yellow hat bears a resemblance to the golden halos that repeat throughout Greco-Roman and Christian art, drawing a connection not only to art history and religion, but also more broadly to the Western domination of the Caribbean. Pan Am rules the skies and the terrain. Quite literally, Pan Am<sup>32</sup> shaped the terrain as they expanded their operations from Key West, to Miami, and throughout Latin America, Central America, and the Caribbean. To build airbases they “carved out of jungles and packed out of volcanic rock” (Pan Am Air 2012). The poster exoticizes the woman’s indeterminate racial characteristics and challenges us, as contemporary viewers, to think about how the poster represented the region to the world and how these ideas persist today.

While the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century depicted ideal images of Miami as a “tropical paradise,” by the 1970s and 80s, a “darker side” of Miami became more prevalent. This is especially the case in television and film.<sup>33</sup> For instance, *Scarface* combines stories of immigration, drugs, violence that all take place in the tropical setting of Miami and Miami Beach, while *Miami Vice* utilized the familiar color scheme of blues, pinks, and whites while showing a grittier, crime-ridden side of Miami. Currently, the TV series *CSI: Miami* continues this tradition by showing both the sultry side of

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<sup>32</sup> Photo of Pan Am Miami Airport, State Archives of Florida, Florida Photographic Collection: <http://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/28273>

<sup>33</sup> There is much more on films and television than I could discuss here. A survey of films in and about Miami reveals some of the same ideas as I bring up in my brief discussion. Some notable films from the earlier part 20th century such as *Some Like it Hot* and *Moon Over Miami* also depict Miami’s tropicity and foreignness. These images of Miami continue into the 21st century, and we can see that through films such as *The Birdcage*, *Ace Ventura Pet Detective* and *There’s Something About Mary*. Crimes, sex, drugs, and violence have also long been visualized through film and television, ranging from *Some Like it Hot* to *Fast 2 Furious* and *Bad Boys*.

Miami through its vivid use of color – blues, whites, and pinks- while also showing graphic, but hyperreal crime scenes.

This visual history pictured through various media including postcards, photographs, posters, and moving pictures serves as the backdrop against which contemporary artwork is made, and more importantly exposes the terrain that has become so visually dominant that it is hard to see anything else. When one thinks of ‘Miami,’ or ‘the Caribbean,’ or ‘tropicality,’ this visual terrain obscures a deeper understanding of contemporary artists’ work.

## Chapter 3

### **Making and Unmaking Caribbean Art and Space**

#### *Mapping the Terrain*

Contemporarily, several areas of Miami can be considered key centers of contemporary arts including Miami Beach, North Miami, Wynwood, and the Design District. I identify these places because it is where many artists work, where exhibitions take place, and the areas mentioned in newspaper and magazine articles about art in Miami. In addition, enclaves of Little Haiti and Little Havana are hubs of artistic activity, broadly, including festivals, music, food, and folklore. These areas serve not only as productions of culture for the neighborhood or even that particular immigrant group, but as symbolic of the relevance of these activities to Miami and its people as a whole. It is important to note that many Haitians live outside of Little Haiti in other areas of South Florida including Miami Shores, North Miami, and further north in Broward County. This is a pattern that tends to follow greater financial stability. Little Havana, once a neighborhood comprised mostly of Cubans, and home to the infamous Calle Ocho, a corridor of shops and restaurants along SW 8<sup>th</sup> St, is now home to Cubans and communities that have recently arrived from Honduras and Nicaragua. Cuban people live throughout Miami-Dade County, and their location throughout the area is primarily based

on class. Places I experienced as secondary sites in the realm of contemporary arts include Coconut Grove and South Miami.

Spaces of art production related to the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora include galleries that show art work, nonprofit organizations that serve artists and communities worldwide, artist collectives, and organizations that promote arts in general including not only contemporary visual art, but also theater, music, and dance. For instance, Libreri Mapou is a bookstore and cultural center owned by author and activist Jan Mapou. A number of activities take place there including exhibition of visual art, dance performances and rehearsal, readings, and Kreyol lessons. Artist Charo Oquet founded the organization, Edge Zones and it has been a central part of Oquet's art practice through which she seeks to engage artists and communities in the creation, exhibition, and documentation of art in Miami and the Caribbean. (Interview with author, June/July 2007) This is a shifting terrain. Many have opened and closed their doors prior to the end of my fieldwork in 2011 and writing my dissertation in 2012 – 2013, but this list and map give a general sense of the terrain of contemporary Caribbean art in Miami.



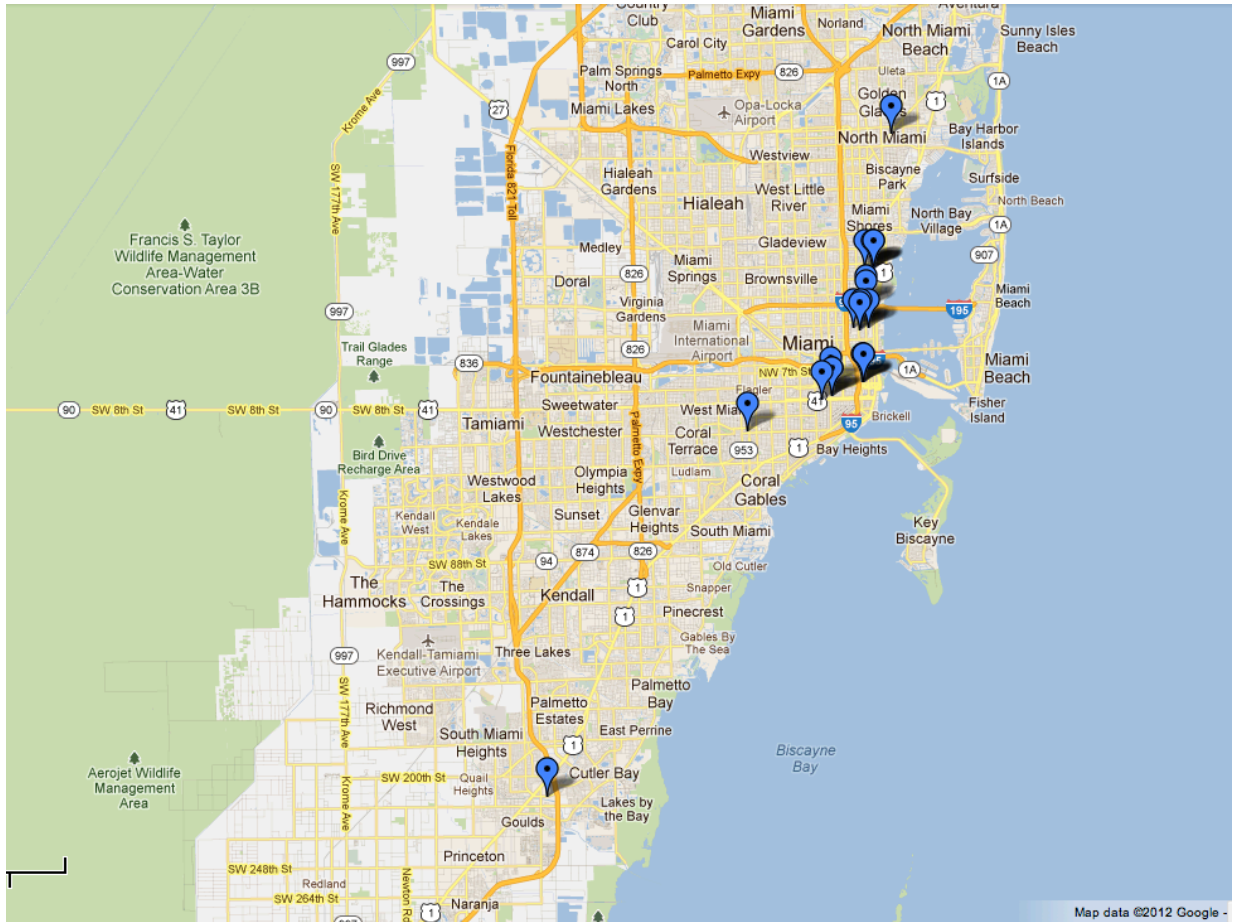


Figure 3-1: “Caribbean Art Terrain” Map on Google Maps. Prepared by author and is currently available for public viewing and editing.

Key sites for production and exhibition of Caribbean art in Miami include:

- 6th Street Container
- Artformz
- Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
- Books and Books
- Chelsea Gallery
- Diaspora Vibe Gallery/Cultural Arts Incubator
- Edge Zones
- FotoKonbit
- FundArte
- Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance
- HistoryMiami
- Libreri Mapou
- Little Haiti Cultural Center

- Miami-Dade County Public Library
- Miami Light Project
- The Rhythm Foundation
- Wynwood Arts District

Each of these sites makes up part of the terrain of contemporary Caribbean art in Miami.

Much of the continual change and lack of sedimented institutions in this shifting terrain is related to the politics of space and cultural production.

### *Fieldwork in Miami's Segmented Terrains*

A typical day of fieldwork involved planning out a list of places to go and people to see, getting in and out of my green 97 Ford Explorer, stopping somewhere for coffee and a place to write notes, and a visits to museums and galleries. While my fieldwork was situated in Miami, most of my time was spent in my car getting from place to place and online checking Facebook for artist's updates about their work and events. Despite Miami's 'multicultural-ness,' and what I argue for in terms of 'diaspora aesthetics,'<sup>34</sup> I often spent time hopping from one event to the next in one day or evening, trying to squeeze in visits to the 'Cuban' event in one place and the 'Haitian' event in another, while also making it to the major institutional spaces such as the museums in downtown Miami, collections in the Design District and Wynwood, and contemporary art galleries and artist-run spaces in Wynwood. However, while in decades past these events may have explicitly been directed at one group or another, as in "The Miami Generation: Nine Cuban-American Artists" show from 1983/84, the segmentation happens on a more

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<sup>34</sup> This is discussed in my introduction. Basically, this refers to how I think artists' works participate more in conversations relating to diaspora aesthetics than to one country or another (as in their country of origin). As artists living in Miami, their work engages in an aesthetics based on their lives as artists who live in an in-between space that is Miami.

informal level. At the very least, there is less focus specifically on shows dedicated to artists of one national origin. For all of the mixing that happens on a conceptual, or aesthetic level, Miami's art and non-art terrains are still largely segregated by race, ethnicity, language, nationality, class, or some combination of these, with language being a predominant factor (i.e. whether one speaks English, Spanish, or Haitian Kreyol).

One of the things that surprised me most during my fieldwork was how few of the artists I interviewed knew each other personally, and how few people involved in the arts knew the artists I was working with. I became accustomed to running through the list and seeing blank stares that indicated no recognition. It was also the case that I would ask people locally involved with the arts (curators, other artists, writers, collectors) for assistance in locating more women artists of Caribbean descent, and most people would not be able to come up with any names. One well-known male artist thought for a few minutes with his finger on his chin before saying, "There should be so many, but I just cannot think of anyone. Or anyone I would like to put my name behind." Often, people would send me to other people they were sure would know women artists of Caribbean descent. I diligently followed through on these leads only to have these people send me right back to the person that referred them.

There are several, somewhat opposing, factors at play here that contribute to the production of hidden terrains. First, many of the artists I did eventually connect with only have some attachment to the label "Caribbean artist," perhaps making it difficult for someone to come up with their name when asked for a 'Caribbean artist.' Though I did eventually learn about some artists this way. For instance, a chance meeting with Tiffany Hanan Madera to fill out paperwork for my visiting position at the University of Miami's

Center for Latin American Studies lead me to Kristie Stephenson when I asked if she knew of any Caribbean artists. A second is that most of the artists in my research have not received much recognition for their work. They keep producing and exhibiting their work, but the kind of recognition that the art world prizes - such as solo gallery and museum shows, and critical reviews in the media - have been elusive for many. Additionally, Miami is often considered predominantly a Latin American city, this regional focus elides Miami's Caribbean-ness from the purview of contemporary arts. Cuba, at once Latin American and Caribbean, looms large in the Miami imaginary and has come to stand for both regions without regard for what this focus might erase. The one museum to actively consider Caribbean-ness within Miami is the history museum, HistoryMiami, through their cultural programming and artisan demonstrations. Finally, Miami's arts terrains are segmented into pockets and the social circles within these pockets do not often overlap. I found myself traveling between these terrains in my research as I tried to make it to several events from Homestead to North Miami in one day and it was unlikely that I would see the same people from one event to the next. Because who else besides an anthropologist seeking to understand this terrain had the time or desire to drive from one end of the sprawling county to the other?

This separation of terrains owes to Miami's relatively large and sprawling geographic region, different waves of migration, the city's history of tourism and its associated concepts and aesthetics, and the history of visual arts development in Miami, especially as propelled by real estate developers and wealthy collectors. These historical and contemporary forces channel the majority of artists (the 'art darlings' notwithstanding as they tend benefit from these forces) into certain spaces in the city,

where they carve out their own niche where they can produce their work. These factors also contribute to certain expectations for artists of Caribbean descent, and lead many of them to make claims that being of Caribbean descent is of little importance to their work. However, their work and often their explanations of their work and their artistic commitments shows otherwise. Their work shows an engagement with the terrain of Caribbean art production and discourse.

*Zooming In: Global Caribbean at the Little Haiti Cultural Center*

An event that marked the centrality of Caribbean-ness within Miami was *Global Caribbean: Focus on the Contemporary Caribbean Visual Art Landscape*. On December 4, 2009, an exhibition entitled *Global Caribbean* was launched at the Little Haiti Cultural Center.<sup>35</sup> This event was concurrent with Art Basel and several other art fairs that set up shop in Miami during the first week of December. Artist Edouard Duval-Carrie curated the show as part of a three-year program highlighting the work of Caribbean artists who live in or out of the Caribbean. Duval-Carrie is a Haitian-American artist who is currently based in Miami. His multi-media works often make reference to Haitian culture, history, and religion. Duval-Carrie is perhaps the best-known Caribbean artist working in Miami. His studio is on the site of the Little Haiti Cultural Center, and he is represented in Miami by Bernice Steinbaum Gallery. Culturesfrance, a project of the French government to promote French culture around the world, funded the exhibition. The work in the show ranged from paintings to sculpture to photography to web-based presentation of collaborative space, and the project sought to exhibit artists' work under the rubric of

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<sup>35</sup> The Little Haiti Cultural Center, which opened in 2009, was built around Duval-Carrie's studio.

“‘regional’ visions” (Duval-Carrie 2009), with ‘regional’ referring to the Caribbean region, of which Miami and other parts of the southern U.S. like New Orleans are often included. Duval-Carrie explained that this multi-year project is critical to the arts scene in Miami since because Caribbean artists are not recognized enough during Art Basel Miami Beach. Also, very few galleries or museums in Miami show the work of Caribbean artists, and when they do it is not, as Duval-Carrie insisted “high quality construction and venue for showing art.”<sup>36</sup> As an artist, Duval-Carrie took on this role of curator to create the kind of venue for Caribbean art that he envisioned should be present in Miami.

Duval-Carrie expressed to *Miami Herald* writer Fabiola Santiago that the connective thread of the artists’ work is attention to “‘the Caribbean dilemma.’ Does their identification as artists from a region often misunderstood as ‘some sort of a backwater, like the backyard of the United States’ ghettoize them and prevent their being seen as quality players in the arena of international contemporary art?” (Santiago 2010). This concern is a potent one because the work of artists from the Caribbean has long been provincialized (Zuver 1991). Leon Wainwright points out that one of the primary reasons for this is due to how the artists and the work are viewed temporally. Artists from or associated with the Caribbean region are not often viewed as coeval (Fabian 2000[1983]) with other contemporary artists (Wainwright 2011). On the other hand, there is an expectation that Caribbean or Caribbean diaspora artists will reproduce standard tropes of

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<sup>36</sup> Fieldnotes, December 5, 2009

migration and exile, and if they veer off that course it can be hard for them to gain standing in the art world.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 3-2. At the opening of *Global Caribbean*, photograph by author, December 4, 2009.

*Global Caribbean* opened at midday on December 4, 2009. I arrived at the Little Haiti Cultural Center shortly after it has begun. I saw several artists I knew from my research including Vickie Pierre, Betty Rosado, and Alex Heria. Pierre and Rosado both had works in the exhibition. During the opening I talked with Vickie Pierre. When we had met nearly a year earlier for an interview she told me that she reluctantly takes on the label of being a ‘Caribbean’ artist. Born in Brooklyn, New York to Haitian parents she told me that she did not think she was “Caribbean enough” to be labeled as such

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<sup>37</sup> See also Kobena Mercer on the burden of the black artist.

(interview with author, March 2008). Despite this, most reviews of her work and even this show label her as a ‘Haitian’ or ‘Haitian-American’ artist. But, a year later in the presence of other artists’ works she said, “all of a sudden I feel that my work is Caribbean . . . I see the Haitian components in my work like the scaffolding, which can also be related to the water.”<sup>38</sup> She further discussed how the ‘scaffolding’ in her work relates to the processes of traveling and moving, and maybe her work was “more Haitian than [she] thought.”<sup>39</sup> While reluctant to place herself within the category of being a ‘Haitian’ or ‘Haitian-American’ artist, Pierre’s work alludes to these connections, however subtle they may be. The ‘scaffolding’ she refers to are the abstract lines in her paintings that fold on top of one another. The abstract visual elements leave room for us, as the viewer, to interpret them from our own perspective. It also allows for multiple reinterpretations, as Pierre herself explained, as she viewed the pieces again in a new context. The work of Vickie Pierre, whose work I will look at more closely in the pages that follow, is situated within her own personal experience and broader history of visual culture of Miami and the Caribbean. As I discussed, these tropes have become such a prominent motif in how we understand Miami that they are the dominant visual imagery people come to expect. Anything outside is seen as incongruous. Artists like Pierre manage to incorporate imagery that alludes to these visual tropes, but challenges them by integrating them into a new visual context. I will come back to Pierre’s work, but first I want to further consider *Global Caribbean* in the context of the terrain of contemporary Caribbean art in Miami and beyond.

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<sup>38</sup> Field notes, December 4, 2009

<sup>39</sup> Field notes December 4, 2009





Figure 3-3. Vickie Pierre in front of her paintings at the opening of *Global Caribbean*, photograph by author, December 4, 2009.

The title of the program, *Global Caribbean: Focus on the Contemporary Caribbean Visual Art Landscape*, drew my attention not only to the visual forms of the work, but how this work forms a landscape of vision and thought - a discourse on what it means to engage with the ideas of “Caribbean” from different mediums, viewpoints, and locations. These themes were discussed and debated the next day, at a panel at the Little Haiti Cultural Center. The panel included several of the artists - Vickie Pierre, Nicole Awai, Hew Locke, and Jean-Francois Boclé - as well as Erica James, Director of the National Gallery of the Bahamas, who wrote one of the catalogue essays, and Duval-Carrie. While these were the ‘official’ panelists, the ‘panel’ quickly turned into a dialogue and debate among the panelists and the audience members, many of whom work

in the field of Caribbean art and cultural studies such as Annie Paul and Patricia Saunders.

At first, the group discussed the importance of hosting *Global Caribbean* during the biggest “art week” in Miami, which is centered on Art Basel. For the first time ever, a Caribbean-focused event was included on the list of VIP programs on Art Basel’s schedule. This is a kind of seal of approval, giving this show an incredible amount of weight amidst the thousands of shows and fairs that happen at the same time.

Hew Locke: I think it’s how, in the context of Miami – and context is everything. In the context of Miami Art Basel, doing something like this – that changes it completely. That makes it a whole different game from having something which is, you know, um, it makes it more mainstream. I mean it’s a group thing – the Caribbean – but, in the context of Miami Basel, it’s like, yes, that’s good.

Erica James: So, are you saying if it wasn’t during Art Basel it wouldn’t be-

Locke: Oh, no no no. I thought somebody would say that. No, it’s not that. That’s not the case, but, it helps. You know what I mean. It helps. It adds extra spice to the stew, shall we say. You know. Um, doing it at other times, uh, it may or may not be more difficult. I don’t live in Miami, um, I’ve been going around galleries here, trying to get a handle on how things are for them, out of this particular heat, this quadrant of whatever and it sounds like – I was talking to one dealer – and it sounds like there’s a concern there, that we’ve got to have something exciting in January, you know. I think, it’s not a question of you don’t do anything outside of this, but I suppose you got a bit more pressure on you on how it’s got to be something so amazing. Here it’s easier.

Nicole Awai: We want to be part of Art Basel because that’s the point, right. You want them to be aware that we are making important, contemporary, essential, interesting work. So, therefore you put it in this setting and it’s part of this event, so that they will come – an audience who probably wouldn’t come to Little Haiti otherwise, they came, or they come, or they will come.

Locke: Exactly.

Awai: And, they might come again, you know.

This exchange between Locke, James, and Awai shows some of the challenges and successes of hosting *Global Caribbean* during Art Basel. It marks a space for Caribbean

art on the international scene precisely because it is held during the time of the year when, as Locke says, “you got a bit more pressure” to produce “something so amazing.” Awai sees the purpose of hosting a Caribbean focused show during Art Basel as a critical step in moving ‘Caribbean’ art into pertinent contemporary art discussions. As she says, making people of on the international art scene “aware that we are making important, contemporary, essential, interesting work.” She also notes how *Global Caribbean* shifted the audience’s map by drawing people to Little Haiti. While Little Haiti may not have been on their itinerary before, “they came, or they come, or they will come.”

Despite recognition from Art Basel, the ‘Caribbean dilemma’ that Duval-Carrie discussed with Santiago, played a big role in the discussion. How do artists from the Caribbean or of Caribbean descent make work without being interpreted as only making work about a few central ideas? In the excerpt below, artist Nicole Awai expresses her frustration with being collapsed into certain categories based on the dominant tropes about Caribbean art. Several hours after *Global Caribbean* opened, an Associated Press article was published online. The article positively reviewed the show, but in Awai’s opinion the article did little to break with dominant modes of interpretation of Caribbean, as tropical destination, post slavery, or post colony.

Nicole Awai: Nevertheless, but still, what go round in that AP thing is basically the same thing that happened with the Brooklyn show [*Infinite Islands*], where once again we’re trying to get past these stereotypes, but what is easy for them to access is some of these played out themes that might not have anything to do with us. Oh! Oooo! Look at that, that might have some slavery stuff to it. Oh! Oooo! That might have some colonial stuff to it. Oh! Ok, alright I could write this article. And I’ll put up the artists, and it’s not fair to the artists, even you [referring to Duval-Carrie]. You don’t necessarily want to be collapsed into that category. Oo ooo, I’m pretty and shiny and colonial art, ok. And that’s what they do. So, therefore, we have to find and we have to sort of control, and the way we write about things has to be in a way that will divert that kind of discussion because you know what, they’re also coming, and I will never forget in the *Islands* show

how many people outside, beyond the media, etc., who came and said I didn't know they were doing that – it's good art.

Audience Member (unnamed): Where was that?

Awai: The *Infinite Islands* show.

Locke: Oh, yes, yes.

Awai: And these would be New York art friends, curators, dealers, etc. Like, yeah, man, they're doing some interesting stuff, but it was once again how the media writes about things and it becomes even more idealized that way. And I think that's our battle and we should have more of those, and we have to be very clear about context. We have to be very clear about how we write about it.

Erica James: Well, yeah, we had conversations about two years ago about this idea, and what my concern about my own writing practice is about transformation or about trying to talk about the Caribbean in a more complex way. Everywhere you go, everywhere you engage – I mean, I write on Janine Antoni, who was born in the Bahamas, and she was on the cover of *Art in America* the other day, and I've had numerous conversations with her about the whole Caribbean, you know, these connections, but the first thing the author says is, in *Art in America* was that, you know 'fine art doesn't come from the Bahamas.'

[audience laughing]

'How do you exist?' And I, so it just makes you realize where we are and the kind of work we have to do, and I, um, I love art and I love, and I feel that we don't look at art enough anymore. I would have liked for this conversation to be as large as the opening. You know, so that the artists could actually – we could have a conversation about what is being expressed, what is being addressed in that. Because, you know, after the [excitement] of the opening, where is the work? How can we do some work and be transformed? Where is the paradigm for us to move ahead? Um, because I'm tired of a lot of the creolite and all polysemic and all of that. We know that.

Awai compares the interpretation of the *Global Caribbean* show to an exhibition in Brooklyn, *Infinite Islands* in 2007-2008. Her main contention is that the writing about the show hones in on two dominant categories of classification -colonialism and slavery - primarily because they provide easy entry into the artwork for writers. The categorization has precluded additional interpretations of the work and has also rendered their work static. Additionally, continual writing about the work as only participating in

conversations on colonialism and slavery has precluded people from seeing (in the sense of actually looking at it and also in the sense of grasping it) the work, as Awai says of her friends and associates in New York who said, “I didn’t know they were doing that - it’s good art.” Erica James continues on this point, and explains how many people don’t think contemporary art can exist in the Caribbean, an idea mirroring Wainwright’s conceptualization of the problem of ‘coevalness.’ They both point toward writing as an essential component to visual art production in terms of creating a context for the artwork as well as broadening the audience.

Though *Global Caribbean* was, of course, organized around ideas of the Caribbean as a region and a binding force, the conversations during the panel revealed the uneasiness with which many of the artists placed themselves within that category.

Vickie: Pierre In my case, I’ve never classified my work as Caribbean art. So, whenever I’m including in these sorts of exhibitions, it’s always a

Edouard Duval-Carrie: With great reticence

Pierre: That’s true, that’s true, and that’s something that I’ve struggled with my entire art career, but it’s something that I stand on cause I’m not going to create anything

Duval-Carrie: be pigeonholed

Pierre: other than what I need to create. And, to your issue of the African American artists and how they struggled, or how they’ve been trying to create a dialogue so that the work is seen as the work and not in any category – black art – um, I think that’s kind of a role that the Caribbean artists need to take – is to just make your art and if it includes references of the Caribbean it does, if it doesn’t it doesn’t, but that’s ok. And then there’s a dialogue about it.

Later in conversation, but continuing on the idea of what defines ‘Caribbean art,’ Awai continued:

Nicole Awai: On some level, maybe it’s a certain consciousness, you know and I think you have to think differently. I think part of the reason – I’m so tired of the whole – not

you personally, just the conversation of identity and all of this stuff is that we've been trying to fill Caribbean art with a certain meaning. I think you just have to do what you do because I think there's an insufficiency in our language to describe what is going on right now. I think we need people writing and working, but do your work, and the language will come, to describe what is going on. Even if it happens in five years, cause we're working and there are writers working, trying to make sense of what's going on. But, I think artists just need to sort of focus on it, because we get bogged down on these identity – I think it frustrates me that we, um, I'm glad Edouard, for instance, wants to just let go of what Caribbean art means, or – just let it go for now, you know. You know, let it go for a little bit. We have so much work to do on so many different levels. We talk about why Caribbean artists aren't getting, or why Chris [Cozier] doesn't want to be called a Caribbean artist, for instance, he doesn't want to be a Caribbean artist because – I teach a Summer class with DePaul University and I always ask the students, um, when you think of the Caribbean, what comes to mind?

Patricia Saunders: Palm trees, ocean, sun gaze

Awai: Ok, thank you. Basically five things. You're reduced to five objects. How can you? And, if anyone knows his work, it's a little bit different than you know the surface, but you're being engaged through a screen that's very thin and narrow and reduced to – nothing that's before you can even, uh, put the work forward. So, I mean, there's a lot of work we have to do. A lot of it is about education. I think we started with it, it keeps going up. But, there are things that have to happen all at once, at the same time. And we can't value-ize it or put it in a hierarchy, we have to be working with the market, we have to be working with education, we have to be working with institutions because they're incredibly important. And, we have to understand our own complexity – that Europe is in the Caribbean, and the Caribbean is in Africa, and Africa is in the Caribbean, and everything

Edouard Duval-Carrie: That's the word

Awai: Everything is a part of it

Duval-Carrie: That's the word: Complexity. If we can convince the world that we are a complex group of people, we've managed. I think we've managed the most that we could.

In their discussion of what defines 'Caribbean art,' the key word is 'complexity.'

With all the challenges to the very existence of contemporary art in the Caribbean and just what that art should look like, the panelists and audience seemed to agree that putting aside any strict definition of 'Caribbean art' would be most useful. Instead, artists should

direct their attention to their work and see what happens. What do they have to say through their work? Let the defining come from that. I turn now to a painting by Vickie Pierre that visually traces this terrain.

*To Tell Without Telling: the Work of Vickie Pierre*

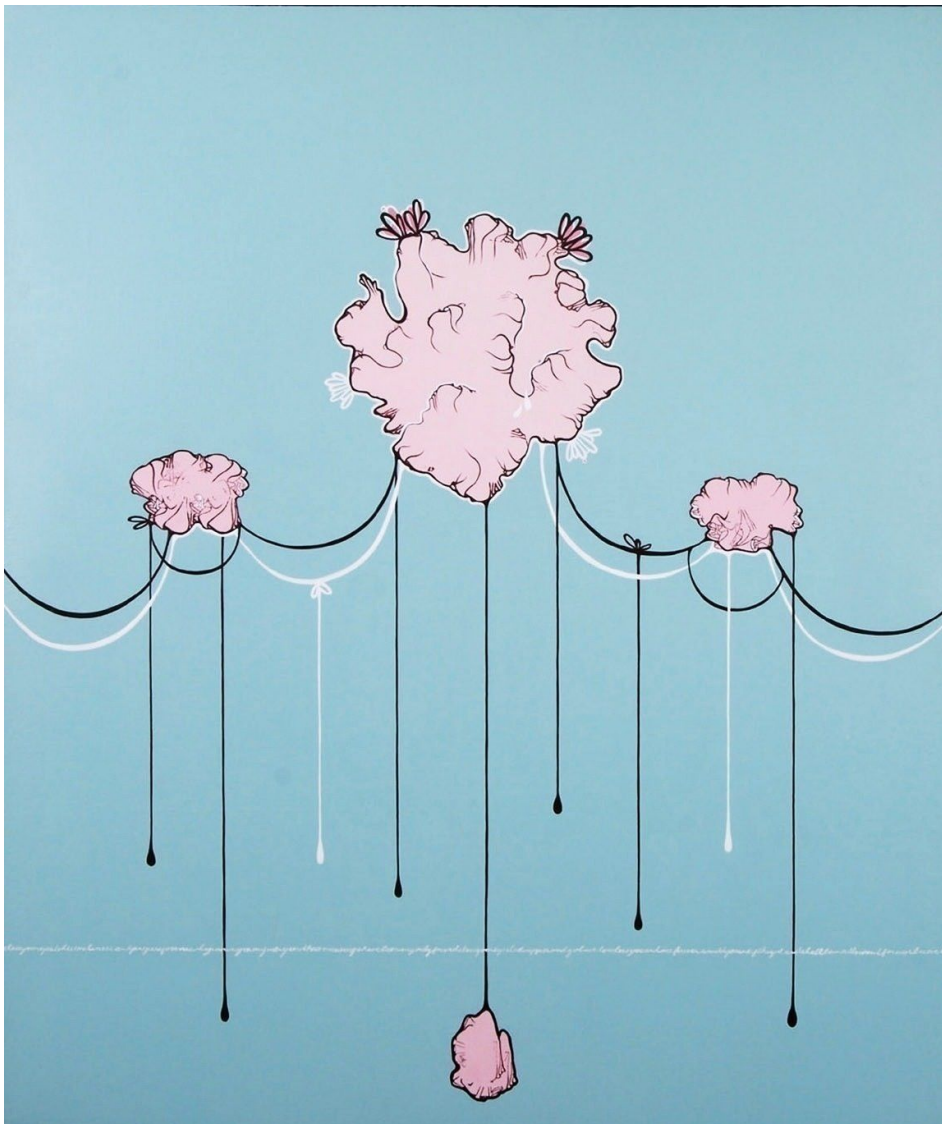


Figure 3-4. Vickie Pierre, *Little Girls Tear So Easily, Like Pink Paper*, acrylic on canvas, 42 x 36 inches, 2008.

Vickie Pierre's painting, *Little Girls Tear So Easily, Like Pink Paper*, shows a style and subject matter that is consistent in her work. Her paintings and sculptures feature abstract forms that reveal nuances about gender and national identity often in a very subtle manner. Pierre was born in Brooklyn, New York, and has lived in Miami since 1998. She attended Santa Monica Community College and went on to earn her BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. For several years after she moved to Miami she worked out of a studio at the Art Center South Florida, then she worked out of her home in Little Haiti. She now lives with her husband in North Miami, and maintains her studio there.

Looking at Pierre's piece, *Little Girls Tear So Easily, Like Pink Paper*, it is not immediately clear what the piece is about. She creates a smooth blue canvas with an abstract design filling its center. The largest, abstract pink shape at the center of the canvas dominates the visual field, and the other orb-like pink shapes move outward from that point. Stamps of Disney princesses create the textured patterns, but the fact that they are stamps is almost impossible to detect. They are small and almost invisible. Her work draws attention to the landscape of American dreams and fantasies, especially focused on prescribed ideas for young girls. Drawing inspiration from gendered American popular culture, Pierre incorporates abstract imagery from her imagination and also prefabricated items. When I visited Pierre's studio in 2008, it was filled with old book covers, perfume bottles, Disney stamps, and paint samples. She incorporates the ideas and shapes of the objects into her work, and uses the paint sample to test her design ideas. These objects also share insight into her process of repurposing items of traditional women's craft into her works of contemporary art that call these ideas into question.





Figure 3-5. Inside Vickie Pierre's Studio, Art Center South Florida, Miami, Beach, photograph by author, 2008.

The juxtaposition of soft pinks, purples, browns, with a title that reads “little girls tear so easily, like pink paper,” is at once poetic and haunting. The pale pink color of the abstract shapes resembles the color of flowers, pink construction paper, or even a muted version of the human heart. The shapes themselves reflect these concepts too. Floating somewhere between realistic forms of things inside the body like the human heart and elements from our natural environment like flowers and clouds, these shapes and lines let us consider a broad range of possible meanings. The meaning of her work begins to be defined through the drip-like black and white lines extending from the pink shapes. They look like drips or ribbons, but they are very straight and purposeful. Each line forms a

tear-shaped orb at its end point. Along the bottom of the painting is a row of text,<sup>40</sup> written in cursive and strung together with no breaks for words or punctuation.

The use of text is how Pierre guides the viewer's interpretation. The title, *Little Girls Tear So Easily, Like Pink Paper*, is a quote from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.<sup>41</sup> The line is said in the first few minutes of episode 7 in season 10, the final season of the show. The First, an evil spirit that inhabits other beings, had in this instance inhabited the body of a woman. Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, wants to rid the world of The First. While The First is torturing a young man, she says, "Little girls tear so easily, like pink paper. Until then, we have this one." Most important for my purposes here is that Pierre chooses this line from a popular American television series in which the hero character is a woman, and in this series evil is also represented as a woman. The threatening remark that "little girls tear so easily, like pink paper" equates women and girls with paper, a fragile material, and pink paper, not only fragile, but seen as weak. 'Tear' in the title, could mean 'to rip,' but also 'tear,' as in the drops that fall from our eyes. The lines that drip straight down the canvas, in black and white, bear a tear-like shape at the end. In this case, the pink paper is itself 'tearing' or crying. But, the lines are black and white, not the pink of the scaffolding above them, alluding to weaponry like arrows or swords. In these layered meanings, Pierre draws out the complexity of gender norms in transnational contexts.

In addition to referencing the American context in which she works, the painting also bears resemblance to the shapes and lines of *vévé*. *Vévé* are geometrical drawings

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<sup>40</sup> I do not know what the text says. I have gotten in touch with Pierre to find out. The image I have is too small for me to read it.

<sup>41</sup> Episode 7, Season 10, "Bring on the Night." This was the last season of the show. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bring\\_on\\_the\\_Night\\_\(Buffy\\_the\\_Vampire\\_Slayer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bring_on_the_Night_(Buffy_the_Vampire_Slayer)) It aired originally on December 17, 2002.

that in the Haitian context reference *loas*, the gods or deities in Vodou. The designs are centered around a *poto mitan*, or a strong, central axis. Vévé are considered powerful symbols which are revered. The origins of vevé are linked to Central and West Africa as well as to indigenous people like Taino who were living in Haiti prior to European arrival. Vévé in Haiti may represent the convergence of the various practices as they developed in the Caribbean. Vévé are drawn on the ground with cornmeal, flour, ashes, among other materials, usually by a *houngan* or Vodou priest. Color is brought into the vevé through pigments. Vévé are also depicted on and using a variety of media. They are commonly seen throughout Miami on wallets, t-shirts, bags, and as decorative pieces outside or inside peoples' homes. Vévé and vodou are regular parts of life, not sectioned off into simply a 'religious' category of practice, and this may account for their widespread use in vodou, everyday life, and in art. However, Karen McCarthy Brown's in-depth study of vevé shows that when drawn outside of the vodou context, vevé may not be seen as true vevé, but as vevé-like designs. Brown (1975) also explains that vevé are foundational in Haitian art. Haitian artists regularly draw vevé or reference their intricate designs in their artworks.



Figure 3-6. A Vodun priest draws a vèvè for a simbi spirit, Carrefour, Haiti, Photograph by Graham Stuart McGee, 1968, From *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/inscribing/index2.html>, accessed April 30, 2013.

In Pierre's work, the thin lines that structure the painting and the curved forms that give the painting its weight, share visual resemblance with the lines and curves of vèvè. In both *Little Girls Tear So Easily Like Pink Paper* and another work, below, *Totem for My Sisters* (2007), we can see these similarities in form. Pierre does not directly reference vèvè or *loas* in her work, which is critical to highlight. Some artists like Edouard Duval-Carrie, do note their use of vèvè in their artwork. Duval-Carrie marks his work's connection to Haiti. Pierre's abstract paintings mask explicit interpretation and functions "to tell without telling" (Glissant 1996:272). Drawing from her experiences growing up in a Haitian household, but in an American culture, the forms in Pierre's work show fluidity in their discontinuity. The forms reveal glimpses like the shape of a dress, or the faintest hint of a Disney stamp, and the lines of vèvè but the narrative is not revealed only by looking at the painting.

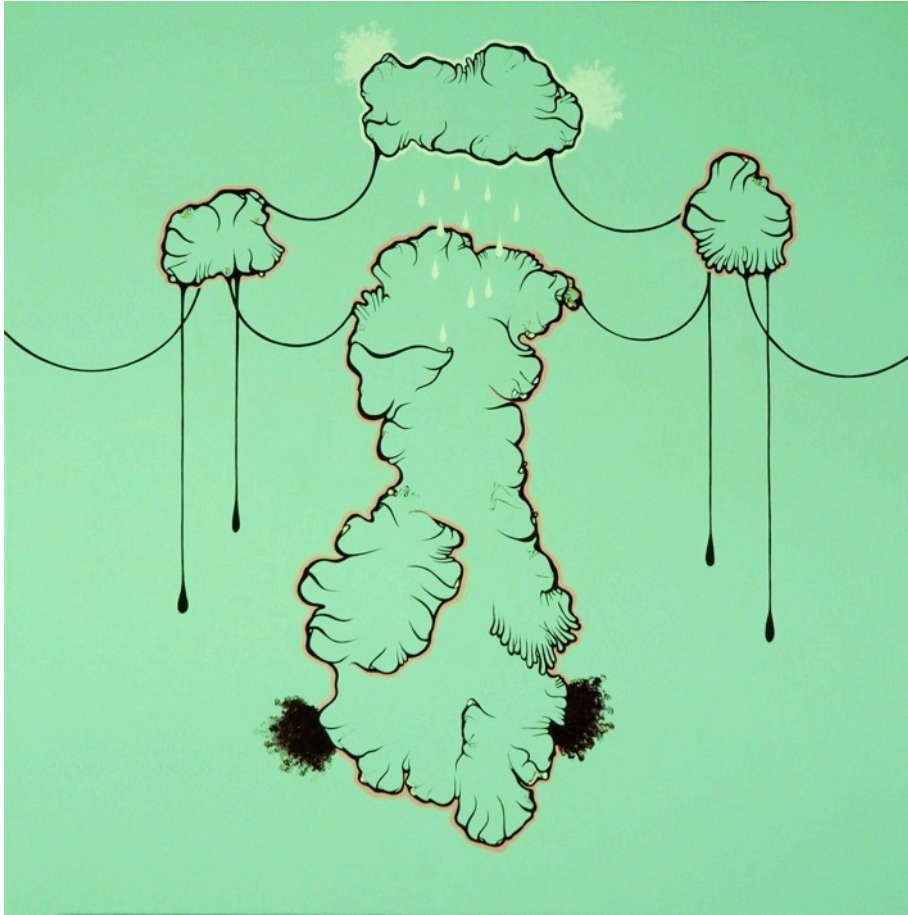


Figure 3-7. Vickie Pierre, *Totem for My Sisters*, Acrylic on Canvas, 30 x 30 inches, 2007.

While many of the artists I write about remain largely hidden in the landscape of art production in Miami, Pierre has garnered recognition for her work. She has been included in shows at the Miami Art Museum, and a solo show at the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood. And, she was, of course, also in the *Global Caribbean* show curated by Edouard Duval-Carrie, one of the best known artists in Miami. She, Betty Rosado, and Duval-Carrie were the three Miami-based artists represented in the show. Pierre's abstractions blend multiplicity and ambiguity to garner them attention not only from a Caribbean audience, but the broader audience for art, sometimes called 'the mainstream.' Though the challenge remains for Pierre to get people to see not only her 'Haitian-

American-ness' but also her artwork on its own merits, as she told me during our initial interview and reiterated in the *Global Caribbean* panel. Pierre shows the making and unmaking of Caribbean space in her work by painting canvasses filled with contradiction, complexity, and masking. She makes and unmakes Caribbean space within each work.

*Zooming In: Wynwood, a Neighborhood and an Arts District*



Figure 3-8. Image from Google Street View on NW 23 St and NW 2nd Avenue, facing west, 2011.

Wynwood is another space in the city that shows the confluence of Caribbean-ness and the arts in Miami. Yet, unlike the *Global Caribbean* show at the Little Haiti Cultural Center, which clearly linked Miami to a larger Caribbean artistic frame, Wynwood shows how Caribbean landscapes in Miami are often overlooked. The image above, from Google street view, shows a flamingo painted onto an industrial sliding door shows the influx of contemporary arts. On the right is the wall of a shoe warehouse; its signage,

'NICEWALK, INC.' painted directly onto the building. Throughout my time doing fieldwork in Miami, people I met, often randomly on the street, in talk threads on Yelp, or in Wynwood itself, most often referred to Wynwood as “that new neighborhood,” “the place where they have galleries and big parties once a month,” and “the place with the graffiti murals.” But, Wynwood isn't new. Wynwood as an “arts district” is new, but the neighborhood has a rich history rooted in fashion, manufacturing, and it has been the hub of Puerto Rican life since at least the 1950s. The collision of this new arts district with the neighborhood points to the kinds of contradictions I saw during my fieldwork and that the artists expressed to me: Miami is definitely a Caribbean city, and yet, somehow, this gets erased or overlooked in many contemporary arts contexts.



Figure 3-9. Interior view of dressmaking factory - Miami, Florida, ca. 1950, State Archives of Florida, Florida Photographic Collection, <http://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/38696>

Wynwood grew into a Puerto Rican neighborhood in the 1940s as the number of Latinos in Miami steadily increased. In particular, there was a surge in migration from Puerto Rico in the 1940s and 50s, and many people sought jobs in the neighboring fashion district. The new arrivals settled in areas, such as Wynwood and Overtown that had previously been predominantly black (Shell-Weiss 145). Miami's segregation policies meant that black residents and white residents lived in different neighborhoods, by policy and practice. Latinos challenged the divide between "black" and "white," not only in terms of peoples' ideas of racial categories, but also in their geographic and cultural spread into the city. Work was steady until the 1980s, when there was a decline in manufacturing. Some of the Puerto Rican population left the area, but many remained. As of 2010, Wynwood and neighboring Edgewater, are home to approximately 15,200 residents. On the City of Miami website Wynwood/Edgewater are described as a crossroads between Caribbean and Latin American populations that "offers a cultural and commercial cross section of contemporary life in Miami today" (City of Miami 2011). Several things mark this as a Puerto Rican neighborhood, including the presence of the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, Roberto Clemente Park, restaurants that sell Puerto Rican food, and the labeling of the entire neighborhood as "Old San Juan" or, more commonly, "El Barrio."





Figure 3-10. Wynwood Arts District Map from [www.wynwoodmiami.com](http://www.wynwoodmiami.com), January 17, 2012.

Wynwood as an arts district started to take shape in the late 1990s, and began to develop at a rapid pace in 2002 (same time as the arrival of Art Basel Miami Beach). Wynwood shows a similar transformation to places like SoHo and East Harlem (Davila 2004; Zukin and Braslow 2011). More artists moved into or opened studios in the neighborhood beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, some with the help of real estate developers who sought to make their properties more valuable. Gallerists followed. Prior to gentrification, many artists had studios in these neighborhoods because of the low rent and large spaces. Now there are more art galleries, shops, and restaurants than

artist studios.<sup>42</sup> Gallerists in the area formed an organization - Wynwood Arts District Association (WADA) - and developed marketing materials including a logo, website, maps, flyers, and street banners. Monthly art walks held on the second Saturday of every month became the primary way of generating foot traffic to the neighborhood. The logo pictures a pothole that reads 'Wynwood Arts District.' The use of the pothole, an urban symbol, marks Wynwood as both "hip" and "gritty," two important factors in the development of many arts districts globally (Zukin and Braslow 2011). The pothole marks this as a place with cultural capital that one can access by visiting the galleries, shops, and restaurants.



Figure 3-11. Wynwood Arts District Logo as of January 2012.

Art, the original protagonists of the narrative of arts in Wynwood, though not Wynwood as a neighborhood, is not at the center of the story anymore. Today, it is more

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<sup>42</sup> Based on the Wynwood Art District maps, from 2007 to 2009, the number of spaces rose from 68 to 71 (not including the art fairs since those were not actual spaces, but annual events) and in 2012 there were 108. While the number of galleries has only fluctuated slightly over the years, the number of artist studios has dropped significantly from 12 in 2007 to 13 in 2009 to 5 in 2012.

focused on business. Real estate developers run the show, and in fact, have largely created the arts scene in Wynwood. Right next door to Wynwood (and sometimes considered as overlapping) is the newly built shopping plaza called Midtown. Midtown is an outdoor mall-type of place that occupies several blocks. There is a Target, Ross, and Marshalls, along with dozens of new restaurants. Towering above the shops and restaurants are condominium buildings designed for the “new urban lifestyle.”



Figure 3-12. Image from Google Street View of Midtown, facing east, 2011.

Many residents have remained through this ride, living alongside the influx of people as the area was rebranded. Since this was a warehouse district before the arts moved in, there were vacant spaces to be had by artists, gallerists, and real estate developers turned restaurateurs. But, some residents have been displaced. Residents of Wynwood made a few attempts to halt gentrification in the area, but the swiftness of the real estate developers and gallerists in coordinating with the city on everything from new

zoning to construction permits enabled a relatively fast process (Feldman 2011).

Businesses that lined NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and North Miami Avenue, including dress shops like Dorissa, shoe stores, *bodegas* (small, one-stop shops), and even community centers have been replaced. First by galleries and furniture shops (higher end as well as consignment), and more recently by hip restaurants and cafes including Joey's,<sup>43</sup> Lester's, Morgan's, and Panther Coffee. Some neighborhood restaurants and businesses remain, including Boricua Cafe and Enriqueta's Sandwich Shop. Others, like the longtime Jamaican restaurant, Clives, have closed. Clives closed in 2013, after operating in Wynwood for 38 years.



Figure 3-13. Dorrisa of Miami, formerly a dress shop, photograph by author, 2009.

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<sup>43</sup> From their website: "The affordable, chic restaurant is owned by Joey Goldman, a partner in Goldman Properties, which rejuvenates urban areas and transforms them into thriving global destinations."

Whereas other neighborhoods have been promoted for their cultural and historical heritage, the history and culture of Wynwood are slowly being erased or “unmade.” For comparative purposes, the Little Havana area of Miami, located along the SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street (*Calle Ocho*) Corridor is promoted online and in printed materials. The area is noted for “preserving traditions” such as playing dominos, drinking Cuban coffee, and swapping the latest political news at Cafe Versailles. The monthly art walk in Little Havana, *Viernes Culturales*, plays to rather than unmakes its cultural legacy. Maps online offer residents and visitors an opportunity to learn about places such as Domino Park, *Calle Ocho*, and Manuel Arttime Theater. None of the promotional material about Wynwood highlights such a cultural history. Understanding Wynwood as an arts district is not separate from understanding the neighborhood of Wynwood, and how it has been unmade in the name of the arts.

This history of Wynwood is clearly linked to the Caribbean via the primarily Puerto Rican population, the history of Puerto Rican migration, the types of businesses that either once did or still do populate the area, and the cultural influences in the area’s food, music, and language. Yet, in the art world and even in broader populations in Miami, Wynwood, the neighborhood, is a hidden landscape.

*Edge Zones: Charo Oquet*



Figure 3-14. Charo Oquet with visitors in Edge Zones, photograph by author, 2009.



Figure 3-15. Edge Zones' former space in Wynwood, photograph by author, 2009.

Artists like Charo Oquet have been closing the doors of their exhibition spaces in Wynwood. Oquet opened Edge Zones in Wynwood in 2003, and closed the space in 2011. Oquet is a multi-disciplinary artist who works in sculpture, painting, and performance. She was born in the Dominican Republic, and moved to the US with her family in 1965. She earned her BFA from Florida International University, and then returned to the Dominican Republic. Oquet later lived in New Zealand before returning to the US and settling in Miami. Her artwork includes objects and references to the Caribbean, particularly to *orishas*, or Afro-Caribbean religious deities. Oquet's work as an artist is complemented by her work as a cultural producer on a broader plane.

Oquet facilitates the production and exhibition of other artists' work as well as her own. Through Edge Zones, Oquet has made an imprint on not only the visual and cultural landscape, but the physical one. She has produced exhibitions, hosted artist exchanges, community events, published books, and even hosted her own art fair – Art Baselita. Oquet explained that the decision to close had to do both with the financial aspects of running a space, but also the atmosphere in the Wynwood Arts District shifted its focus from contemporary arts to commerce and large parties. She told a local reporter, “We basically just evaluated the current economic circumstances and what it was exactly we were doing in Wynwood . . . We had a good run and a great location, but at the same time, the way Wynwood is developing and the direction it's going in, I think it's turned into something that in a sense we didn't feel so much a part of” (Martin 2012). Oquet's move out of Wynwood signals a shift in the dynamics of the neighborhood, and also how artists, and especially Caribbean artists, do not feel the same connection with this area as they did in the past.

While Oquet is physically moving Edge Zones out of Wynwood, Edge Zones as an organization and as her art practice will continue, either in another part of the city or perhaps virtually. Her focus is on building networks and relationships between the arts in Miami and the Caribbean (interview with author, June 2007), as she has been doing through projects like “The Art of Uncertainty” which began in 2007. This project brings artists and curators together to collaborate on exhibitions, performances, and interventions at art institutions and public venues globally.

*Changes in Wynwood: Yomarie Silva*

Another artist who noted the changes in Wynwood was Yomarie Silva. Silva was born in Puerto Rico, and grew up between New York and Miami. When she was a child, she lived in a small apartment in downtown Miami, and frequented Wynwood with her family. She attended college first in New York, at the School of Visual Arts, and then earned her BFA and MFA from Florida International University. In March 2011, I visited Silva at her studio at the Kendall Campus of Miami-Dade College for an interview. A professor and a sculptor, her studio is also the college’s sculpture classroom. A small woman, she is shorter than me (and I’m 5’4”), she looks even tinier surrounded by the large equipment in the studio. Tiny, but powerful. The studio is partly indoors, partly outdoors, and contains machinery like a drill press and table saw, large metal tables, a noisy exhaust fan, and huge planks of wood. We sat in the outside part of the studio, on two wooden stools next to the mounting area for bronze casting.





Figure 3-16. Yomarie Silva, photograph by author, 2011.



Figure 3-17. Yomarie Silva's Sculpture Studio at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus, photograph by author, 2011.

In this part of the interview, I had just asked about the changes in Miami since she has lived there.

L: Have you seen it change over time?

Y: Yeah, you know when I came back from New York and I'm like, oh my god, I'm shooting myself in the foot, I'm gonna live in this village because Miami is a village and

there's no art scene here . . . and that was in the early 90s and it has done a huge change because there are more galleries. This whole idea of this whole art walk thing. What?! Wynwood is now no longer a Puerto Rican neighborhood, which is what it was. All those people got a little displaced, you know.

L: Well, luckily some of those places haven't taken over homes yet

Y: Right *pero* some of 'em did. And you know a lot of the shops

L: Well, the shops I know, because I used to go hang out there all the time

Y: It was *el barrio*.

L: Wynwood and Allapattah.

Y: Well, that was *el barrio*. So, you know, the *barrio* has changed a little bit and that happens. So, there's this place called Midtown, right. There's a Target [pronounced Tar-jay]. There's a Five Guys. There's Bernice Steinbaum Gallery. There's all these galleries that are all popping up. And you know, we have Basel and we have you know art shows . . . Miami International Art Fair . . . It's a big thing. All these galleries and stuff like that. So, it has changed a lot. That I can you know, see art more readily instead of just the Miami Art Museum. You know, which was called something completely different. So, it has grown, but it makes sense. If you want it to – if you want to change it in terms of an artistic environment, then, uh, you're going to have to put an effort into it and make it change. So, a lot of stuff if going on. It's a very different place now. There's actually places to go and see stuff.

L: Yeah. How does it – like does that make you feel better about being here in Miami?

Y: Yeah. And what I really like is that we can still see some street art happening. That I really am grateful for.

L: Yeah? Like what kinds of street art?

Y: Well, um, in Wynwood, they've encouraged and they have asked these really famous graffiti artists – man, do your work. Like that's the best damn thing on the planet. We have things buildings, let's put some work on it. And, I appreciate that kind of work. It's not in some stuffy gallery, it's not in some museum, right, where we have these elitist concept of what art is, it is out there for the people. That we can drive by and see that and appreciate that. And I think when you're encouraged to do things like that it makes you want to do it even more. Then again, I work in an academic institution and these are where these things pop and it's accepted that we want these things out there and um – So, I think it's encouraging. And I think it's encouraging for the young students. Cause I've had students, you know undergrad, putting out there for shows and stuff like that. So, the more they see this the more they want to do it. And the fact that there's different kinds of

places that accept different kinds of art is a beautiful thing. So I think it's growing, you know. Um, I I you know, it's not an old city, so it has a long way to go. Especially, I mean, it can't compare to New York. It's just not New York.

L: So, like the Caribbean communities in Miami, including like the Puerto Rican neighborhood in Wynwood that people just like – I mean, I heard, I hear like ridiculous things, studying art. Things like, um, Wynwood never existed before. I'm like, well, it did. It was a Puerto Rican neighborhood. You still see there's Roberto Clemente Park and it was there before; they had big festivals and all kinds of music and there was fruit a vegetable vendors and it was happening. I mean, it's always been a hub.

Y: mmm hmmm

L: And, people don't acknowledge that at all.

Y: Nope. There was this place called Aspira. And, it was a community place that was there to help the people of the Wynwood community. It no longer exists.

L: Oh ok

Y: My dad belonged to that place. There's also the Borinquen Health Care Center.

L: Yeah

Y: I did a mural there with an artist

L: Oh, ok

Y: Yes, with a local artist that was there at the time and um, how important these things were for that community and how people just completely, well, that changed. Right when you get off of, god, is that 95 or that extension, to get out, Aspira is right on the corner. You can still see the building. It's abandoned. Right across the street from that is, you go a little bit further, and there you have the Target [pronounced Tar-jay] and the Bernice Steinbaum, and for someone like me who did go to the ball park and did go to the Puerto Rican festival and eat my *alcapurrias*, that's gone and it is fascinating, but it happens in Park Slope. It happened in Chelsea and it happened in, even in Spanish Harlem in New York City. So, how that changed and yes, Miami's not Caribbean, it is way more Latin American centered.

As she described in the interview, Wynwood was *El Barrio*. Wynwood was the place of Puerto Rican festivals, familiar food, and music. The Wynwood of her childhood has changed, but as an artist, she is of two minds about the changes. On the one hand, “Wynwood is no longer a Puerto Rican neighborhood.” Silva notes the erasure of

Caribbean-ness within the neighborhood with the loss of Aspira, the community center, businesses, and residents. The association of Wynwood with Puerto Rico or a larger Caribbean-ness is no longer a large presence. Today, when many people think of Wynwood, they do not think of the neighborhood, they think of the art galleries, the art walks, the parties, the restaurants, etc. Yet, Silva does not completely reject the changes, because, as she said, “there was no art scene” in the past and now there is. She is hopeful about some of the changes in Wynwood, including generation of new works and new artists, and the artworks that are taking place outside the gallery, such as the murals and graffiti. This kind of change, she points out, happens everywhere. “It happened in Chelsea and it happened in, even in Spanish Harlem in New York City.” Silva ended this part of the interview remarking the “Miami’s not Caribbean, it is way more Latin American centered,” pointing to the fact that though there has been change in Miami, it is not the same kind of change that happens in other parts of the country, such as New York. In Miami, Latin America and Latin American-ness is the predominant influence. This focus, however, elides the Caribbean history, culture, and terrain of Miami.

*Making the Invisible, Visible: the Work of Yomarie Silva*



Figure 3-18. Yomarie Silva, *Folium*, cast wax and pigments, 13 x 9 inches, 2010.

Silva's artwork reflects a similar ambivalence about loss and change, and how her work is situated in a Caribbean context. We met while we were both artists in residence at the Deering Estate in the Cutler Bay area of Miami. It is likely that I would have never met her had I not been an artist in residence because her focus is mainly on teaching and producing work, not on circulating her artwork. Primarily, her work highlights elements of our natural environment that may otherwise go unnoticed - small animals, leaves, pods, seeds. It was interesting to me that her work, like *Folium*, above, seems to trace the landscape into its surface and compelled me to think more closely about her relationship to the city where she lives and works. During our interview she explained how she adamantly tries to avoid positioning her work in a way that would fall too easily into the

category of ‘Caribbean.’ Her work draws as much from an idea of Caribbean-ness as it does from 19th and 20th century botanical illustrations, as suggested by the title of the work above, *Folium*, a Latin word meaning a thin, leaf-like structure. Yet, she has always been drawn to forms that she associates with Puerto Rico because they seem familiar. And, it just so happens that many of these forms are also found in Miami.

*Folium*, is a wax cast of a leaf from a Sea Grape tree that she found while she was an artist in residence at the Deering Estate. The Sea Grape tree is native to North America, and like other tropical plants it thrives in areas where other plants may not - near salty water and high winds; a feature of many tropical plants whose thick leaves and dense veins and roots enable them to get the water they need. Highlighting this type of hardy leaf in her work, Silva is perhaps drawing a connection between herself and other Caribbean people to spaces in Miami. Needing to create the space and scenarios necessary to thrive. Making spaces, like this sculpture marks out space for its existence. Close attention to the leaf’s vein structure, its coloring, and the areas where the leaf folds or is discolored show the topography of the leaf’s surface, and reflects a concern over how terrains are traversed and pictured.

As a wax sculpture, *Folium*, is particularly compelling because the art object itself is what would typically be destroyed in the lost wax method. In the lost wax method, a wax model is made, covered in plaster, and then melted out so that another material can fill the hole and become the sculpture. *Folium* is the wax model that could be used to cast a sculpture in another material – such as bronze. Silva uses bronze and other material in her work, as you will see below. But, in *Folium* the wax cast remains as the piece

representing the potential of unmaking of space since this wax could be covered up and melted away. Instead it makes space and traces a terrain in its surface.

The coloring of the leaf suggests that this is a leaf that has fallen to the ground, not one that remains attached to a tree. The leaves of the sea grape tree are green until the fall from the tree and begin to decay. Silva stops this process of decay metaphorically by creating a sculpture out of the deteriorating leaf. The formation of the leaf into a sculptural piece attempts to preserve the leaf.

While this work attests to the connection between Silva's artistic process, Miami's Caribbean terrain, and a larger discourse on Caribbean art, she has been reluctant to see it that way. Her work is not as much about representing a Caribbean-ness or a tropicality, but in making visible what is often made to seem invisible. In this way, her work reveals something about the making and unmaking of Caribbean spaces in Miami. Even though Silva "tried" not to make work that related to her upbringing in Puerto Rico, she was still drawn to certain shapes, forms, colors, and objects in our environment that are characteristically "tropical." Gender also came into our discussion as Silva explained that she does not feel her work says anything about her as a woman. These remarks more than likely show, not only the broader connections of her work, but also to the fact that she has to be adamant about *not* making work *as* a woman or *as* a Caribbean person. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Caribbean artists' work is often viewed through a lens of the dominant tropes of tropicality or a positioning of their work as outside of the present moment. Silva manipulates time, vision, and visibility through the production of sculpture. Her interest is not only in representing tropical plants in South Florida because

she relates to them, but more importantly, highlighting things in our world that we may not notice. Making the invisible, visible.

### *Conclusion*

The terrain of contemporary Caribbean art is one of complexity and contradiction. This chapter traced the terrain contemporary Caribbean art in Miami, first by considering the city's visual culture historically and then by turning toward our contemporary moment. I focused on two sites of making and unmaking of Caribbean space in Miami in relation to the visual arts. The first, Global Caribbean at the Little Haiti Cultural Center in 2009, was an exhibition that took place during Art Basel. The second, Wynwood, is a primarily Puerto Rican neighborhood that since 2002 has developed rapidly into an internationally recognized arts district. The making and unmaking of Caribbean art in Miami is occurring on several planes: geography, discourse, visual culture, and art work. In my discussion of these terrains I included analysis of the presence of Caribbean art in the city and how contemporary Caribbean diaspora artists are discussing these ideas. I talked about the work of Charo Oquet through her art space, Edge Zones, and how her practice as an artist is being altered by Miami shifting terrain. I analyzed the work of Vickie Pierre and Yomarie Silva, whose work stylistically and thematically reflects the concerns of this environment. Pierre's work shows how art work can be at once 'American' and 'Caribbean' in theme and style. Silva's work calls attention to Miami's connections to the Caribbean and at the same time, the fragile state of these spaces as they change. Oquet, Pierre, and Silva's artworks trace the terrain of Caribbean art in



Miami in the surface of their art objects, and allow us to see things we may otherwise not see.

This chapter contributes to my argument about diaspora aesthetics by showing how artists are considering their connections to the broader Caribbean as well as Miami, not only focusing on national origins. I show how artists' works can be understood in different contexts - such as analyzing Pierre's work from the standpoint of American popular culture when the predominant trend would be to fit her into the 'Haitian' box, a label that she would prefer not be the only one that describes her or her work. I show how artists are actively producing work and operating art spaces, contributing to my overall argument that there are women artists of Caribbean descent producing works and working in the cultural arts scene in Miami. However, these artists are often hard to find. I discuss how this relates to tropicalization and stereotypical expectations of artist's work. I linked together the geography of Miami with arts production, showing how artists' work reflects the spaces they live in. In the next chapter, I turn to how artists engage the landscape.

## Chapter 4

### **Migrations, Landscapes, and Becoming in Diaspora**

Artists engage the landscape through their artwork as a mode of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ in diaspora. With their work they interacting with their environment - producing experience rather than creating a totalizing definition of the experience of ‘migration’ or ‘diaspora’ or the other associated terminology of movement from place to place. This attention to land, landscape, and terrain builds on and revises existing literature on migrations and diasporas, particularly as they are related to art work. Diaspora and migration literature and theories emphasize the metaphor of water over terrain but the work of contemporary visual artists in Miami shows that negotiating being and becoming in diaspora often involves a negotiation of being corporeally connected to land masses and other elements of the terrestrial. During my fieldwork it was clear that artists in Miami were finding new modes of expressing their ambivalent experiences of being and living in diaspora.

The artists I discuss in this chapter include Antonia Wright, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, Kristie Stephenson, and Lydia Rubio. After discussing diaspora and migrations, I will look at the work of artists Antonia Wright and Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez. Their work moves into the landscape, engaging it in both the production and display of work. Then, I will analyze the work of artists Kristie Stephenson and Lydia Rubio. The artists produce works that show us how people can feel trapped, caged, or separated from the environment. At the same time, artists engage their surroundings to

create new meanings and experiences. I am interested in unseating a narrative which has focused mainly on displacement in the work of diasporic artists - looking here at how artists engage with the landscape.

### *Defining migrations and related terms*

Migration. Leaving. Coming. Going. Migration is a persistent theme of Caribbean scholarship. The Caribbean is a region whose land and water have seen countless migrations since the islands began their prehistoric geological journey from near Asia to their current location between North and South America. Migration is a common experience, a common expectation, and an adaptive strategy of Caribbean peoples. Bonham Richardson explains that “human migration has been a compelling livelihood strategy in the Caribbean region ever since its people have been free to leave” (1992:134). For the Caribbean region, migration is not a contemporary idea, but a foundational concept. The very land of the region is and has always been migrating - shifting, moving, never settled terrain. Migrations also continue to be an ever present reality. From the slave trade of the to the labor migrations that followed, post emancipatory arrivals and departures, and contemporary migration for work, school, or the ever present “better life,” many scholars have argued that the Caribbean is a region of migration. Miami is both part of the Caribbean region and a borderland. It is not always a destination, but frequently a stopping point.

Of all of themes I raise in my dissertation, the one of migration, immigration, diaspora, exile, or most broadly, the movements of people from place to place, is the topic which has garnered the most scholarly attention. In addition to my own interest in

people's movements from place to place it was also this scholarly attention that motivated me to continue researching the field of migration in relation to the arts and artists' lives.

Migration research in the social sciences has tended to focus on farm labor, domestic work, and familial relationships (Chamberlain 1998; Kearny 1986; Ortiz 2002; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Richman 2005). Little research on migration in the social sciences concerns artists. Much of the research on the connection between migrations and art has come from artists themselves or from fields including art history and cultural studies. In the Introduction I discuss some of the ideas about connections between migration scholarship and arts scholarship through the idea of 'diaspora aesthetics.' This type of practice means that artists develop work that connects with more than one place. Social science research has discussed some areas of this kind of art production, especially as it concerns festivals and music. Carnival is a good example as this annual event is hosted in cities around the world, and takes on the personality of the new place while it highlights its Caribbean origins.

Most studies of immigrant artists focus on a one-to-one connection between the artists and their country of origin (e.g. "Cuban artist" or "Jamaican artist") (Bosch 2004; Braziel 2008; cf. Lindsay 1996). Artists and their experiences do not fit neatly into many of the studies because they occupy a unique position in terms of class, politics, and ways of life. 'Art' is often associated with higher classes, higher wealth because it is primarily the people with means who fund art, collect art, and sit on the boards of museums and other institutions. While the product and sometimes the artists themselves are incorporated into the life of the wealthy, artists themselves often earn meager incomes.

There is a plurality of experience, and their migration experiences can differ quite drastically from other people in their 'national' or 'ethnic' group.<sup>44</sup>

I use the term 'migrations' to stand for the host of terminology that relates to peoples movements from place to place. This glosses over the host of differences among migrations, and it is to those differences I would like briefly to turn now before going into the specifics of how migration unfolds in the works and lives of the artists in this research.

Contemporary scholarship on migration has recognized the idea that migrations are rarely one-way journeys. As Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky explain,

Most scholars now recognize that many contemporary migrants and their predecessors maintained a variety of ties to their home countries while they became incorporated into the countries where they settled. Migration has never been a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multicultural salad bowl but one in which migrants, to varying degrees, are simultaneously embedded in the multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields in which they live. More and more aspects of social life take place across borders, even as the political and cultural salience of nation-state boundaries remains clear. (2007:129)

Many peoples' lives are lived in more than one place, sometimes across national borders. In other words, transnational (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995). The word transnational differs from a similar word 'cosmopolitan' because the former maintains a connection with the national. While the national might be a system some would like to ignore, few people have the privilege of subverting the constraints of nation-states, even while many find ways to resist the pressures and restrictions of nation-states such as regulating citizenship, travel, marriage, property ownership, employment, education, and other aspects of daily life. Cosmopolitanism assumes that the world is one, and that people move freely within it (Appiah 2006). Although this might be an ideal, it is just not

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<sup>44</sup> See Olwig (2007) also and Ong (1999) for why these groupings don't help much in migration studies because 'communities' don't operate that way all the time.

the reality for the majority of people. Additionally, using a transnational lens to approach migrations, allows us to see a fuller picture of migration and people's experiences. A focus on transnational processes widens the lens globally, not only to get a sense of what is happening around the world, but how local stories interact with global change as well.

Though a transnational lens focuses attention on global flows and exchange, using the framework of transnationalism at times obscures the fact that many migrants do not lead transnational lives – or the transnational processes occur only in the realm of the imagination. Depending on the political power and parties, finances, social networks, and employment, people may not even have the option to travel back and forth between countries of origin and residence. If, for instance, a person is living in the United States as an undocumented migrant (without papers), then they cannot come and go. If a person is living in exile, then they are not returning to their country of origin; either by choice or by force. If a person is working a job that barely provides enough money to secure a place to live, then buying a plane ticket home is likely out of the question.

In addition to the social factors regulating movement, differing legal practices affect people's migrations. These policies are especially evident in Miami, as a space of continual interaction with Latin America and the Caribbean. Miami's border is one of the sea and of land, and this space is articulated in the policy known as the Wet Foot Dry Foot policy.

The Wet Foot Dry Foot policy is the informal name for the special consideration given to Cuban migrants. It is a United States government policy officially known as the US-Cuba Immigration Accord. Under the law, the Coast Guard patrols the waters surrounding the US, and when Cuban people are found out at sea, the Coast Guard can

determine asylum status. Those seeking refugee status under the category of political asylum may be recommended for. If a Cuban person reaches dry land without being intercepted by the Coast Guard, they may live in the US, and after a year and a day can file for a change in their legal status that can eventually lead to citizenship. During this time, the person is still undocumented, so could not travel back and forth from the US perspective. Plus, since they likely left Cuba under tumultuous circumstances, there is little chance they would be easily allowed reentry into that country without facing persecution for having left without the permission of the Cuban government. This policy only applies to people seeking asylum from Cuba, not to other people seeking refuge in the US including people from Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Mexico. So, while a scholarly lens on transnational processes is useful, we have to keep in mind that the actual lives of people may not be transnational in the ways scholarship narrates, with flows of communication, goods, and people across national boundaries occurring seamlessly. There are distinct edges, contours, and high hurdles that are not always easy to move around.

Language, and the language we use to describe migrations, is especially significant because it marks gender, class, race, citizenship, and status. When we describe people as ‘migrants’ vs ‘expats’ the person and their migratory routes are marked along lines of social hierarchy. While there has been resurgence, or a louder continuation, of conversation on themes of migrations in light of a “global” or “cosmopolitan” world, these ideas and research about them has a long history, especially in anthropology. Kevin Yelvington importantly points out that presenting or approaching “current anthropological concerns with processes of globalization, dispersion, migration,

transnationalism, cultural hybridity, cultural politics and the politics of culture, difference and disjuncture” as if they are “‘new,’ ‘cutting edge,’ or ‘hot topics’” elides foundational scholarship (Yelvington 2001:227). This foundational scholarship includes work on the anthropology of African diasporas in the Americas by people such as W.E.B Du Bois, St. Clair Drake, Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, Jean Price-Mars, Romulo Lachatnere, and Arthur Schomburg (Yelvington 2001:227). These scholars took up topics of race, history, heritage, migrations, culture, politics, memory, and art in ways that are useful and pertinent in contemporary scholarship, including my own. While terms like ‘transnationalism’ are increasingly being used, especially since the 1990s, and it is true that our ability to travel and connect to spaces has picked up speed, my point here is that the topic of migrations is a core concern of anthropology - historically as well as contemporarily.

I use the word ‘migrations’ frequently because it refers to movements from place to place without specific attention on country of origin, race, political affiliation or allegiance, or a specific homeland. People migrate between and within nations. Migration can refer to a cross-national move or an international one. Migration is the fact of moving. Birds migrate. People migrate. Edouard Glissant has discussed migration as a primary feature of *sapiens*, beings.<sup>45</sup> The plurality of the word focuses attention on the fact that migration often happens many times over, thereby making migrations a more appropriate word choice. As I mentioned, ‘migrations’ stands in for, overlaps, glosses over many other associated terminology, which have specific meanings, histories, and contemporary uses. Yet, because the word stands for many processes and experiences, it

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<sup>45</sup> Field notes, December 18, 2012. Bouchra Khalili said that Edouard Glissant wrote this in an essay called, “When the Wall Fell.” She created a video piece with this essay. She gave a talk at the Miami Art Museum on December 18, 2012.



is critical to recognize the shape of these differences. Forced migration, such as during the Atlantic slave trade, is not the same as a choice migration to attend college or find employment. People who flee because of political or religious circumstances may understand themselves to be in 'exile,' desiring a return, but temporarily excluded from their country of origin or the country they call home.

A common word used to define migrations now and in the past is 'diaspora.' The word has continually transformed. A classic definition of 'diaspora,' from Greek, means dispersion or dispersal. In reference to people's migrations, it has been used to describe or define one-way journeys from origin to new living location; dispersed from one common place to one or many new ones. 'Diaspora' has been used to define, for instance people of Jewish heritage as well as African heritage, referring to a dispersal from a common place into many new places. (Cohen 1997; Clifford 1994, 1997) An important feature in many definitions of 'diaspora' is that there is a sense of collective identity, and often an imagination of a homeland (Rushdie 1991). This homeland grounds the collective identity in a place. Robin Cohen explains that a diasporic claim "may be strong or weak, or boldly or meekly articulated in a given circumstance or historical period, but a member's adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of similar background" (Cohen 1997:ix). However, in my research, people's practices did not line up with these ideas of diasporic connectedness. The very idea of 'diaspora' though remains strong. Artist Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, who I discuss later in this chapter, explained that no matter how she feels about her own migration or diaspora,

“diaspora is an obligation” (personal communication with author, November 30, 2012)<sup>46</sup>. Rodriguez described diaspora as an obligation because as an artist who was born in Cuba and lives in the United States, she feels compelled to interpret, translate, and present how she understands being in diaspora to other people. Viewers of her work expect this of her and her work. ‘Diaspora’ to Rodriguez encompasses more than the classic definition of a one-way journey. It encompasses living in a certain state. Being in diaspora. I will come back to the idea of being and becoming in diaspora in the concluding remarks of this chapter.

At various points in time, social, cultural, and political movements have sought to unify people’s disparate experiences. The creation of diasporic consciousness serves political aims as well as social ones. For instance, Pan-African and Pan-Caribbean movements set out to unify people across national boundaries. The movements are organized with belief in power of the collective versus the individual. Tiffany Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelly explain that the term African diaspora, as it emerged in the 1950s and 60s, “served in the scholarly debates both as a political term, with which to emphasize unifying experiences of African peoples dispersed by the slave trade, and also as an analytical term that enabled scholars to talk about black communities across national boundaries” (2000:14). However, diasporic identities and movements have the potential to flatten differences that matter in people’s lives, like race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Further, the collective identity movements often do not account for differences in routes of migration, such as whether that migration was forced or voluntary (though either end of that spectrum does not necessarily tell the whole picture either).

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<sup>46</sup> Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez offered this comment after my presentation of an earlier draft of this chapter at the Cuban Heritage Collection symposium on November 30, 2012 at the University of Miami.

Complicating the notion of diaspora, Brent Hayes Edwards points to the *décalagé*, which he explains is a French word which resists translation, but can be understood as a “‘gap,’ ‘discrepancy,’ ‘time-lag,’ or ‘interval’” (2006:31). In reviving this term from the text of Léopold Senghor, he argues that we can use this framework to reinterpret diaspora as a space in between. Diaspora as neither here nor there. It is not one place over another. Edwards further explains that part of the word is *caler*, which means “‘to prop up or wedge something’”(32). So, while *décalagé* refers to a gap or lag, it also includes reference to propping something up and according to Edwards, “alludes to the taking away of something that was added in the first place” (32). This model attempts to point to the point in the exchange of people and culture (forced or voluntarily); something gone, but also something added. This concept recognizes the “double-consciousness” which W.E.B DuBois made well-known, but pushes us beyond the conception of merely understanding two identities or consciousnesses which coexist (1997[1903]). In the framework put forward by Edwards the term *décalagé* elucidates the often uneasy combination of this ‘double-ness.’ There is a collision that results in both absence and presence.

As diaspora and migrations involve movements, they involve particularities of place and at times a feeling of placelessness. What happens across places and times when one does not feel that they have a place where they belong? As Jacqueline Nassy Brown’s research in England articulates, there is “no actual space” called the African diaspora, it is mapped onto different locales (1998:73). Her research set out to understand “why and how black identity is constituted as the mutual opposite of English and British identities” (73). In England, she argues, “social spaces are constructed in tandem with the

processes of racial formation” (73), and African diasporic people are set outside of the nation even if they were born there, live there, and work there.

Sometimes, people do feel as if they have a particular place, a nation that they belong to, but they cannot live there for various reasons including political beliefs. Exile. Living in a state of exile shapes ideas about where ‘home’ is and the way one lives in the present. In *The Portable Island: Cubans at Home in the World*, Ruth Behar writes that “Cubans today can be found all over the map, living in places as far afield as Argentina, Amherst, and Australia, and Mantanzas, Michigan, and Moscow. We’re no longer torn simply between the island in the sea and the mirror island Cuban exiles built in Miami” (Behar and Suarez 2008:3). Yet, Behar asks, “Is it a comfort that our island is portable? Or does it make us inconsolable?” (ibid. 8) If the idea of Cuba as home remains with a person no matter where they are, is this a comfort or a haunting? In the same book, Jose Kozer begins his essay writing, “For a Jew like me, who’s lived over forty years outside his native land, being what’s called an exile is neither novel nor surprising or discouraging” (ibid. 37). Kozer, explains that

The exile can define himself as one who doesn’t have just the one tree, the one flower; it is given to him, rather, to know, to examine, to fall in love with, to use the multiplicity of flowers and trees, gathered in his incessant wandering to all points of the compass, such that the man born in the tropics ends up, one could say, singing of the snows of the north, and he sings of the flat-roofed masonry houses of his native place but equally of the peak-roofed northern houses, their copings and lofty mansards. (ibid. 37)

Behar and Kozer poetically illustrate the conflicted nature of exile. At once at home everywhere and nowhere.

### *Cuban Migration: A Snapshot as Example*

Even if we focus attention on the migrations between two countries, the US and Cuba, it is clear how diverse, complicated, and varied migration experiences can be. To generalize, following the Cuban Revolution, scholars have identified four primary “waves” or groups. The first beginning directly following the Revolution in 1960; the second starting in about 1965; the third in the 1980s; and the fourth in the 1990s. Each of these so-called “waves” is identified with a particular class, race, and occupation, with the generally wealthier Cubans arriving in the first wave, the second including greater economic diversity, the third being the time period that witnessed the Mariel boatlift, and the fourth was a time when more people arrived on the shores of Miami and Key West via rafts, or *balsas*.

During the early 1960s in the “first wave” of Cuban migration, about 2,000 people arrived by plane in Miami each week (Behar 2007:12). Most of those in the first wave were upper and upper-middle class business owners who would lose their businesses to the state (Pedraza 1996:265). Close ties between the U.S. and Cuba before the Revolution prompted many to go to the U.S., and most of this group settled in Miami. Some people who left in the early 1960s were not wealthy and fled the country on small boats or rafts, a practice that continues today. The “second wave” of Cuban migration started in about 1965 and included skilled craftspeople, small merchants, and other skilled workers. They left Cuba seeking greater economic opportunities. With the second wave, diversification of Cuban emigrants began to take shape. In the early 1960s, 31 percent of the Cubans who arrived in the U.S. were categorized as ‘professionals,’ and by 1970, that number dropped to 12 percent (Pedraza 1996:267).

The “third” and “fourth” waves of Cuban immigrants include those who came by boat. The third wave was prompted in 1980 by the storming of the Peruvian embassy in Havana to demand political asylum. Following that, Castro opened the Port of Mariel and 125,000 Cubans left the island (Pedraza 1996:269). In this chaotic exodus, many families in Miami came by boat to pick up their relatives. However, families who came often took many more people back to Miami including the people Castro had expunged from prisons and mental hospitals for the occasion. Additionally, many gay people were allowed to leave on via the Port of Mariel because they were also seen as counter-Revolutionary. Castro referred to the “Marielitos” as the “scum of the revolution” (Behar 1995:8) and much of that stereotype carried over into Miami’s sociopolitical climate. This group also included the highest proportion of blue collar workers and black people than before (Pedraza 1996: 279). The fourth wave took place from around 1991 – 1994. The boatlifts brought people not only to Miami, but to the Bahamas and Cayman Islands too. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba went into what is known as the “special period” – a system of wartime rationing during peace. Cubans were suffering economically more than ever before. Food shortages, electrical outages, and a lack of the most basic supplies characterized everyday life in Cuba during the 1990s. Riots on the streets of Havana prompted Castro to direct Cuban Coast Guard not to stop anyone from leaving (Pedraza 1996:273). Many people made makeshift boats or rafts, “balseros” and took to the sea in an attempt to make it to the U.S. Because of the “Wet Foot/Dry Foot” Policy any Cuban who reaches dry land in the U.S. is granted asylum, and a process through which to obtain residency and citizenship. Pedraza’s research continues up to the

early 2000s, and there is continual migration from Cuba to the US, though the routes and patterns have changed.

Artists, as a category, are not often accounted for in research on migration. The artists of Cuban descent that I worked with include: artists who were born in Cuba in the 1950s and moved here with their parents; artists who left Cuba in the 1960s and 70s to live in places including Puerto Rico, Miami, and New York; and artists who were born in the US to one or more Cuban parents. Some of the artists have never returned to Cuba, and some have made multiple trips.

Artist's individual migration and diaspora experiences have been shaped by factors including age, time of migration, gender, race, sexuality, political and social affinities and allegiances, and also by their decision to be artists. As artists they work with ideas and personal histories in visual form. These differences further clarify that 'Cuban migration' is not a one-dimensional idea. Even as it changes from person to person, it can also change throughout the course of a person's life. For instance, artist Ana Mendieta once romanticized notions of Cuba and the Revolution, but later she became slightly more disenchanted. Ana Mendieta was an artist born in Havana, Cuba in 1948. She and her sister were sent to the US by their parents on Operation Pedro Pan in 1961. She had distanced herself from her father whom she held in disregard for pushing her and her sister into exile, but later came to understand him more as a human being who made decisions that he believed in at the time to send she and her sister to the United States during Operation Pedro Pan. (Montane 1991)

### *Diaspora: Haiti and Living in a Floating Homeland*

In general, people from Cuba have a much different experience of living outside of the island than people from other Caribbean countries. For Haitian people, for instance, being in ‘diaspora’<sup>47</sup> is not the same as being an exile from Cuba, but still stands in a precarious position in relation to the country and people living in Haiti. People in diaspora are often viewed as suspicious to people living in Haiti, as they are the ones who left. Sometimes people living in Haiti think diaspora Haitians are not to be trusted, that they are arrogant, or they have become foreigners (Danticat 2011). At the same time many Haitian people rely on those in diaspora to send remittances of money and goods.

People living in diaspora constitute the 10<sup>th</sup> Department of Haiti, an entire political sector that lives outside of the terrain of the nation, or as Edwidge Danticat has written, the 10<sup>th</sup> Department is like a “floating homeland” (2011: 49). The notion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Department has various origin stories. One is that in 1991, then Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide developed the idea of the 10th Department, when a group of émigrés was visiting the country. Haiti’s terrain is divided up into nine sections called departments. Aristide said they should form a 10<sup>th</sup> Department since they were so important to Haiti. While it may have been a comment made in the spur of the moment, Aristide recognized the incredibly significant political, social, and economic power of the large number of Haitian people living outside out Haiti, in cities including Miami, Boston, New York, and Toronto. Economics were a primary motivating factor in creating more recognition for Haitian people residing outside of the country. In 1991 people in diaspora were sending over \$100 million to Haiti. After being recognized as a 10<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> I use this spelling of diaspora in this context because it refers specifically to a Haitian context, and this is the way it is spelled. Otherwise, I use the more common English spelling, diaspora.



Department, people in diaspora raised over \$600 million on April 28, 1991, to support development efforts. (Jean-Pierre 1994) In 2011, as Haiti was recovering from the earthquake in February of 2010, Haitians living in diaspora were granted the right to vote.

Danticat writes that diaspora is a word of “multilayered meaning” (2011:49). Diaspora can mean all of the Haitian people living outside of Haiti. Diaspora can be used as a neutral identifier, but also as a label or insult. Danticat reflects on her “own personal experiences as an immigrant and a writer [include] being called *dyaspora* when expressing an opposing political point of view in discussions with friends and family members living in Haiti, who knew that they could easily silence me by saying, ‘What do you know? You’re living outside. You’re a *dyaspora*’” (2011:49). Other times when visiting Haiti, “a stranger who wanted to catch my attention would call out ‘*Dyaspora!*’ as though it were a title like *Miss*, *Ms.*, *Mademoiselle*, or *Madame*” (2011:50). In everyday gatherings, conversations, and social events, ‘members of the *dyaspora* would be classified--justifiably or not as arrogant, insensitive, overbearing, and pretentious people who were eager to reap the benefits of good jobs and political positions in times of stability in a country that they’d fled and stayed away from during difficult times” (2011:50). Danticat wrote that when people made these remarks she would “bow [her] head and accept these judgments when they were expressed, feeling guilty about my own physical distance from a country I had left at the age of twelve during a dictatorship that has forced thousands to choose between exile or death” (2011:50). Justifying her position, she explained that she had little choice in the matter of leaving or staying in Haiti. She was, after all, just a child. Yet, when she returns to Haiti, she bears the mark of a “foreign being but still not a *blan*” (50 – 51). *Blan* is the Kreyol word for foreigner,

which literally means ‘white’ but is used to differentiate Haitians from non-Haitians. Being *diaspora* is almost, but quite like being *blan* in the minds of some people living in Haiti. Her friend, colleague, and well known radio commentator Jean Dominique, in whose memory she wrote the essay, “I Am Not a Journalist,” offered these words: “‘The *Diaspora* are people with their feet planted in both worlds . . . There’s no need to be ashamed of that. There are more than a million of you. You are not alone’” (51). In the telling of these personal experiences, Danticat offers nuance to the word and experience of *diaspora*, and reveals her own conflicted feelings about being *diaspora* and living outside of Haiti.

As my research is concerned with a broad array of people and experiences through a focus on the ‘Caribbean,’ it is not possible to account for each and every possible definition of migration or migration experiences in this text. In this brief overview, I wanted to point out some ways people move from place to place and how scholars have thought about these movements. Miami presents an interesting (because it is complicated) place to contemplate migrations because there are many people living in the city who have come for various reasons and live their day-to-day lives in various forms.

### *Licking the Earth and Smelling the Rain: Art and Migration*

When I began to consider how contemporary artists in Miami were addressing Caribbean migration and migrations in general, I initially looked for the elements I expected would be common in artwork about migration. Water. Borders. Nostalgia. Memories. Home. I asked questions about how artists defined home, how they related to home, where they considered home to be, and I did not get very far with this line of

questioning. The artists wanted to talk about what they were working on now, where they are now, and aspects of their personal history that has informed their lives and their work as artists. In an effort to contextualize my research on contemporary art and Caribbean migration, I turned to local archives and histories.

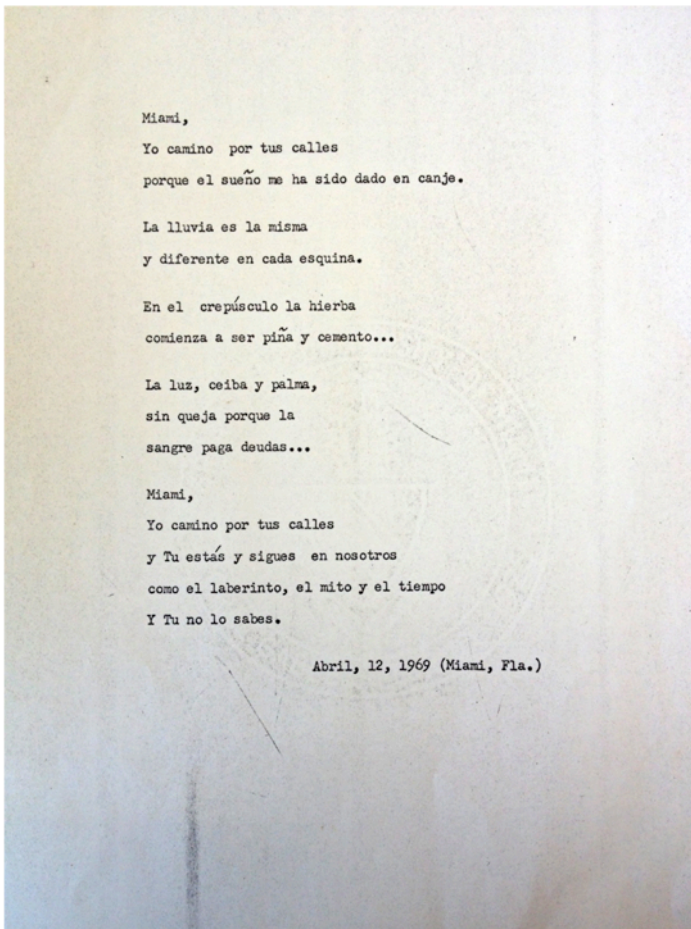


Figure 4-1. "Miami" by Ana Rosa Nuñez, 1969, Ana Rosa Nuñez Collection, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

While researching in the archival materials at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami, I came across a poem by Ana Rosa Nuñez. "*Miami, Yo camino tus calles/porque el sueño me ha sido dado en canje*" (Miami, I walk your streets because the dream has been given to me in an exchange). In the poem, Nuñez writes about traversing

Miami's landscape. She goes on to reflect on the rain and the street corners. I bring this poem to the foreground because Nuñez's writing and poetry about Miami are as much a reflection of her experience in the city as they are of her experience of being an "exile" from Cuba – of the possible exchange she might be referencing. Nuñez was born in Cuba in 1926, and came to Miami in 1965, several years after start of the Cuban Revolution. She began work at the University of Miami library not long after arriving in the city, and was instrumental in building what is now the Cuban Heritage Collection. Like many people who migrated to the United States from Cuba in the 1960s, Nuñez felt herself to be an exile from Cuba, a country where she likely wanted to live, but did not feel as if she had a place. This poem, "Miami," and many of her other works show her visceral engagement with the city that she lived in. She walked the streets. She felt the rain. She participated in Miami's culture and everyday life. It is from the actions of everyday life, the walking the streets, the trips to the grocery store, the cooking dinner, the way this place smells after the rain as compared to somewhere else, that I want to begin a contemplation about what it means to make art in diaspora.

The theme of migration in artwork has often been depicted through reference to the landscape. For instance, water, the sea, or the ocean are prevalent. Water stands in for the great divide between here and there. In the catalogue for the exhibition, *Surrounded by Water*, Marc Mitchell explained, that artists have incorporated the theme of water into their artwork "by means of autobiography, maps, emigration, archeology, religion, and politics" (Remba 2008:7). Water is the force that connects and divides. It is part of our environment as much as it has been a metaphor - especially here in Miami, where we can look out over the Atlantic to imagine a Havana that lies less than 300 miles away.

Mitchell further highlighted that “Water has been a constant presence in Cuban visual culture and is the heart of *Cubania* (the essence of everything Cuban)” (ibid.). Water is certainly a provocative theme, especially when we think of the experiences of Caribbean migrants and the overwhelming presence of water and the sea in people’s journeys and in the images that come to define these journeys for the migrants and the public viewing them.

Water is prevalent in the works of well-known artists including Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Jose Bedia, Edouard Duval-Carrie, among others. The artists depict water and migration through their use of the color blue, lines that represent waves, people in between land masses, and by combining symbols from the US and the Caribbean. Campos-Pons highlights multiple migrations including her own from Cuba, and her ancestral migration from Africa. Her work draws attention to memories of migrations as well as her familial history. The piece, *Estudio Para Elevata*, shows an abstracted waterscape, suggesting the tumult of migrations by sea. Another artist, Quisqueya Henriquez used actual seawater to produce this work, *Helado de Agua de Mar Caribe*. The ice cream was salty, not sweet, and the piece evoked the sea and also stereotypes about the Caribbean and Caribbean people.



Figure 4-2. Quisqueya Henriquez, *Helado de Agua de Mar Caribe (Caribbean Sea Water Ice Cream)*, 2002.

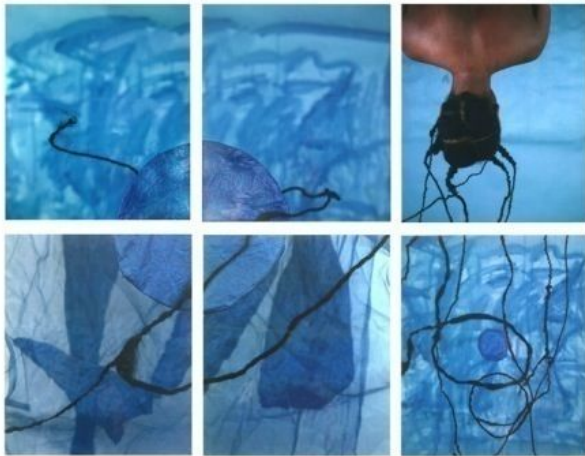


Figure 4-3. Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Estudio para Elevata / Study for Elevata*, 6 Polaroid prints, 24 x 20 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches, 2002.

Then, there is the other side of the journey. Reaching land. What do people do when they're here? How do they navigate and negotiate daily life? Perhaps it is such a weighted journey that people have tended to focus on the travel, the divide, the force of the water, and not the arrival or even the returns. There has been more of a focus on the migration, the movement itself, than on the living and being in a place. Yet, this is the goal for many people. To find a place, even if it means finding a place over and over

again. Reaching dry land, the man in this news photo from the Cuban Heritage Collection, kisses the ground. “A kiss for free soil,” reads the text on the reverse of the print. The ground is clearly important.



Figure 4-4. Cuban man kissing the ground upon his arrival to the United States, 1967, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

When I looked closer though, I began to see that literature, imagery, and other text has touched on aspects of finding footing. Scholars including Ruth Behar, Joseph Roach, and Salamishah Tillet write about the powerful connection between the landscape and memory, where certain sites are imbued with memory because of events that transpired there. In his memoir, *Before Night Falls*, writer Reinaldo Arenas wrote of his early connection with the earth. “I was two,” he wrote, “I was standing there, naked. I bent down and licked the earth. The first taste I remember is the taste of the earth” (1993:1). Artist Ana Mendieta is known for her iconic *Siluetas* series from the 1970s in which she imprinted her body into the landscape, and she produced many other works that show her special connection with the earth.

Mendieta's artist statement in 1981 includes a poem that describes how she felt about living away from Cuba and how that influenced her work.

Pain of Cuba  
body I am  
my orphanhood I live.

In Cuba when you die  
the earth that covers us  
speaks.

But here,  
covered by the earth whose prisoner I am  
I feel death palpitating underneath the earth.

And, so,  
as my whole being is filled with want of Cuba  
I go on to make my mark upon the earth,  
to go on is victory.  
Ana Mendieta, June 1, 1981 (Viso 2008:199)



Figure 4-5. Ana Mendieta, photo documentation from the *Siluetas* series, c. 1970s



Kaira Cabañas writes that in the *Siluetas* series, Mendieta “conflated land with home” in an “attempt to reconstitute ties to her home and assuage the pain of exile” (1999:14). In 1982, there was an exhibition of Mendieta’s work surrounding the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami. Works in the exhibition included “Body Tracks” and “Anima.” The invitation<sup>48</sup> provides a sketched map locating the works in the terrain of the University of Miami. In the exhibition invitation she expressed how she felt her work communicated a connection between herself and the landscape. In her words, “For the last twelve years I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body.” She goes on to explain that this dialogue is necessary because she had “been torn from [her] homeland (Cuba) during [her] adolescence.” She describes this as akin to being “cast out from the womb” which she likens to “Nature.” By creating artwork that engages the landscape, Mendieta sought to “re-establish the bonds that unite [her] to the Universe.” Mendieta viewed herself as an exile, a person forced from her homeland. Her way of dealing with what Cabanas called “the pain of exile,” (1999:14) was to create works within the landscape where she was living or visiting. Connecting herself with the land helped her feel like she belonged there, or at least that she could belong somewhere. As she wrote in the invitation, “These obsessive acts of re-asserting my ties with the earth are really a manifestation of my thirst for being.”

In 1981, she also completed several works of art in Miami. The works she created in Miami, though locally prized, are not well known in the larger arts scene. One was a work off the coast of Key Biscayne, an area just south of the city of Miami. The piece

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<sup>48</sup> Invitation to Ana Mendieta’s exhibition at the Lowe Art Museum, Helen Kohen Papers, Archives of American Art. I have an image of this invitation, but it is for research purposes only. It is in Helen Kohen’s papers at the Archives of American Art. I came across it in 2011 – 2012 while I was a fellow. The quotes are drawn from the invitation itself.

was titled *Ochún*, and consisted of two sand islands shaped into an hour-glass figure in the waters off of Key Biscayne. Ochún is the Afro-Cuban goddess of water, and in Cuba represents the Virgin of Charity. Curator, Olga Viso comments that the piece itself represents Mendieta's experience of living outside of her home country. Similarly to Mendieta, "the island is bifurcated and through them travel the same waters that ebb and flow daily between Florida and Cuba irrespective of the boundaries imposed by politics" (2008:201).

Another piece Mendieta produced in Miami in 1981 was *Ceiba Fetish*. This piece was one of her early experiments with trees with her mind set on creating more permanent pieces in the future. For *Ceiba Fetish*, Mendieta visited a sacred site for santeros in Little Havana; the ceiba tree located in Cuban Memorial Park. Mendieta etched a male figure into the tree and she used hair collected from local barber shops to highlight the trees roots, knots, and branches. She worked on this piece with the help of friends, local artist and curator Cesar Trasobares, and architect Juan Lezcano.<sup>49</sup> (Viso 2008:280)

The groundwork, so to speak, for my ideas about how artists think through migrations and diasporas, already existed in the archive though this connection with the landscape has not been addressed to the extent of the water. There are four artists I worked with during my fieldwork in Miami whose work brings these ideas to life in visual form: Antonia Wright, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, Kristie Stephenson, and Lydia

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<sup>49</sup> Mendieta's work in Miami is discussed in the text cited here by Olga Viso. Additionally, I attended an event at the de la Cruz Collection in Miami on February 4, 2010, called "Among Friends." The event was a "conversation between Rosa de la Cruz, Peter Menendez, Craig Robins and Cesar Trasobares about their friendship with Ana Mendieta, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Carlos Alfonzo. The participants bring interesting perspectives to this exchange of ideas as they share memories, anecdotes and insights as collectors, culture activists and fellow artist," as described in the promotional materials. Cesar Trasobares is working on a memoir, which will likely include some of his experiences with Mendieta in Miami.

Rubio. The artists come from a range of personal and artistic backgrounds. While they may know each other or know of each other, they do not work closely together.

Therefore, I found the common threads between their works striking as they present ideas that must be grappled with since they appear over and over again in artists' works. On the one hand, Wright and Rodriguez actively engage the landscape in the production and display of their works, and on the other, Stephenson and Rubio visualize a detachment from their surroundings in a way that engages the landscape, but from a perspective of being set apart from it. After a discussion of each of the artists and their works, I will close with an analysis of how their work helps us to understand contemporary forms of migration, living in diaspora, and artistic production. For each of the artists, I will give a brief overview of their work, and then focus on one piece.

*Antonia Wright: I Scream, Therefore I Exist*

Antonia Wright was born in Miami in 1979, to a Cuban-born mother and American-born father. She earned her Bachelors from the University of Montana, a Masters in Fine Arts in poetry from the New School University in New York City, and has also studied at the International Center of Photography. Wright is currently based in Miami and has worked out of studios at the Art Center South Florida on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach, the Deering Estate, and the Lotus House Women's Shelter.

Wright's work is, in her words, "process-oriented" and she often uses her own body in the creation of the works, along the lines of artists like Ana Mendieta, Marina Abramovic, and Janine Antoni. She views her works as "social critique," and she calls cultural phenomena into question; things she describes as "bizarre" occurrences in the

world. (Wright 2012) Making art is her way of making sense out of these things. Some of her critiques have involved Fidel Castro and the Cuban government, the social norms of the *quince* in Miami's culture, and the economy in relation to the arts in the United States. She puts her background in poetry and writing into practice in her visual work by clearly presenting singular ideas in powerful, visceral forms. As Wright explained, "My response is always with a lot of urgency and it always brings everything to the body" (Ortiz 2011). Wright has thrown her body into a stack of books in the piece, *Job Creation in a Bad Economy* (2010), kissed on an escalator in the piece *Love on an Escalator* (2012), and smoked cigars until she got sick in *You Make Me Sick* (2008). In the work *I Scream, Therefore I Exist* (2011), Wright screamed underwater in various bodies of water in Miami and the Bahamas.



Figure 4-6. Antonia Wright, *I Scream, Therefore I Exist*, film still.

In Antonia Wright's performance and video piece, *I Scream, Therefore I Exist*,<sup>50</sup> the work can be seen as bridge between the ideas of interacting on the land and in water. As we can see from this film still, the video image captures the water of the swimming pool and the manicured landscape in the upper third of the screen.

The work is both a performance and a video. While only a few people would ever witness the performance, Wright creates the video piece to stand a work of art on its own. Viso describes Mendieta's videos in a similar manner, explaining that Mendieta's videos are performative, not performances. The video works Mendieta created were documentations of her actions, her performances in the landscape, but they did not require an audience at the moment of their creation. Wright's *I Scream, Therefore I Exist* did not have an audience per se, when it was created (besides her boyfriend Ruben Millares who shot the video and whoever happened to pass by while they were making it). It was intended more as an artwork with performative elements than a work of performance art. Some of Wright's other work, particularly her more recent work, such as *Drinks On Me* (2012) engages more with performance in front of an audience. When exhibited in a gallery space, *I Scream, Therefore I Exist* is shown on a flat screen monitor. When I saw it in the Frederic Snitzer Gallery in 2011, there were two monitors displaying the work, and viewers could see Wright swim between them. The monitors became the frames for the moving image, but the frames were not hard and fast boundaries. Like water, Wright moved between them.

The title of her work evokes another connection to both migration and the land. "I scream therefore I exist" is a line from Reinaldo Arenas's memoir *Before Night Falls*.

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<sup>50</sup> Wright produced this piece specifically for the show, *Aesthetics and Values* at Florida International University; a show that is curated by university students each year. They select artists in the Miami area whose work they like, and participate in the process of curating the show.

Arenas was a writer born in Cuba in 1943. He faced pressure and persecution in Cuba because of his sexuality and his profession as a writer. He ardently pursued writing and published pieces while living in Cuba by secretly giving his writing to others who could transport the text out of the country. He was among the hundreds of thousands who left Cuba during the Mariel boatlift. He lived in Miami for a short time, and then lived in New York. In the section of the memoir where Arenas writes these words, he discusses about the problems of being a writer wanting to write and tell his truth and the struggles of living as a Cuban exile. He wrote, “in exile, we have no country to represent us, we live as if by special permission, always in danger of being rejected” (1993:301). The feeling of being unsettled permeates the memoir, and stands in stark contrast to his earliest memories of feeling connected to the earth and the soil.

In the video performance Wright enters into swimming pools in Miami and The Bahamas. As she dips below the surface, she lets out a scream. While she screams below the surface of the water, the people who are above the water do not hear her. As she explains in her artist statement, “When one screams underwater, those above cannot hear and are oblivious . . . I am interested in how people can have completely different realities existing at the same time” (Wright 2011). Wright draws attention to the schisms between worlds; the reality of the two women in the frame and also between land and water. The swimming pool is not the ocean, but a mediated part of the landscape. It is a body of water built into the ground

Evoking a line from Arenas’s memoir, Wright has done more than find an interesting literary quote to draw from. As an artist with a diasporic connection to Cuba, I see this as one way that she can connect with Arenas, who was a Cuban exile and an

artist living in the US. Also, in the work, Wright connects with Miami, the city where she lives, but has left in different points in her life. Wright's bodily way of connecting with space and place forms a bond, sometimes *forces* a bond as we can interpret from the scream she belts out under water. The fact that this scream is underwater and goes unnoticed by people above the water relates to the way Arenas experienced some of his time in Miami. He arrived full of hope that he we would find the freedom he sought, but at times he was belting out screams underwater, unheard, and yet those screams still meant that he was alive.

This video still shown above is from the performance Wright did in the Bahamas. I originally thought this piece was shot in Miami, but when I gave a presentation of this work, Wright told me that the video that she has shown most frequently is the one she shot in the Bahamas, where her grandmother currently lives. The difference in geography marks Wright's own position in relation to the Caribbean and movements between spaces, and also shows how Miami's own landscape is at times indiscernible from spaces throughout the Caribbean. Is this pool in Miami or Nassau, and how much does it matter?

### *Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez: Elusive Landscape*

Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez is, in her words, a “film, video and installation artist working with various manifestations of projected imagery” (Rodríguez 2012). Born in Cuba, she moved to the United States with her family in the 1960s, and they settled in New York. Rodríguez grew up in New York, and later lived and studied in San Francisco before moving to Miami just over 10 years ago. She earned her Bachelors in Film Production from San Francisco State University, and has studied with artists including

Trinh T. Minh-ha, Barbara Hammer, and Marlon Riggs. Rodriguez has also participated in many residencies and workshops including the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York and the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

Rodriguez's work combines hand-crafted 16mm film with video, sound, public landscapes, and performance. The medium of the 16mm film features prominently in her work, and Rodriguez works and reworks the medium many times over to create her eventual pieces. She either shoots new film footage or uses existing archival film. Then she scratches, paints, and otherwise alters the film creating new imagery. In doing this, she challenges common ideas of the precious-ness of the film as an object. She transforms actual film into art itself, and then that is projected in various environments ranging from building walls to city parks to peep-show style booths. The venue emphasizes the content of the work and alters the viewing experience. Subjects of particular interest to Rodriguez include gender, sexuality, popular culture, cultural norms, and performance. Her work also shows a connection with Afro-Cuban rituals in the Yoruba tradition which are often brought into her works through the soundtracks. In the work, *Elusive Landscape*, for instance, the soundtrack includes bata drumming. Some of her other recent works include: *Sonambula* (2011) which uses found film footage to explore the concept of sleepwalking, and *Ellos y Nosotros: Them and Us* (2010), an installation consisting of two empty and disassembled birdcages and a film projection of birds on the ceiling.





Figure 4-7. Map of *Elusive Landscape* locations, prepared by author, 2010.

Rodriguez’s piece, *Elusive Landscape*, was a public art project that consisted of “hand-crafted 16mm film loops depicting natural landscapes and [the films were] projected directly into the landscapes themselves” (Rodriguez 2012). This work was shown in 2010. Rodriguez shot and projected in five different city parks in various Miami neighborhoods. Each installation also featured unique soundscapes for each site created by experimental composer and sound designer Ricardo Lastre. In Legion Park, for example, a bouncing basketball and a whistle interrupted the musical soundtrack of chanting, percussion, and instrumental sections. Rodriguez’s close attention to the qualities of each space and the differences among them shows how she thought about the personality of each site. What does this park look like? sound like? feel like?

The five parks were disparate in spatial location and also in the surrounding populations. Miami is primarily a car dependent city, and though it is the only city in the country to encompass two national parks, green space is a rare sight. Part of Rodriguez’s project

then was to utilize the green space and then actually get people out to the various city parks; which often meant crossing racial, ethnic, and class lines drawn by neighborhood. This slide depicts the location of the five parks: Arch Creek Park in North Miami, Legion Memorial Park in city of Miami/Lemon City, E.G. Sewell Park in the Miami River area, Miami Beach Botanical Garden in Miami Beach, and Vizcaya Gardens in the South Miami/Brickell area.



Figure 4-8. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, installation of *Elusive Landscape* at Legion Memorial Park, Miami, Florida, 2010.

Experiencing this work in person I was immediately drawn to the performative aspects of this work including the performance of the projectors shining their bright lights with colorful images onto trees, bushes, and grass. The projectors hummed loudly and their positioning was slightly different in each park lending to the feeling that they were

choreographed, as if in a dance performance. Audience members were an important part of the performance of the piece as they navigated around the park during the installations. There were a few regular people at each installment (other artists and friends of the artist), and then the audience changed with each event. Discussing the audience participation at each event, what most compelled Rodriguez were the people who wandered into the park, perhaps as a matter of course in their day, and when they saw these unusual projections they made their way through the park to see what was happening.<sup>2</sup> A reporter for the *New Times* expressed her thrill of seeing both people and art in the park, writing “We don't know what will surprise you more -- the dancing, flickering images bouncing off the oak trees at Legion Park or the fact that there are actually people in a Miami-Dade park” (McCorquodale 2010). Many people in the neighborhoods surrounding the parks had likely not experienced contemporary art prior to this engagement, as one spectator explained in a video interview. Even if they did go to a museum, they still would not experience art in this way because it's in the park. And that was part of her point – to engage a broad audience which isn't possible in traditional art world settings where access is limited by admission prices, cultural cache, or general lack of awareness and education about the arts.



Figure 4-9. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, film still from *Elusive Landscape*, 2010.

Looking more closely at the films themselves, we can see that they enact performances on the landscape by projecting the landscape back onto the landscape itself. Rodriguez's marks and scratching on the film are combined with clips of found film and the soundtrack composed by Lastre. The combination of the projection of films in city parks leads to a reconsideration of "the natural," "the public," and how we use "public space." Who are the parks for? Who do we encounter? In this clip we can see how she calls attention to certain elements of the parks and the surrounding space such as the tugboat or a particular tree. In this way, she calls attention to what may otherwise go unnoticed. As people make their way around the installation, they are also sometimes made to be part of the projection as they are caught in the light of the projector with the film then projected on them and their body rather than the surrounding landscape. The ephemeral quality of this project is akin to music or dance performance. It is impossible to recreate in words or images, though I have tried to show some of them

here. Its life is in the actual event. However, these spaces throughout the city now hold the memories of these events (Roach 1996). I know for myself, when I visit each of these parks now, I remember the experience of visiting during *Elusive Landscape*, and the park is forever changed.

As an artist who spent her early years in different cities, this piece also functions to create Rodriguez's mark, her filmic footprint, even if ephemeral, in the city. Her use of a wide geographic terrain illustrates the breadth of this engagement.

*Kristie Stephenson: HIBI Visa Girl/Indentured Laborer*

The stories the artists told me as I visited their home or they visited mine revolved around their life stories and their artwork. As I was interested specifically in themes of migration, I also asked questions about their own or their family's migrations. Yet, for almost the entire span of my fieldwork, most of the artists I met with and interviewed did not address migration directly in their artwork. The work I had seen ranged vastly in subject matter, style, media, and while some artists addressed their personal and familial histories in one form or another, little, if any of the work presented migration - as a passage between places - directly. That is, until I met Kristie Stephenson, and she showed me a piece entitled *HIBI Girl* (2009).



Figure 4-10. Kristie Stephenson, *H1B Visa Girl/Indentured Laborer*, Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 60 inches.

I met Kristie Stephenson in the summer of 2011. For me, this was late in the game considering my official fieldwork time period was nearly finished. But, it had been difficult to find artists of Jamaican background. So when I learned of Stephenson's work, we set up an interview. As with the other interviews, I asked about her background and her her own migration to the United States from Jamaica. She told me how she left Jamaica as a teenager to attend the Rhode Island School of Design. She studied architecture and then began work as an architect in Miami. Her experience of migration to the United States as a student seemed to flow fairly easily. She enjoyed her classes, her

work, and her peers. Then, as she transitioned to life as an architect things changed. She moved to Miami because of its proximity to Jamaica, to be close to her brother who lived in the city, and for the warmer weather. However, as an architect, she no longer had time for the painting and drawing she had done as an architecture student. The art part of architecture slowly slid away as project management and client relations took center stage. Yet, she felt as if she had to continue in her professional work as an architect as it was the pathway to her very presence in the US. She was on an H1B1 visa. Stephenson did find her way back to art, and she created paintings using acrylic on board and sometimes combining other materials such as fabric into the paintings, resulting in pieces which are structural in form.

On the day that I interviewed Stephenson, we sat at my dining table in my Florida room. She had brought a stack of her paintings and samples of the jewelry pieces she was working on. As she pulled out each work, a story of memory, history, and personal relationships unfolded. Each painting she creates is done so with a specific intention, and often with a specific person in mind. When we arrived at this one, Stephenson told me, “I’ve called her Indentured Laborer and when I’m really mad, I call her H1B1 Visa, that’s a work visa that I was on when I’m here” (interview with author, June 9, 2011). Stephenson’s painting depicts a female figure bound by her visa. In the painting we see a woman in the center, wrapped by a cocoon-like covering in what appears to be a cream color fabric. The figure hovers above the bottom edge of the painting, not quite touching the edge of the frame. As Stephenson writes in her artist statement, “[h]er clothing references body wrapping; figure uprooted and hovering in place, not yet planted. Her eyes convey hope to the future generations that will come after her” (Stephenson 2009).

The main figure is in the center and in the foreground. The abstract background shows no discernible image. It could be understood as a field, as there appears to be a horizon line. The background also has two diagonal lines extending from the figure toward the horizon line. The lines in the background serve to ground the female form in a landscape, though not an identifiable one. This could indicate a choice between paths – either in the present or in the past. They are behind the woman and now she is bound. Stephenson indicates that the woman is bound by her choices, choices she made in the past.

Stephenson explained that “in this [piece], I’m thinking of my grandmother’s ancestry. My maternal grandmother. She is half-Chinese. So, I’m thinking of her coming here. Or, no, her ancestors. Because what happened is, after slavery was abolished, none of the African population in Jamaica wanted to work on the plantations anymore” (interview with author, June 9, 2011). In the painting, the female figure represents both the artist and her grandmother. Stephenson was thinking of the ways her family migrated to Jamaica from China for work, and the way she migrated to the United States from Jamaica for work. She went into further detail:

Kristie Stephenson: So, the government brought in indentured laborers from India, first, and then China. So, I’m thinking of her family, or her ancestors coming to the New World, Jamaica, in the hopes of making a better life. And then I’m thinking of my role, coming from Jamaica, in Miami, um, to do the same thing. So, that painting is like um, it’s like calling on the wisdom of your ancestors, and knowing that they know that things will get better. Cause if you look at the entire Caribbean population, I think we brought so much like the music and the culture, like reggae music. It’s it’s it’s uh, an optimistic answer to, what? To what was going on. And, if you think of the entire Caribbean, or if I look at Jamaica, where we had a history of slavery and uh, people being brought in as indentured laborers and then when you look at the whole community now – how colorful it is, and how unique, those horrible things that happened in the past have grown into something wonderful, like reggae music, you know. So, um, that’s what I’m thinking about. And she’s bound because um, it’s the feeling of being bound by contract, you know tied, in her case, her ancestors were tied to the land. I guess they had to work a very long time before they were free to do what they wanted, and um, it’s me bound, bound by contract to a firm – not being free to move around.



Lara Stein Pardo: Right, because they sponsored your H1B1?

KS: Yeah, and um, yeah, just being bound and not feeling very comfortable to really speak my mind, which I really wanted to do. (Interview with author, June 9, 2011)

Stephenson's piece reflects her own experience of feeling un-rooted in the United States because of her temporary and uncertain visa status. At the will of her employer she could have to uproot herself and return to Jamaica. Stephenson's work stands in contrast to many of the other artists' work I came to know during my fieldwork. She directly addressed her experience with migration in this piece in particular. Many of the artists expressed that their lives and rootedness in Miami was always in question, always in flux. Yet, there was also a manner in which many of the artists actively sought to engage the city in their art making. Stephenson's piece shows how detached the artist felt from her life in Miami. The figure does not reach the edge of the painting. She is floating. She cannot find solid ground. Stephenson's very real issues with visa status challenged any possible sense of finding a place, or at least one she could feel rooted in. As she illustrated in her painting, she felt bound by restrictions on her movement and the legal claims to her whereabouts. While Wright and Rodriguez produced works that show an engagement with the city, Stephenson's piece shows a separation from the landscape.

*Lydia Rubio: Arcadia at 2PM*

Lydia Rubio is another artist whose work depicts a separation from the landscape while at the same time engaging it in her work. Rubio was born in Havana in 1946. Rubio studied, lived, and worked in Boston, Florence, Gainesville, and New York before

moving to Miami. She has been living and working in Miami since 1987. When I arrived at a Rubio's home and studio for an interview I was greeted by her work immediately. The gate of the home she owns in the southwest area of Miami, near Coral Gables, is her own work of art. A typical iron-style gate, but with Rubio's own design. Rubio's work varies in medium and includes drawing, painting, installation, and public work. She has a background in architecture. She earned her Bachelors in Architecture from the University of Florida, and her Masters in Architecture from Harvard University. She worked as a professional architect for a time until she, similarly to Stephenson, came to realize that the reason for getting involved with architecture, the art and design part, was no longer part of her practice. Rubio works full time as an artist, and has also taught and lectured at various institutions including Parsons School of Art and Design. Rubio's work has garnered support in the form of grants and residencies from the State of Florida Individual Artist Fellowship, the Cintas Foundation, and the Pollock Krasner Foundation. She has worked on major public art commissions including for a gate design at Women's Park in Miami, and for two sculptural installations at the Raleigh-Durham Airport in North Carolina.

It was the images of the installations at the Raleigh-Durham Airport that drew me into Rubio's work. It was a Tuesday evening, part of an ArtTable (Miami edition) event Books and Books in Coral Gables. Rubio described her artistic practice and showed images of the sculptural pieces in the airport. The latest piece, *The Gate of Air* (2011) is a large-scale stainless steel spiral shell that spans at least two stories. The first piece for the airport, *The Gate of Earth* (2008) is a large-scale tree sculpture and terrazzo design. The tree passes through the wall of the airport so that it is at once an indoor and outdoor

sculpture. I sat in the audience mesmerized by her work. The scale was impressive, and I was also drawn to her ideas. Rubio has a way of working that touched upon some of the themes I was learning about in my research – migration, home, nature, memory – but she was working in a way that I had not seen before. Her large architectural pieces in public spaces impressed me. I was drawn to the way her sculptures were grand in scale and maintained softness through her use of curving lines. After the presentation I introduced myself, told her about my project, and made plans for an interview.

Rubio works out of a studio adjacent to her home. Her studio is filled with her artwork, handmade books, papers, binders, paints, and other art making tools. Rubio's art practice is structured, drawing on her background in architecture. She usually plans her pieces in advance with sketches. These sketches form books that accompany finished works whether they are sculptures, drawings, or paintings. As Rubio describes in her artist statement, there are certain elements in her work. These form "a system, not a theme" (2012). On her website she lists the following components of the system:

- series structured like a novel, disrupted narratives, chapters with significant numbers
- the image fragmented, in specified re-installations
- words and texts structuring a single work or series, spelling out phrases incorporated throughout the various works
- diverse themes or subject matter
- use of sculpture as object to be represented in paintings or drawings
- technically elaborate, detailed works (Rubio 2012)

This system is apparent in her works. She often combines image and text, sometimes drawing heavily on the text as image in works like *Miami-Geneva* or *Bogota*. Both of these works spell out the names of the cities, with one letter on each page. Each page

includes more text and other hand-drawn images.



Figure 4-11. Lydia Rubio, *Bogota*, Ink on Paper.

Rubio's works represent her attention to both form and concept, and she holds true to her system which explains that she will produce works that are diverse in subject matter. The works also have layers upon layers on meaning. There is symbolism in the imagery, the titles, and the texts. Only some of which I can interpret. This adds to the mystery.

The sculptural piece, *Arcadia at 2 PM* began as this sketch, which is now it's own artwork.



Figure 4-12. Lydia Rubio, *Bird in a Box*, ink on paper, 1998. Pictured here displayed at Cremata Gallery in 2010. Photograph by author.

The image above is from the show, *Identity Papers: 1993 – 2010*, that presented a retrospective view of Rubio's work at the Cremata Gallery in Little Havana. The show consisted of thirty works on paper and one sculpture. The works on paper included paintings, drawings, and book-like objects. The singular sculpture in the show was *Arcadia at 2 PM*, featuring a bird sitting on top of a metal cage. The piece was to the right of the gallery's entryway, and though not directly in the line of site as I walked in the door, I was immediately drawn to it. The bird's body was constructed of precise and swooping silver lines of the aluminum. The bird's body was light because the shape was formed by material that did not form a complete shape, but left noticeable gaps. It was as if the air necessary for flight could still pass through the body of the bird. Yet, thought

the bird looked like it was ready to take flight, looking closer I noticed that the bird was not just sitting on top of the cage it was tied to it. Bound to the cage.



Figure 4-13. Lydia Rubio, *Arcadia at 2 PM*, bird cage, ceramic, aluminum, and oil on panel, 2001.

The title of the work, 'Arcadia' references a place in Greece that during the time of the Renaissance was heralded as a place of wilderness. Wild and free, the terrain was thought to be unspoiled by the human touch. Rubio draws inspiration from the period of the Renaissance, and we see that in this piece through her titling of the work, and also the backdrop. In the backdrop there is a triangle with letters spelling out 'Arcadia' and there is a number '2' in the space where it would be on a clock. During the Renaissance, artists like Leonardo de Vinci were fascinated by systems of the human body, numbers, and language. Renaissance artists also turned attention to humanistic concerns and drew

inspiration from literature and history. Rubio, in her works, seeks to carry on these interests and we see traces of this in this work.

In the gallery notes, Enrico Mario Santí, Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Texas, writes that

‘Arcadia at 2 p.m.,’ the show’s single sculpture, could well serve as the emblem for Lydia Rubio’s signature statement. It depicts a proud bird sitting atop her metal cage. Inside lies a resigned island-like mound, sitting against a blue background, be it sea or sky, that shows in turn, the spectral version of a Masonic pyramid inscribed with the baffling title that recalls Cabrera Infante’s famous book on cinema. *Et in Arcadia ego* was the classical topic in Renaissance painting showing the ultimate triumph of Death. Rubio’s ‘identity papers’ tell us of yet another triumph: how Beauty, Art, and of course Freedom, conquer all. (2010)

Santí points to the contradictions within the piece. The bird is “proud” as it sits on top of the cage, and yet it is also trapped or tied to the “island-like mound” inside the cage.

Though it is not actually in the cage, the bird cannot flee from the island. The bird is tethered to a large rock, resembling an island. This island could be Cuba, Rubio’s home country, but the island structure is non-descript. She leaves interpretation open by abstracting the island. The blue background inside the cage forms only half of the backdrop for the artwork since it is only inside the cage. The bird is not in front of a backdrop, but sits above. As Santí notes, it is unclear whether the blue backdrop is the sky or the sea. Rubio engages two tropes of migration at the same time by blurring the boundaries of water and sky. The central tension in the piece is between the bird and the landmass of the island. Rubio engages the landscape in many forms in this work. She highlights the sea, the sky, and the land, and attaches them all to a bird that seems to be free yet remains bound inside the cage. Harkening back to her original drawing several

years before this piece was completed, Rubio interprets the bird as a “bird in a box” even though it sits outside the box itself.

In an interview with the *Miami Herald's* Lydia Martin in 2009, while preparing for her show, “The Foreigner,” Rubio revealed that she’s always felt “Like I don't fit in anywhere” (2009). Rubio explained that she feels like an outsider in the art world because her work is “outside contemporary art world tendencies” and an outsider in her family “[t]hey still don't understand my choice to be an artist. They wanted me to stay an architect. Or even, just be a married woman with children” (2009). Rubio continued to say that she also feels like “a foreigner, or an *extranjera* even, because I'm gay” (2009).

In the Miami context she feels like an outsider as well. As she told Martin,

Even in Miami I feel like a foreigner because I was born in Cuba and lived in Puerto Rico, Italy, Boston, New York. When I came to Miami 20 years ago, I found people who had never lived anywhere else but here. Their only point of reference was Miami. Miami has never been my point of reference. And I'm a Cuban artist, but I'm not in a lot of Cuban collections. Hispanic collectors don't really know my work because I went to the side of American galleries. And because I reject some of the tendencies of contemporary art, that makes me a sort of outcast in the mainstream art world, too. (2009)

Rubio explains that she feels like an outsider in Miami because even though there are a lot of other people in the city who share a common heritage, she does not feel that she has a lot in common with Cuban people. She has lived in cities around the world. She studied in Florence and became entranced with style and period of the Renaissance. While she lives in Miami, she says that Miami is not her point of reference. It is where she lives, but her artistic references do not revolve around any one particular place. While many Cuban collectors collect works by Cuban artists, Rubio explains that she is not in those collections because she has more often been shown in “American galleries.” Rubio told Martin that she rejects current trends in the contemporary art world which Rubio remarks



involve “repeat, repeat, repeat” (2009). She is not interested in repetition. She is interested in creating new works and new processes. This, she feels, has left her outside of many contemporary art world trends. Yet, Rubio’s works are not necessarily ignored. As I mentioned before she has two major public works in the Raleigh-Durham Airport and was commissioned to create a gate in Women’s Park in Miami. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and she has won major awards. By all the markers of art world success, she has done pretty well. However, Rubio, like many other artists has struggled financially, leaving her to feel as if her success is only partial. She owns her home but has no savings, leaving her in a precarious position, and perhaps one that adds to her feelings of isolation.

*Artists Engage the Landscape: Being and Becoming in Diaspora*

Each of the four artists’ works above reveal local landscapes in a global story. They demonstrate an engagement with place that focuses not only on displacement but also on figuring themselves into narratives of migration. Using the landscape as the actual or abstract terrain for their art making, I argue that Wright, Rodriguez, Stephenson, and Rubio visually articulate new ways to think through migrations and diaspora. Migration as a process of becoming; what Tiffany Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelly have termed the “process and condition” of diaspora (2000:20). It is a process because diaspora is “constantly being remade through movement, migration, and travel, as well as imagined through thought, cultural production, and political struggle” (ibid.). It is a condition because it is “multiply mediated,” or produced within the context of other forces like race and gender hierarchies across national borders. Drawing from theories of the

performative, I shift the focus from the art object to the action of the art work in order to draw attention to the “meaning-making processes rather than on unearthing a fixed underlying meaning” (Johnson 2003:223). This “meaning-making” process to me relates to what both Paul Gilroy and Michelle Wright have discussed as the dialectic of being and becoming in diaspora. It is not a one-way journey, but a continual process.

Artists are engaging the land, the earth, the landscape, the water, and the sea is also a way of engaging in being and becoming in diaspora. They engage the landscape either directly, as Wright and Rodriguez do, or portray an detachment from the landscape, as Stephenson and Rubio do in their work. The fact of their ‘Cuban’-ness, ‘Jamaican’-ness, their heritage, or their place of birth, is in this case not a primary lens through which I analyze the work. Their personal histories figure into the works’ creation and meaning, but it is not the only way to understand their pieces. I want to place emphasis on how the artists are living and making meaning out of their lives in the United States, which for all but one of the artists is not the country where they were born. The artists seek to make meaning from and in the place where they live, without a continual focus on the nostalgic longing for country of origin. Experience, being, and becoming mean engaging with the world all the time, not finding a fixed home.



Figure 4-14. Ana Rosa Nuñez, “Miami Landscape (City)”, Ana Rosa Nuñez Collection, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

I will end somewhat where I began with a document from Ana Rosa Nuñez’s papers. This is a photograph of the Miami skyline. Nuñez wrote on the back of this photo, “Miami Landscape (City).”<sup>51</sup> In a statement about poetry she wrote that the poem begins not with the writer, but with the reader. That is what gives life to the poem and breaks the silence. She wrote, “I believe in the order of the chaos established in the soul when the abyss is not yet forgotten.” In this photograph of Miami’s landscape, in Nuñez’s poetry, and in the work of artists who engage the landscape like Wright and Rodriguez, and their predecessors, Mendieta and Arenas. The artists I discussed in this chapter are working to create meaning out of the place where they exist at this moment. In creating their artworks they are also producing alternate geographies, new paths for us to follow in understanding migration, from the imagination out of the chaos of everyday life.

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<sup>51</sup> Ana Rose Nuñez Collection, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries.

## Chapter 5

### **Race, Gender, Photography, and Public Space**

#### *Sunday Morning Art Basel Panel: Diaspora, Dialog, Directions*

On November 28, 2010, I attended at panel entitled “The Miami Compendium: Diaspora, Dialog, Directions.” Held at the Miami Art Museum it promised to be a forum for discussion of Africa’s influence on contemporary artistic production and a space for artists, scholars, and other interested parties to converse about the issues and ideas in artwork and the art world. It was held on a Sunday at the very beginning of Art Basel/Art Fair week; a time of many overlapping art events that have become central to Miami’s art world. Holding the panel at this time, I thought, would bring out the entire arts community to discuss the concepts of diaspora and artistic production. In reality, I sat in the cold lobby of the Miami Art Museum with the panelists, waiting for more audience members to arrive. At half-hour past the starting time, they decided to begin the panel with myself as the lone audience member. I did not remain the only audience member for the entire time. Three or four more people came, including friend and artist, Donnalyn Anthony. I was glad for the company, but our meager audience was still outnumbered by the panelists. I had been so thrilled that there was even going to be a panel addressing African diaspora art in Miami, but I wondered if I was the only one. More structurally speaking, what are the issues that create the context for a panel about African diaspora art

in Miami to be so poorly attended? There are indeed many layers to uncover in this situation.

One conundrum is the invisibility of black artists coupled with the idea that black artists in Miami are not producing 'quality' work. The issue of 'quality,' is a highly subjective category attesting to an artwork's merit and artistic excellence. Most often, I have seen the issue of 'quality' raised not only on the artistic merits of an art work (e.g. the skill in producing a work, what materials are used, or the conceptual ideas behind the work), but about the artist themselves (e.g. The artists' personality, social connections, and exhibition history.) The idea that black artists' work lacks 'quality' is unfortunately a persistent theme in the American art context, and seems only to be founded on the invisibility of black artists in the art world. Marc Zuver, writing in the catalog for *CUBA-USA*, in 1991 explains that throughout the past two centuries "racism and provincialism have been the hallmarks of the American museum and art world. Women artists have been marginalized; Blacks 'lacking quality'; Latinos almost invisible; and Afro Latinos not even existent" (Zuver 1991:2). He goes on to say that the "argument that 'We don't show Latinos, Women, and Blacks because the quality isn't there' is specious. The quality is there and has been all along but the nabobs of our art academia and our museums have not been looking" (ibid.). A testament to the quality of work that has been there all along are several fairly recent large museum-scale shows, including *30 Americans, Now Dig This!, Freestyle, Frequency, and Snap Judgments*. Yet, even in a time of large and impressive exhibitions featuring the work of black artists there is still a dearth of information or awareness about the larger scene of black arts.

The lack of information hinges particularly on geography - where the artist lives and works. *30 Americans* showcased works from the collection of Miami-based collectors of Don and Mera Rubell. The show made its debut in Miami at the Rubell Collection before traveling to other venues such as the Corcoran in Washington D.C. Though the Rubell family and the Rubell Collection building is based in Miami, the exhibition featured only one Miami-based artist - the late Purvis Young. This kind of geographic exclusion of Miami, even when the show takes place in Miami, mirrors a trend in large exhibitions: most of the artists are based in New York, with some in Los Angeles.<sup>52</sup> Miami-based artists have achieved some of the typical markers of 'success' in the art world such as inclusion in major museum shows. Adler Guerrier, a Haitian-born Miami-based artist was in the Whitney Biennial in 2008. But, one artist's inclusion in a show does not indicate widespread change. As Kobena Mercer, Olu Oguibe, and other scholars have highlighted, showing the work of artists of color is usually a one-at-a-time playing field (Mercer 1990; Oguibe 2004). This speaks to broad issues of "representation" and the "culture game" of the arts profession. Once a few artists are recognized or there have been a few exhibitions there seems to be the idea that there is "equal" representation. Further, one artists' work is taken as the representation of all artists of similar background - whether that mean place of residence, gender, national origin, race, or sexuality.

Another key factor in Miami is the educational system. Students attend Miami-Dade County Schools based on the neighborhood where they live. Low income neighborhoods with mostly black students are home to some of the poorest performing

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<sup>52</sup> A major milestone exhibition was *Now Dig This!*, part of the large-scale Pacific Standard Time project.

schools in the county. Schools including Miami Edison Senior High, with a predominantly Haitian-American student body, was threatened with closure in 2010. Students and parents protested and the school remained open, but I'm not sure if anything about the school has changed. Often when changes are made, administrators add science and English classes and reduce arts and technical education classes. 'The arts,' broadly speaking, are not seen as valuable (outside of the magnet programs, of which Miami does have a number of excellent ones such as New World School of the Arts). If the arts are not valuable in the educational system, it is unlikely that young people will grow up and become artists.

I left the panel with a heavy heart. I had come to the panel hoping to learn more about the connections between African diaspora arts and Miami. Surely a city with such a deep and long-lasting relationship to the Caribbean would be a nucleus for African diaspora arts. If this panel was a sign of the state of black arts and its surrounding discourse in Miami, it was not good. It showed me just how disconnected populations are in Miami, as I discuss in Chapter 4. Anthony and I went to lunch at Soyka, a restaurant north of the Miami Art Museum, and we spent a few hours talking about the issues the panel raised for me as an anthropologist interested in learning more about Caribbean diasporic arts in Miami, and for her, a Miami-born black artist with familial roots in the Bahamas. How can we understand black artistic practice in Miami with so little scholarship or discussion of the topic? How are black artists participating in larger dialogues about African diaspora and Caribbean issues? What is at stake in artists' work? How do artists bridge the divide between publics and art worlds?

In this chapter, I will discuss two Miami-based artists Noelle Théard and Donnalyn Anthony. I focus on how their photographic work and practice re-envision black representation, their role as artists who work in public spaces, and how their work produces documents for the future archives. I use materials drawn from ethnographic research with Théard and Anthony including interviews, informal conversations, emails, phone calls, and the artists' own documents such as their artist statements and websites. By presenting and analyzing several works by Anthony and Théard in conjunction with key debates surrounding the production of their work, I pay particular attention to what it means for them, as black women artists of Caribbean descent based in the United States, to produce documentary photographs. I consider their work under the rubric of 'black photographic practice' because both artists identify as 'black,' and they discuss their own work in terms of a relationship and lineage within the work of other black artists and situate their work not only as art but as social practice. 'Black,' in this context, is used instead of other signifiers such as 'African-American,' as it points to the larger diasporic framework of the artists' work and also how they self-identify. As Miami-based artists, their contribution to black photographic practice provides a different viewpoint; one that is often left out of contemporary art discussions that are often focused on New York. Théard and Anthony's work provides a critical entryway into artistic production outside of this art world center. As such their work and art practice participates in timely transatlantic and transnational conversations about photography and representation, and offers insight into contemporary art-making today.



## *Research Among Friends*

This chapter grew out of my research in Miami. However, I came to know Anthony and Théard long before I had started my work as an anthropologist. As I discuss in the Introduction, I am from Miami and my fieldwork was prompted by my personal experiences in the city.

Anthony is from Miami too, but we met outside of Miami, during our college years on the study abroad program Semester at Sea in 2001. The study abroad program took us to eleven countries in three months all while living on a small-scale cruise-ship-like boat. This was not a cruise, though. It was better. We had college classes, lived on the ship with our peers and professors, and regularly we woke up in a new country. During the course of the semester we traveled to Cuba, Brazil, South Africa, Kenya, India, Malaysia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, and Japan. As young artists with an interest in photography, we were challenged to think about what it meant to photograph people and places around the world and how the politics of race, gender, class, and sexuality in different contexts come to bear on personal and artistic experiences. Anthony was always a more comfortable street photographer than me. Quietly, she befriended people and shot stunning portraits throughout our trip. We have remained friends since we first met in 2001, seeing each other whenever we happen to be in the same city.

I came to know Théard in 2004, shortly after I had moved back to Miami from Boulder, following college graduation. We met during a Dead Prez performance at The District (a now defunct restaurant and performance space in Miami's Design District). As I crouched down to get a different angle for a photograph of the musicians, I looked up and saw another woman photographer. We were both dressed in black; our hair pulled

back out of our faces, and toted big cameras – the unofficial photographer’s uniform. It was such an unusual sight for me to see another woman photographer shooting a concert<sup>53</sup> that I introduced myself. Since then we saw each other over and over again in various art spaces around Miami and eventually worked together on a project called Miami Art Salon.<sup>54</sup>

All of our paths lead us in and out of Miami over the years, me to Michigan for graduate school and DC for a fellowship, Anthony to South Carolina for college and Georgia to work as a teacher, and Théard to Haiti to run FotoKonbit and New York for her MFA. But during the course of my ethnographic fieldwork we all found ourselves in Miami, a complicated place or, as Renato Rosaldo (1993 [1989]) might say, “a busy intersection” of people, places, and things, from which to contemplate the meaning of photographic practice, diaspora, migrations, race, class, and gender. They were official, meaning consent-form signing participants in this research, so I did conduct interviews and other types of research related specifically to their work as artists. The material in this chapter draws from the ethnographic research, including the interviews, studio visits, and follow-up surveys, but because of our friendship, the research spilled over into late-night conversations, long lunches, collaborative projects, emails, texts, and phone calls. It reflects the dialogues between myself, Théard, and Anthony, and our collective work toward understanding what it means to make art and be an artist in the world we live in today, and how this work could mean something for our own times and also in the future.

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<sup>53</sup> Though I didn’t know it at the time, photography and especially photography that places the photographer in a public context is primarily a field of men.

<sup>54</sup> Miami Art Salon was a project that was funded through the Arts of Citizenship at the University of Michigan. The project’s goal was to gather Miami-based artists to “inspire, provoke, and produce,” in terms of art making and dialogue. Funded by the Arts of Citizenship during my fieldwork, the project was instrumental in creating the time for Théard and I to collaborate and also for me to learn about the broader Miami arts scene.

*Posing for the Camera: Photographs that Guard and Reveal*



Figure 5-1. Noelle Théard, *Untitled*, Les Cayes, Haiti, 2011.



Figure 5-2. Donnalyn Anthony, *Mama Brown's Store*, Miami, Florida, 2011.

The women in the photographs above stand alone, with no other person in the frame, and face the camera. Standing firmly, posing for the photograph, they seem fully aware of the photographer's presence. In Noelle Théard's *Untitled* photograph on the left, the woman is pictured in front of her store in Les Cayes, Haiti. A pastel pink plastered wall stands in the background and frames her. The items in the store are displayed in neat rows on a blue shelf in front of a pair of pale green wooden doors displaying various products including food and household goods, and she holds three cups in her left hand. This untitled piece shares similarities in style, form, and content, with Donnalyn Anthony's *Mama Brown's Store*, on the right. In *Mama Brown's Store* the woman pictured is selling frozen cups with fruit, as is described on the brown cardboard sign fastened to the gate she is leaning on. She is wearing a brown and black outfit with a black head tie, and the hand that grasps the wrought iron gate shows her plum-colored

manicure. Mama Brown is the sole proprietor of this homegrown business, which seems to be run from the gate of the apartment complex where she lives. The picture was taken in Liberty City, a Miami neighborhood in the Northwestern part of the city.

The two photographs are pieces in a larger body of documentary-style photographs created by Théard and Anthony. Much of their work portrays everyday life and people along the lines of Théard's *Untitled* and Anthony's *Mama Brown's Store* above. Their larger bodies of work include both color and black and white photographs that use the entire frame, filling it with the subject and their contexts. Their subjects range from the two women business owners pictured above, to a man painting a mural in Miami in remembrance of the earthquake in Haiti, political rallies in the streets of Port Au Prince, football games in Miami, and hip hop artists in Capetown. The range of subjects in their larger bodies of work reveals an interest in representing black life through photography and the artists' transnational connections.

Photography, and especially documentary has played an important role in black life since the mid-1800s (Willis 2000). Though many black women have worked as photographers since the advent of the technology few are well known, widely exhibited, or written about. It has often been the case that black women photographers themselves – Deborah Willis, Carrie Mae Weems, Jean Moutoussamy-Ashe, and Lorna Simpson, to name a few - have taken up the task of writing black women into the history of contemporary art practice, whether through their writing or art work.

*Untitled* and *Mama Brown's Store*, above, show a particular trend and in Théard and Anthony's larger bodies of work, and the stakes involved: to produce representations of blackness and picture people in such a way shows black people as engaged in their

own self-representation, but not fully exposed for the camera. This is especially apparent in their portraiture, where we can see and feel the person looking back at us through the photographs (Garland-Thomson 2009). The photographs portray people in a way that challenges the idea that the subjects are completely available for consumption by the photographer or viewers' gaze. I argue that Théard and Anthony purposefully produce photographs in such a way to create the kind of photographs that reveal as much as the guard. There is a tension here between being exposed and protected. As a result, they reclaim photography as a practice *and* an object, a dual function that is especially important for black women artists and other artists of color who have long been, often alternately, the object of the photographer's gaze or invisible (Bloom 1999; Farrington 2005; Fusco 1995; Willis and Williams 2002).

Little scholarship has focused specifically on women or even the gender disparity in the practice of the medium of photography (Aronson 1991; Farrington 2005; Moutoussamy-Ashe 1993; Willis and Williams 2002). Even within the literature of black feminist artistic expression, there is more written about writing than any other form of art (Smith 1979; Walker 1983). Over the past decade there have been more large-scale institutional art exhibitions devoted to black artists such as *Freestyle*, *Frequency*, *30 Americans*, and *Snap Judgments*. However, as Marsha Meskimmon laments, there is a tendency for a few well-known artists to come to stand for the whole. "Their extraordinary interventions are generalized into insignificance while, at the same time, the work of other, less-known artists remains all but hidden from view" (Butler and Mark 2007: 323). Therefore, a dual challenge emerges: their work seems to become cliché, even though they may be touching on some very important concepts and making crucial

artistic interventions, and the works of other artists are not able to rise to the surface (ibid.). This is why it is important to continue not only exhibitions, but also research about artists and their practice. As Michele Wallace explains, the critical role of artists is producing work that disproves invisibility or a lack of vision. Wallace argues that “black visual artists – make things and make visions. Their job, their goal is to re-envision vision” (2004:191). Visual art shows us how artists interpret the world, leading to insights into our current social worlds and dilemmas.

*Documenting Folks and Leaving Evidence: Donnalyn Anthony*

Anthony’s work centers on black life in Miami. She was born in Miami’s Liberty City, and adopted into a family in the same area when she was only a few days old. Much of her work focuses on Liberty City as well as other traditionally black neighborhoods in Miami, including Overtown and North Miami. In her artist statement she explains that her work in Miami began in earnest after living outside of the city for a number of years. She attended college in South Carolina and worked as a teacher in Georgia. When she returned to Miami in 2009 she “became aware that much had changed about the place I called home” (Anthony 2012). She visited places in the city but they did not feel the same. The places “were often physically recognizable, but were otherwise unfamiliar” (Anthony 2012). She wondered what had changed about Miami. This led her to photography as a way to engage with people and places “to understand the community as it had evolved” (Anthony 2012).

Alongside her own work in documentary photography, Anthony is also a photographer for the *Miami Times*, a black owned and operated newspaper based in

Miami that was founded in 1923. Working for the *Miami Times*, Anthony is at the forefront of black life in Miami, photographing events, places, and individuals related to politics, music, arts, daily life, sports, and education. Although the paper only requires a couple of images per weekly issue, Anthony regularly spends a significant amount of time in the neighborhoods and at events, getting to know people and continuing to shoot photographs. In an interview, she recounted to me that she sees other photographers come in, shoot the picture, and leave, never to experience the rest of the scene whether that be the dedication of the Lemon City Cemetery<sup>55</sup> or the political speech of Frederica Wilson.<sup>56</sup>

Anthony's main motivations in photography are to document in black life in Miami and to "leave evidence" that she was there. She partially attributes these motivations to being an adoptee. She is also interested in about what a 'community' is, where it is, and how it functions. As she reflected, "I just starting photographing folk. what's around me. What's going on around me. That's what I like to do anyway. I like to document people. I think it speaks to my personal history as an adoptee. I think I'm just drawn to photojournalism - documenting people's stories as they see them, or as they feel them" (Personal communication with author, December 2010). Her focus on 'black Miami' emanates from a desire to see people like herself and the people she knows represented photographically. The 'Miami' of the imagination and the news media largely lacks depiction of the everyday life of black people in the city. Instead, as I discuss in Chapter 2, imagery of Miami pictures people at leisure (e.g. in bathing suits, at the beach,

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<sup>55</sup> In 2008, remains of early residents and founders of Miami, many of whom were of black Bahamian descent, were found in Lemon City. In 2011, there was a memorial ceremony to dedicate the cemetery.

<sup>56</sup> Frederica Wilson is a Congresswoman who represents Florida's 17<sup>th</sup> District. She was born in Miami's Overtown and grew up in Liberty City. She took office in 2010.

dancing) or involved in criminal or violent activity (e.g. movies like *Scarface*, riots, or illicit drug trade). Anthony's photographs work to counter this imagery by focusing on people's nuances, their histories, personhood, and the spaces of Miami. Anthony's work serves not only her purposes as an artist, but a larger role in Miami - to document and share imagery with and about people in Miami outside of the imagery that has typically been circulated.

*Putting the Social in Photography: Noelle Théard*

Théard, who is presently based in Miami and New York, was, as she explains, "born to a Haitian dad and a French mum" in El Paso, Texas. Her grandfather was born in Les Cayes, where she shot *Untitled*. Her educational background is in journalism, African diaspora studies, and photography. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Texas, Austin and Florida International University, respectively, and her MFA from Parsons The New School for Design in New York. The predominant focus of her photography is portraiture, and her work shows a keen eye for photographing people in the context in which they work and live. Théard is interested in the everyday aspects of life and portraying those moments through photography. For instance, in *Untitled* Théard photographs the woman and the place where she works. Other photographs show children at school, people at home, and musicians in concert. Théard has also photographed hip hop culture globally, including throughout Latin America, the US, Haiti, and South Africa. Her photography is typically in a documentary-style, and she has worked in many places including Haiti, the US, and South Africa. The predominant focus of her photography is portraiture. In Miami, she



works predominantly in Wynwood, Allapattah, and North Miami – hubs of not only people from Haiti, but from around the Caribbean including Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico – attesting to both Miami’s culture and her own diasporic connections and aesthetics. It is important to her that the people in her photographs that reflect the populations that actually live in the places she shoots, whether it’s Miami, Les Cayes, or elsewhere.

In addition to documentary photography, her art practice also includes social photography programming that she has helped to develop in collaboration with local organizations and other. These projects involve working within communities/neighborhoods to get people involved with photography. By collaborating with local organizations, the artists and representatives of the organizations develop programming suited to each context. Some of these projects include Galeria del Barrio, Power U Youth, and FotoKonbit. Galeria del Barrio was a project Théard worked on in 2008 with the Miami Workers Center in Wynwood. In this project adult members of a Latino workers rights association, Miami in Action, used photography as a means of communicating their response to gentrification in their neighborhood. Largely art collectors and gallerists who opened venues in the neighborhood beginning around 2002, when the Wynwood Arts District was formed, have driven gentrification in Wynwood. The photographs produced by the participants respond to the residents’ experience of being marginalized and pushed out of “their historically vibrant immigrant neighborhood” (Théard 2012). The following year, in 2009, Théard worked with Power U Youth to produce the photography exhibition, *Through Our Eyes: Images from Overtown*. The project guided teenagers through the photographic process to “respond to

and critique the Prison Industrial Complex, which has built a ‘schools to prison pipeline’ disproportionately incarcerating youth of color” (Théard 2012). Théard brings a unique focus on the craft and meaning of photography, and teaches both how to create a technically pleasing image as well as one that holds significance for the photographer and potential viewers. These endeavors are educational, collaborative, process-oriented projects that participate in dialogue with social, historical, and art world conversations such as definitions of “art” vs. “activism” and challenges to what is understood as an art object.

In this chapter I focus on Théard’s own documentary work and the project, FotoKonbit. One reason for this focus is that Théard, Marie Arago and Tatiana Mora-Liaud developed FotoKonbit while I was conducting fieldwork, from 2009 – 2011. Another is that FotoKonbit participates in the themes of my dissertation including Caribbean discourse, representation, and artists’ roles in public.

#### *FotoKonbit: Haiti Through Haitian Eyes*

In 2010, Noelle Théard, Tatiana Mora Liautaud, and Marie Arago, started FotoKonbit. FotoKonbit is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization “created to empower Haitians to tell their own stories through photography . . . [and it is] a community of photographers building an archive that shows Haiti through Haitian eyes” (FotoKonbit Website, accessed November 2011). Working with partner organizations throughout Haiti, they teach photography workshops to children and adults. The organization’s name draws inspiration from the Kreyol word ‘konbit,’ which “can be defined as the coming together of similar talents in an effort towards a common goal” (ibid.). Since its initial

founding in 2010, several more people have joined the FotoKonbit “team” including Ralph Dupoux, Frederic Dupoux, Maggie Steber, Edwidge Danticat, and Vikto El-Saleh.

This project is fairly new – having only begun in 2010. Yet the urgency, especially sparked by the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, has pushed those involved with FotoKonbit to do a lot in a very short amount of time. So far they have held workshops in several cities in Haiti including Camp Perrin, Peguyville, and Caradeux. Théard is currently pursuing her MFA at Parsons School of Art and Design, and the other two founding members Marie Arago and Tatiana Mora Liautaud (who is originally from Haiti) moved to Haiti this year in order to build better alliances and partnerships and a better base within the country. Participants’ work has been featured on the *TIME Lightbox*, and exhibited at Florida International University and the LOOK3 Festival of Photographs.

FotoKonbit follows from Théard’s<sup>57</sup> own body of photographic work and social photography projects such as Galeria del Barrio. In a sense, each one has built on the last, with ever-clearer definition of her artistic practice based on social practice. Théard attributes her interest in a social photography practice to her own engagement with the world and to the work of other artists. Photography is a medium that can be voyeuristic (e.g. snapping photos when no one is looking or without permission), but it also has the potential to open up the space for conversation and engagement with people. It is the latter that Théard finds most compelling about social photography projects. For her, it is

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<sup>57</sup> The collective nature of the project is clearly central and an important component in my analysis. My larger research is about Caribbean diaspora artists based in Miami, and Théard is part of this larger research. Since she has primarily been focused on FotoKonbit in the past year and a half, it makes sense to also emphasize this work in an analysis of her art practice and to consider how it follows from her other art works and projects.

important that the “work not to just be seen as an activist project but one that can enter into a dialogue with contemporary art” (Interview with author, April 26, 2011).

Théard is guided in her projects by a few central elements: that they have social importance, a collaborative element, and that they relate to social and cultural history as well as art history. One of her main artistic influences is Jamel Shabazz, about whom she wrote her MA thesis. In it she attests to his artistic process of talking with people, getting to know them, and only then, shooting a photograph. She explained to me that this is the method through which she gets to know people and photograph them. For Théard it is important that the person’s performance of self be reflected in the photograph, and she often works with the person, showing them images during the course of photographing them, and settling on an image that the person feels reflects something about themselves (different than “I do/don’t like that one”).

This performative mode of photography is sustained in working with participants in projects like FotoKonbit. The photograph is the final product, the evidence of this meeting, but the entire process is a performative mode of visual art. In teaching other people how to produce their own photographic work, Théard is passing on not only the technical skills of photography, but also the embodied actions in the acts of photographing. As a diasporic<sup>58</sup> artist living in Miami, this work in Haiti enacts her connection to the country and also to transnational or diasporic aesthetics as a mode of artistic practice in addition to visual form. Being an instrumental part of constructing a

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<sup>58</sup> “Dyaspora” – the Kreyol word for diaspora – has been a historically difficult position. As ‘dyaspora’ a Haitian person living outside of Haiti is sometimes seen with distrust – as one who left. Then again, Haitians living abroad are considered the 10<sup>th</sup> Department and are allowed to vote in Haitian elections. See Karen Richman’s *Migration and Vodou* for in-depth analysis of ‘dyaspora,’ and Edwidge Danticat’s book *Create Dangerously* for a personal account of living in diaspora.

new archive of images of Haiti, this performance will make a significant mark in how Haiti is understood visually within and outside of the country.

The next section provides some insight into the history of black representation that informs the practice of Théard and Anthony (Part I). I then turn attention to their role in the public as street photographers (Part II), and end with how their work plays a role in transforming future archives (Part III).

### *Part I: Photographic Representation*

Photography, as a medium, has been both prized and derided for appearing to represent reality. Photographs seem to reveal what happened to be before the camera; that is, that a photograph shows us the world as it appeared to the photographer, which she then captured on film. However, this is a fallacy. Photographic representation is as much a portrayal of the imagination of the artist as a painting or a drawing. From the composition, to the choice of subject, to the decision to shoot in black and white or color, to the cropping, framing, eventual size of the print, and where the photograph is displayed. Photographs can be abstract, realistic, or something else. Photographs feel particularly intimate because many people are familiar with photographs and in the US context the 1888 advent of Kodak camera made photography more widely accessible to the general public. For black people, in particular, photography offered a way for everyday people to create their own images that did not replicate the caricatures in

drawings or paintings that had largely defined black visual representation.<sup>59</sup> Some people had their own cameras and others sat for studio photographers. As Brian Wallis contends, “[p]hotography at least avoided the most egregious forms of caricature and exaggeration and began to offer blacks some semblance of dignity before the camera and a viable means of self-representation” (Wallis 2005:9). However, the history of photography is laden with photographs that functioned to degrade or demean black people. These photographs that were often made without the full participation of the subject, even if something akin to consent was given for their photograph.

For Théard and Anthony, it is not only their internal desire to create photographic representations, but their knowledge and personal experiences of the historical and contemporary weight of photographs that come to bear on their photographic practice. When they photograph they carry with them a history of gross misrecognition because of the history of raced and gendered representations that have functioned to ridicule, stereotype, dehumanize, and categorize. As Théard explains in her thesis, “[h]istorically, negative and pathological representations of black subjects by unscrupulous photographers have worked to reaffirm stereotypes and justify less-than-human treatment. From postcards of lynchings to images of black people as objects of scorn or amusement, the black subject in history has been more often than not, cast in a negative light” (2010:8). The photographs that Théard and Anthony produce are a new acts of representation and a powerful step toward producing new realities (de Certeau 1988[1984]:123).

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<sup>59</sup> See for example the drawings of Saartjie Baartman, who was called “Hottentot Venus,” and exhibited for her physical characteristics. A discussion of the legacy of the Baartman can be found in among other texts, Willis, Deborah, ed., *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her "Hottentot"*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

In the early days of photography, many portraits were made in the name of science in an effort to catalog racial difference and maintain control over enslaved black people throughout the African diaspora (Rogers 2006; Smith 2004; Wallis 2003). Photography's abilities to capture images people believe as the truth lent itself well to the cataloging of criminals, the movements of the human body, and detailed recording of specimens. For example, in 1850, anthropologist Louis Agassiz commissioned Joseph T. Zealy to photograph enslaved people in South Carolina. In conjunction with craniology and other physical testing, his aim was to confirm his theories about white racial superiority.

The photographs produced portray black men and women wearing little or no clothing. When there are clothes in the images, they appear to have been pulled down for the purposes of the photograph furthering the visual connotation of being stripped for the camera. The people are posed in frontal and side views which function as a catalog of their faces, facial features, and torsos. This was and still is the same pose used in mug shots functioning to degrade the people photographed as they are portrayed as specimens to be reviewed later.

As a means of self-representation, artists and non-artists alike often wanted to portray black life in a positive or glorified light. For example, photographer James VanDerZee, who is now very well known, but was virtually ignored in his own time, was a photographer of Harlem as well as a studio photographer. He aimed to portray people in the best possible manner. Examples of this can be seen in iconic works such as *Couple, Harlem* (1932) and *Wedding Day, Harlem* (1926).<sup>60</sup> VanDerZee approached the photograph as art by staging the photos with costumes and props, and then later

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<sup>60</sup> Both of these photographs are in the Prints and Photographs Division at the Library of Congress and available to view as thumbnails on their website. The titles reflect VanDerZee's original portfolio titles.

retouching the photos to create beautiful representations of the people he photographed. And, it worked. His photographs are captivating. The people's poses and outfits combine with the rich tonality of the black and white prints to portray a Harlem of the imagination. But, it leaves one wondering what would have been portrayed if he were not, perhaps, attempting to counteract the brutality of earlier images with his own fantastic works of glamour and the surreal.

Though the examples of black misrepresentation I brought up are removed from our own time, we are still largely surrounded by photographs of people from across the African diaspora that are stereotypical at best, and in many cases, demeaning. This is especially the case in journalistic photography, where pressure is high to complete and turn over an assignment. To list, briefly, though not comprehensively, it is common to encounter representations of: people as objects for tourist consumption (Sheller 2003; Thompson 2006); sellers in markets (Aronson 1991; Mugambi 2008); domestic workers (Farrington 2005); athletes (Bell 2008; Moffit 2001); criminals (Tucker 2007; Welch 2007); and victims of tragedy or poverty (Clawson 2002). At face value not *all* of these need be negative, but the problem is that these images are presented to the exclusion of other imagery and these stereotypes come to dominate visual culture and thus people's ideas of blackness and black people. Further, many of these images have been produced without the consent or active engagement of the people photographed. Think, for example, of a seemingly benign instance: the average tourist who snaps away while roaming in a market. Looking for images as mementos of a trip, they are in effect, photographing the people they encounter as the landscape.



Anthropology and photography have a long and tangled history and relate to each other in a number of ways. One of these ways is how both fields work to represent people and places. Anthropologists have created photographic representations alongside their ethnographic work. Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (1942) produced the book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* in an effort to document and analyze culture based on photographs. Mead also produced ethnographic films detailing aspects of culture such as familial relationships. However, these representations are based on the anthropologist's point of view. Visual representation is guided by visual acuity to the surroundings and a sense of the purpose of the photographs.

The essay by Ira Jacknis, "George Hunt, Kwakiutl Photographer," further illustrates this idea. George Hunt was a photographer and also an assistant to Franz Boas. As Jacknis laments, he is mostly known only through his affiliation with Boas. Yet, his photographic work among Kwakiutl "indicates that he did possess a distinctive native approach to ethnographic photography" (143). This "native approach to ethnographic photography," termed by Jacknis, is what I would call his photographic practice. This photographic practice is realized through Hunt's choice of subject, his notes on particular photographs, and his attention to native categories. His choice of subject often included people, which differed from the work of non-native photographers who photographed primarily houses and totems. Through Hunt's notes, we learn the kind of activity in each photo, the participants, and the place, though he did not include the date. Finally, Hunt's photographic practice was attuned to native categories, such as what types of events were important. As Jacknis explains, "he was the only one to record the same kind of event [such as *kotexa* or repaying the bride-price debt]. As a local resident, Hunt clearly had

opportunities denied to more transient photographers” (147). Not only would such access to opportunities be denied, but people’s willingness to allow the camera into their lives depends on their level of comfort and familiarity with the photographer. This is something Hunt cultivated throughout his lifetime, and that someone who was only a visitor could not achieve in a short time.

In the work of earlier anthropologists, photographs were meant to provide visual evidence and explanation. Contemporarily, anthropologists are seeking new modes of working with photography. Ruth Behar collaborated with photographer Humberto Mayol in *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba* (2007). Her goal through the collaboration was to find a way for the photographs to be artistic, and not solely documentary. Working in tandem Behar and Mayol’s representations are present in a book in a way that offers what Behar calls, “epiphanies, not explanations” (259). The collaborative nature of the book results in a portrait that contains complexity rather than resists it. Karen Strassler’s book *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java* (2010) analyzes photographs as well as everyday photographic practice in the construction of national identity. Alongside her written analysis are many photographs by the people she worked with in Java. In some cases, the photographs depict the same moment from different perspectives, adding depth to the images not only as illustrations but as revelatory of a practice.

### *Looking Again: Defining a Practice*

Théard and Anthony’s work shows the negotiation that takes place within the frame of the photograph and also in the process of creating the image. In much of their work,

the person in the photograph looks directly at the lens. The person is an agent in their representation, just as Théard and Anthony seek to represent them. The process is not always a smooth one. Some people may not want to be photographed. Some people are easier to approach than others. Some of the time, the photographs result in images the photographers like, and other times they do not. However, the main issue at hand in terms of photographic practice is how the photographers approach the process and the images they choose to use in their bodies of work. In Théard and Anthony's work, we predominantly see people looking right back at us through the photograph.

This looking back reflects a critical space of resistance to misrepresentation. Writing about film and black women's spectatorship, hooks argues that "critical black female spectatorship emerges as a site of resistance only when individual black women actively resist the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking" (1992:128). hooks theorizes the space of looking back as 'oppositional looks;' the gaze as a critical gaze or as a site of resistance (1992:116). While she primarily considers moving images and spectatorship, these points are worth considering in relation to still photographic images as well, as we consider not only the viewer as spectator, but also the photographer and the person being photographed as spectators and active agents in photographic representation and viewing.

Responding to a photograph by Kathy Sloane, Opal Palmer Adisa wrote the poem, "What fi Do." The poem elucidates hooks's notions of 'oppositional looks' provides some insight into what is happening on the other side of the camera. The photograph, which is not reproduced here, pictures a woman in a spice store. She is holding a broom in both hands, and looks into the camera, her head turned slightly back and to the side.

## What fi Do

Afta dem tek picture of nutmeg and mace dem come tek me	Me is de nutmeg oman me gather de dust to mix wid oil to rub on me body
Everybody wan tek me picture dem neva ask how long me been dese 16 years here sweepin weh de spice a can't afford	Me feet hardly know shoes me arms like rope Yes tek me picture but no expect no smile
But a wouldn't tell dem a blast	Me is me own oman me work hard like this old worn out broom
Me stan like nutmeg stocked in crocus bag foreign bound same way me good times	together we sweep weh de dust and gather spice

Written from the perspective of a woman working in a spice store, she encounters tourists who are primarily interested in taking her photograph, but not concerned with who she is as a person. “Tek me picture,” she says. Then she resists the photographic impulse and says, “but no expect no smile.” (Adisa and Sloane 1991:52) Challenging the potential photographers who seek to objectify her as part of the landscape, she resists the camera’s lens through her own bodily practice; she will remain stern, and not smile. In this poem, she resists not the photograph itself, but challenges the medium and practice from within it. I can imagine that Théard and Anthony have this type of woman in mind when they shoot their photographs. Their photographs reflect the time spent with the

subjects of the photographs and shows us that the people they photograph actively participate in their self-representation. The photographs also show us how the photographers approach their subjects and also how the subjects push back against them, not merely allowing the photographers to shoot them and walk away. I can imagine that Théard and Anthony have this type of woman in mind when they shoot their photographs. Their photographs portray a stillness that reflects the time spent with the subjects of the photographs and shows us that the people they photograph actively participate in their self-representation. The photographs also show us how the photographers approach their subjects and also how the subjects push back against them, not merely allowing the photographers to shoot them and walk away.<sup>61</sup>

Looking again at the portraits that start this essay, *Untitled* and *Mama Brown's Store*, we see two people engaged in their own self-representation, but not necessarily fully exposed for the camera. These portraits offer insight into both the subject's and the photographer's performance in the production of the photographs, and thereby their practice as artists participating in transatlantic feminist artistic practice. For Théard and Anthony, they participate in this practice because of their internal desire to create photographic representations, and also their knowledge and personal experiences of the historical and contemporary weight of photographs that come to bear on their photographic practice. When they photograph they carry with them a history of gross mis-recognition because of the history of raced and gendered representations that have

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<sup>61</sup> See Okwui Enwezor's essay in *Snap Judgments* where he discusses 'photographic sport,' in relation to photographic practice in Africa, as "a kind of sport in which a hunterlike figure wielding congeries of instruments stalks a gamelike subject – suspended between an abyss of indeterminacy and plentitude – waiting to be literally captured. This early phase of photographic sport (dominated by ethnographers, prospectors, speculators, prosecutors of the colonial enterprise) yielded a huge archive of visual tropes about Africa that have persisted in the popular imagination." (2006:13)

functioned to ridicule, stereotype, dehumanize, and categorize. In addition to addressing this concern through photography, Théard also writes about this topic in her thesis. She explains that “[h]istorically, negative and pathological representations of black subjects by unscrupulous photographers have worked to reaffirm stereotypes and justify less-than-human treatment. From postcards of lynchings to images of black people as objects of scorn or amusement, the black subject in history has been more often than not, cast in a negative light” (Théard 2010:8). The photographs that Théard and Anthony produce are a new acts of representation and a powerful step toward producing new realities (de Certeau 1988[1984]:123).

*Untitled* and *Mama Brown’s Store* provide good examples of how Anthony and Théard approach their photographic practice and sheds light on how the artists produce work that portrays the tension between revealing oneself and being guarded in front of the camera. This happens on two planes: the photograph itself and its form and content as well as the artists’ approach to the creation of the photograph. In *Mama Brown’s Store* the entire foreground is filled with the vertical lines of the wrought iron gate, and partially bars our entry into the scene. Wrought iron gates are hard and strong, this one rises well above the woman’s head and photographic frame. Despite this ‘barring,’ the photograph also feels intimate. The woman’s pose belies the apparent restriction, and the sign adds levity through its use of a smiley face in the ‘o’ of ‘frozen.’ She is leaning against the beam with a can of beer in the other hand and seems to be mid-sentence in a story. Anthony approached this woman for a photograph while walking around Liberty City. She shoots with a digital single-lens reflex camera, which is compact, and only uses natural lighting or the camera’s on-board flash. This means that she has very little

equipment with her when she is out shooting, and could have the effect of seeming less intimidating to people she wants to photograph. Théard similarly shoots with minimal equipment. For *Untitled* she used a Holga camera; a simply constructed toy camera, loaded with medium format film. This kind of camera produces unique effects such as a blurring of the outer frame. Because medium format film is used, the resolution is high and the colors are rich in tone. (Personal communication with author, September 20, 2010) Compared to *Mama Brown's Store*, the frame is more open in Théard's *Untitled*. However, the woman's stance is more restrained as she is turned slightly to one side and positioned her hand with the cups in front of her body. She looks directly into the camera, as a look, not a stare. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains that people look when they are curious, and that "[s]taring is an ocular response to what we don't expect to see . . . Indiscreet looking invades another's space. People just simply don't like to be stared at" (2009:3-5). These 'looks' go back and forth from the photographer and the person being photographed. While a 'stare' serves to turn the person being photographed into an object, a 'look' can invite the person to participate in the photographic process. The woman in Théard's *Untitled* shows a slight smile in her face suggesting that she is comfortable with the camera and the photographer behind it. *Untitled* and *Mama Brown's Store* portray people as being aware of the photographer and participating, yet also shielding oneself from the camera's lens. They are neither completely revealed nor completely guarded.

Recalling hooks once more and her attention to the acts of looking, these works show how images are not only about spectatorship, but how the person being photographed and the photographer gaze upon each other. "There is power in looking,"

hooks wrote. (hooks 1992:115) As Lisa Bloom points out, hooks’s ‘looking’ is concerned with experience and feeling, which, she says is “rarely addressed in conventional art history” that favors investigating objects with regard to attribution, date, medium, authenticity, and rarity (1999:3). The way hooks “chooses to look . . . is significant in how it constructs a way of seeing in which the process of investigation is part of the object of knowledge” (1999:3).

Looking plays an important role in another one of Anthony’s photographs, *Untitled* (2010), below. The football player looks at Anthony. He sees her and she sees him. There is a purposeful engagement here that we can feel by looking at the resulting photograph.



Figure 5-3. Donnalyn Anthony, *Untitled*, Miami, Florida, 2010.



The pensive look on the player's face bears the weight of the situation. He is biting his lower lip and his eyes reveal his worry. This is not merely a game. There is a lot riding on each of these high school football games. A chance to go to college. Recognition. Or just feeling good about oneself in a society that in many ways has demonized black manhood. Their crisp, shiny, brightly colored uniforms are lit by the bright stadium lights and contrast the night sky. The yellow Nike "swoosh" inside a black rectangle is painted on the young man's face, and the logo is repeated throughout the frame. The drama of the visual aesthetics of the photograph is heightened by the combination of branding, blackness, masculinity, and the football game itself. There is a strong diagonal line leading from the coach, who is barely in the frame, to the players wearing helmets at the end. It is not clear exactly where they line ends; it seems to go on toward infinity. The uniforms along the line could make every player look the same, but the photograph captures them each in a slightly different posture. Even though the photograph has the potential to flatten them into a group, they maintain their personalities and their individual characters. Images of black male athletes are ubiquitous. Open any newspaper and there will be photographs of black male athletes on the field or in small headshots next to the articles. They are often seen either in mug shot framing (during draft season, for instance, or when they are injured) or in action on the field.<sup>62</sup> In those cases they are players, bodies, cogs in the wheel. Anthony's *Untitled* shows the young

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<sup>62</sup> A parallel could be drawn with this photograph and the work of artist Hank Willis Thomas. For more in-depth work on black athletes see the following: Bell, Ramona J., *Competing Identities: Representations of the Black Female Sporting Body from 1960 to the Present*. PhD Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2008; Carrington, Ben, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2010; Leonard, David J., and C. Richard King, eds., *Commodified and Criminalized: New Racism and African Americans in Contemporary Sports*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011; Moffit, Kimberly Renee, *The Images of Black Male Athletes in British and American Newspapers, 1990 - 1999: A Comparative Content Analysis*. PhD Dissertation. Washington DC: Howard University, 2001.

man's youth, his hopes and dreams, his vulnerability, his personality, his participation in the making of the photograph, *and* Anthony's involvement in the creation of the image.

Anthony's insight into the scenario of the football game is one she has fostered by looking and by participating in the games. Talking with Anthony over dinner one night she recalled her experience of shooting football games:

High school football. It still is part of the community. Just high school sports, I should say, in general. You know you have parents out there. I've seen when I was at FIU they have tailgaters. You know you're hearing the boys out there getting excited. You see basically the boys getting crushed. Not like lit[erally]- like physically crushed but I mean crushed. That this was an outlet you know to, I guess, I'm assuming – now I'm being all poetic with it but- this may have been an opportunity to go to school or whatever the case may have been or just they wanted to win and you see that look of defeat. I actually like football now. I have never liked football before. But I actually like football because I'm right there and I'm in the thick of it. I'm with the coaches. I'm with the players. I hear the audience at a distance. I hear them yelling, like 'You all better win!' 'You all better stop playin!' It's just a really awesome experience. (Interview with author, March 1, 2011)

As Anthony described, it wasn't for the love of football that she shot this image. It is for her commitment to documenting black Miami. Just as with *Mama Brown's Store*, she brings attention to everyday aspects of black life in Miami, where football plays a large role.

What is most important to Anthony is the process and product of the documentation. She gets to learn about black Miami and leave a legacy of photographs that represents black Miami in a way that no one else is currently engaged in from this kind of in-depth perspective. Fully dedicated to "photographing black Miami," her representations of people – men and women- are attuned to their individuality, their emotions, and their stories, whether or not anybody pays much attention to her work right now. As she put it, "If the audience isn't here now, or interested now maybe there'll be an

audience in the future . . . I'm leaving evidence that I was here" (Interview with author, March 1, 2011).

*"Who gets to represent you matters"*

Théard has a similar frame of mind for her work, explaining, "Who gets to represent you matters. It matters in your own self-conception" (Interview with author, June 4, 2010). This framework applies to her own documentary works as well as in projects like FotoKonbit.

FotoKonbit creates – at a quick pace – a new archive of images of Haiti, and puts the power of representation in many people's hands. The photographs produced through FotoKonbit are different from the kinds of pictures we typically see of Haiti on the news, in magazines, or even in art exhibitions. Whereas news representations tend to portray Haiti as tragedy, FotoKonbit images examine every aspect of life from markets to families.



Figure 5-4. Noelle Théard, FotoKonbit participant photos, 2010.

Participants created the photos shown above of a waterfall, a tent camp, and a boy with two roosters. The colors are vibrant, and the effects of the Holga camera are evident in the blurring of the photograph's edges. Whether they use a Holga, 35mm, or digital camera, the participants are guided through the process of framing, composition, lighting, and engaging with people they wish to photograph. The eventual subject matter is of their choosing, and many are "simple, daily life type of pictures" (Interview with author, June 4, 2010). Among the other images in the growing archive are pictures of families, children, animals, businesses, schools, markets, waterfalls, and homes. The project doesn't end with the creating of the images, but extends its reach through showing many of the photographs on the website, and through exhibitions of the work. In order to be a self-sustaining project, the money raised from the sale of the images is contributed to each of the growing photo clubs.

The importance of creating images that are different from the sensationalistic news photographs is immense, though sometimes not immediately apparent. As Théard explained,

Another justification is like – we're not saving lives, we're not feeding people, we're not providing shelter, but you know what, we're doing what we know how to do. Which is photography. And my big thing is this issue of representation. It's a big deal. Who gets to represent you matters. It matters in your own self-conception. It matters how the rest of the world views you. If it comes to kids it affects how you see yourself for the rest of your life. If you're told your whole life that you're ancestors are from the poorest country in the Western hemisphere . . . If I show them pictures of like Port-Salu [a popular and beautiful beach destination] . . . there's this kind of – there's such this huge disconnect. (Interview with author, June 4, 2010)

Théard explains that it is sometimes hard to measure the significance of photography in times of need, but representation, and most of all self-representation is an important aspect of contemporary life as well as in leaving a traceable history for the future. The

images produced build a new archive of images of Haiti that include not only images of devastation and tragedy, but also people's everyday lives as well as the spectacularly beautiful.

*“I love myself when I'm laughing and then again when I'm looking mean and impressive”*

In 1934, Zora Neale Hurston wrote a letter to Carl Van Vechten, after reviewing the portraits he had made of her. “The pictures are swell!” she wrote, “I love myself when I'm laughing and then again when I'm looking mean and impressive” (Kaplan 2003:324). In this sentence Hurston attests to the importance of nuance in representation. Van Vechten had managed to create portraits that represented not only her likeness, but how she felt about herself as well. And, she liked herself not only when she was smiling or laughing, but also when she was “looking mean and impressive” (ibid.).

The way Théard and Anthony approach their art practice shows the weight of creating a portrait in light of the history and current culture of photographs of black people and black photographic practice. The fact that the artists are themselves black women *and* that they are attuned to the stakes involved in this type of work, they create photographs that speak to the tension of revealing and guarding, and also to the possibilities. If the only images people see are either stereotypically negative or hyper-positive, there is no room for lived experience.

I will return to some of the ideas raised in this section on representation in the following two sections, considering how this work reaches the public and create of archives of the future.

### *Part II: Shooting in the Streets*

As women documentary photographers Théard and Anthony's work takes them out into the streets to create photographs, rather than in the space of the studio. Further, they participate in a field that is largely dominated by men. Their presence in the streets is a crucial one because it offers a different perspective for people they photograph as well as one we can see in their photographs. We can think of these as performative acts of social change (Taylor 2003) through both their practice as documentary photographers and the creation of new documents as photographs. Their photographs, as art objects, circulate in print or online and further the reach of their narratives in the public sphere and also in our future archives. Théard and Anthony's relationship to the streets is also revealed through their close particular attention to lived experience as it occurs "on the street" or "in public." As much as their work shows an interest in representation, it also demonstrates the pursuit of people's everyday activities. This means that their work happens out in the streets, in public places, rather than in the controlled environment of a studio.

The space and idea of the 'street' or the 'city' conjures many images including bustling activity, commerce, danger, prostitution, drugs, and crime. The urban street environment has been perceived as a gendered space that men have access to and women's negotiation of this terrain is limited. Setha Low, drawing on Elizabeth Wilson's study of several major cities, explains that the space of the city has been "perceived

primarily as a male place in which women ‘along with minorities, children, and the poor, are still not full citizens in the sense that they have never been granted full and free access to the streets . . . and they have survived and flourished in the interstices of the city, negotiating the contradictions of the city in their own particular way’” (Wilson 1991:8 *In Low* 1996:390) The ‘city’ or ‘urban’ space has a structure and a rhythm that normalizes who can freely negotiate its terrain. Much of this is dependent on gender, race, class, location, and time of day.

Mitchell Dunier’s study of sidewalk street vendors reveals the gender dichotomies, roles present in urban streetscapes, and in particular the role of ‘public characters’ (a term he borrows from Jane Jacobs after he heard it used by one of the main people in the book - Hakim Hasan). Dunier conducted ethnographic fieldwork among book sellers along Greenwich Avenue and Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village. Most of the vendors were black men. The women in the study included girlfriends, mothers, sisters, daughters, and customers. Only one woman was a book vendor. What he reveals is that the presence of the book vendors in the streets is overlaid with such a culturally entrenched “fear of blacks in public spaces . . . Layered on top of a history of racial tensions [and] there are barriers to the development of rapport” (1999:384). Despite the fact that the book vendors live most of their lives in the public sphere (as some of them are also without permanent homes), they are viewed as either threats to safety on the streets or are made to be invisible parts of the streetscape. Hakim Hasan concludes the book with an Afterword and notes that the “streets that are the focus of these pages are places of metropolitan refuge, where the identities of men and women who work and live are hidden in public space. In the pedestrian’s eye these men and women are reduced to a horrific *National*

*Geographic* photograph come to life. It is as if they were born on these streets and have no past, or other life experiences” (319). Hasan points to the challenges the space of the street presents. In the street, people bring their expectations, their assumptions, and their own personal histories and react to each other in close quarters.

Depending on the location, the public space of the street demands an armor, a shield to guard against unwelcome comments, harassment, or interaction. Gina Ulysse attests to this based on her own experiences in the busy streets and markets of Kingston, Jamaica while she was doing her field work. The women she wrote about negotiated public spaces showing ‘tuffness,’ a demeanor that expressed that they were not going to be ‘messed with.’

Whereas masculinity is realized through the gun, female tuffness is expressed through the embodiment of protective shields . . . Hoisted shoulders. Chin held up high. Walking languidly, yet always with a sense of purpose. Soon I would learn that this toughness was an armor, a survival mechanism of sorts worn mostly in public, especially on the street, used to rebuff or discourage unwanted interaction, especially commentaries from men hanging out on corners, posing, and/or engaged in street vending activities. On the streets, these men are gatekeepers . . . The tuff attitude distinguished the tourist from the local, the lady from the woman, the approachable from the unapproachable, and the harassable from the unharrassable. (182-183)

Miami’s street spaces are not as heavily trafficked on foot as other urban spaces. Urban sprawl means that people in Miami mostly move from place to place in cars. So, long walks from one location to the next are not the norm throughout much of the city. Of course, there are exceptions to this. In Little Havana, Little Haiti, and Miami Beach, there is more foot traffic than in other neighborhoods. And, a portion of the population - mostly people of color that lack the funds to purchase cars or gas - that rely on public transportation and their own two feet. Nevertheless, public spaces in Miami, from the grocery store to the sidewalk, demand a similar ‘tuffness,’ expressed through a quick



tongue that can lash out against unwelcome comments in English, Spanish, or Kreyol, an imaginary boyfriend or husband, a fast and purposeful walking stride, no smiling, and knowing whether direct eye contact or no eye contact will persuade someone to leave you alone.

The most common kind of possibly unwanted attention women receive from men is in the form of '*piropos*' or 'sweet talk' - common throughout Latin America and the Caribbean - and that generally, when ignored or only slightly acknowledged will not lead to any further interaction. '*Piropos*' or 'sweet talk' (known by other names as well) are comments, usually made by men, to women passing by. Sometimes men blow kisses, sometimes they toss out a flirtatious remark. It is thought that 'real men' are good at this kind of talk, and thus reinforces gender norms of femininity and masculinity, and the idea of *machismo*. While seemingly benign, this verbal commentary exerts masculine control of the public space.

Given this context of the street environment, it is important to consider the role of Théard and Anthony as photographers in the streets. The space of the streets may be perceived as 'dangerous' or 'exclusionary' for women, but the process of shooting photographs offers an entry point to engage with people in public spaces: to witness, to document, and also to participate.

## *Street Photography*

Definitions of ‘street photography’<sup>63</sup> vary. I am using it here to describe the work of creating photographs in the street settings, including when the photograph includes a person or could be considered a portrait. It is different from journalistic photography, sometimes, in that the photographer is not necessarily shooting to illustrate a particular news story. However, both Théard and Anthony have worked as journalistic photographers, so the aesthetic line of that definition is actually very thin. Vettel-Becker defines ‘street photography’ as

a highly inclusive category, for it is designation of space rather than intent. Indeed almost any image taken in the public rather than the private sphere whose subject matter is neither portraiture nor nature, including photojournalism and social-documentary, has been included under this umbrella term. Its use has served not only to strip social documentary of its ideological content but to aestheticize journalistic photographs, to make these images ‘art’ in a fine-art sense, thus privileging the photographer’s subjectivity over the historical conditions surrounding the subject matter. (2005:68)

Despite women’s participation in street photography throughout history (Moutousammy-Ashe 1993; Vettel-Becker 2005) it has continued to be perceived as a masculine activity. Anthony described that when she is shooting with other photographers around, it becomes like a “pissing contest.” It is the men photographers, in particular, who want to compare equipment, brag about their photographs, and discuss credentials. When Théard recruits people to participate in social photography programs, there are always more men that show up and she and her collaborators have to actively seek out women to participate.

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<sup>63</sup> For more on street photography see Vettel-Becker, Patricia (2005) *Shooting from the Hip: Photography, Masculinity, and Postwar America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Yee, Lydia, and Whitney Rugg, eds. (2008) *Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now*. New York: Bronx Museum, Aperture; and Meyerowitz, Joel, and Colin Westerbeck, eds. (1994) *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

This gendering of photography and the space of the street relates to the bodily practice of photography (Vettel-Becker 2005); a practice that involves placing oneself in a public context and interacting with strangers, often from the vulnerable position of being behind the lens. A number of interpretations of the process of shooting photographs discuss the metaphorical associations of photography with violence or invasion. The vocabulary alone makes for easy comparison: loading, aiming, shooting, viewfinder, take a photo, caught on camera, exposure, etc. Okwui Enwezor relates the practice of street photography to the sport of hunting. ‘Photographic sport’ is “a kind of sport in which a hunterlike figure wielding congeries of instruments stalks a gamelike subject – suspended between an abyss of indeterminacy and plentitude – waiting to be literally captured” (2008:13). With his particular interest in Africa and African art, he concludes that the medium and practice of photography as helped to shape a visual field of ‘Africa’ as wild, dark, and foreign. Further, this type of photography was “dominated by ethnographers, prospectors, speculators, prosecutors of the colonial enterprise [and] yielded a huge archive of visual tropes about Africa that have persisted in the popular imagination” (2008:13). Susan Sontag described the camera as “a predatory weapon -- one that’s as automated as possible, ready to spring” (1977 [1973]:14). Though she asserts that a camera is not the same as a weapon because it will not literally kill anyone, there is still an act of intrusion or violation in photography: “To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (ibid.). The photographer, and then the photograph itself, is powerful and has the potential to

transgress boundaries of time, place, and person-hood. It is up to the photographer to chose how to wield their camera - as a tool, as armor, as a weapon.

### *Legacy and Approach*

Anthony and Théard have modeled their approach to photography on the legacy of two notable photographers - Deborah Willis and Jamel Shabazz. Willis is a photographer and scholar, currently working as Chair of the Department of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of Arts at New York University. Her photographs portray an intimate view into black life, memory, and narrative. Willis's research and writing projects are numerous and include *The Black Female Body*, *Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African American Portraits*, and *Posing Beauty*. Her work marks important contributions to art and scholarship and has been recognized by the MacArthur Foundation, among many others. When Jamel Shabazz was asked who his mentors in photography are he responded: "Deborah Willis is one who I can truly speak of. I have only known her for about 10 years but, during that time she has shown me the importance of documenting, preserving and exhibiting our history, as a way to educate and to preserve our legacy."<sup>64</sup> Shabazz is a photographer known for his work depicting, as he puts it on his website, "urban life" in and around New York (Shabazz 2013). He a photographer and also an educator, teaching classes in schools and museums as well as mentoring youth who are

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<sup>64</sup> From an interview on Dodge and Burn: "D&B: Who are your mentors (in photography)? JS: When it comes to mentors, Professor Deborah Willis is one who I can truly speak of. I have only known her for about 10 years but, during that time she has shown me the importance of documenting, preserving and exhibiting our history, as a way to educate and to preserve our legacy." (<http://dodgeburn.blogspot.com/2009/06/photographer-interview-jamel-shabazz.html> 2009)

interested in photography. Some of his well known books of photography include *Back in the Days* and *A Time Before Crack*.

Taking cues from Shabazz, both Théard and Anthony engage with the people they photograph, talking with them, seeking connections, and learning about the places where they photograph (Personal communication with Anthony, December 2010; Interview with Théard, June 4, 2010). While Sontag and Enwezor elucidate the potential violence of photography, some artists have attuned their practice to create photographs in a way that respects the person being photographed. Théard and Anthony bring this legacy into their practice.

Théard wrote about Shabazz in her thesis, and argued that the “images were created for the pleasure of their subjects and the photographer . . . Shabazz did not steal pictures from a distance with a telephoto lens; he engaged with every single one of his subjects. Sometimes people would decline to be photographed, but he still took the time to talk to them and explain his intention.” (Théard 2010) Shabazz’s practice inverts the tendency to use the camera as a weapon, as if hunting game (Enwezor 2008). Instead he uses the camera as a social icebreaker and allows people room for self-representation. (Shabazz 2005) This extended passage about Shabazz by Théard articulates her own concerns about photographic practice vis a vis an explanation of Shabazz’s work:

The images were created for the pleasure of their subjects and the photographer, without concern for mainstream public opinion. Beyond the joy that they brought to their subjects, the photographs give insight into a private reality that offers an alternate reading of history’s privileged view that only could be provided by Jamel Shabazz, whose dedication to his craft and love for his people allowed a more honest representation that challenged what historical memory claimed to “know” about the 1980s. Seeing such intimate photos of individuals who had been set up to be feared, with glimmers of love in their eyes, fundamentally challenged representations of black and Latino youth as Others. Being one among them, Jamel Shabazz was able to represent black youth as equals, understanding their core values, issues, and the challenges that they faced, and earning

their trust in order to capture their spirit in the way that they wanted to represent it. Shabazz did not steal pictures from a distance with a telephoto lens; he engaged every single one of his subjects. Sometimes people would decline to be photographed, but he still took the time to talk to them and explain his intention. He was attracted to individuals who felt good about themselves, people who were not afraid to project their power and agency onto the world. He was not afraid to create bonds with strangers, understanding that his subjects were angels on the road to life who had entered his path for a reason. Always in the forefront of his mind was positivity and uplift, representing individuals one at a time, while knowingly creating a portrait of his people. For Shabazz, working with such intense dedication, photographing so many hundreds of people, clearly brought him great joy. Indeed, he enjoyed the process and understood in a very deep way that his work would somehow have an impact that would reach beyond his individual subjects. The immediacy of bringing joy to those who posed for him, seeing his images in family homes and albums was part of his motivation, but even deeper, Shabazz's discipline and focus point to a real understanding of the historical value of his photographs. (Théard 2010)

### *Public Photographers: Witness and Participant*

Théard and Anthony photograph in the streets and also seek to engage with the world around them through their work. This illustrates a central role of their work as photographers in the streets: not only to document, but to witness and participate. Their public role as photographers means that they perform their work in a public way (on the streets). Additionally, their work circulates in public spheres through traditional<sup>65</sup> routes (e.g. exhibitions), and also makes use of less traditional routes of circulation (e.g. online). During my fieldwork I saw not only how their work circulated, but also how they continued their art practice through panel discussions, Facebook posts, website updates, participation in local/community events, and art events. Two moments I will discuss below show how their art practice unfolds in the public sphere. The first is a Facebook post by Anthony and, the second is a FotoKonbit panel led by Théard at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami.

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<sup>65</sup> 'Traditional' in this context meaning what is customary in the U.S. art world.



Figure 5-5. Donnalyn Anthony, Maxine Waters and Renita Holmes, 2011.

On August 24, 2011, Anthony posted a picture (above) of California Congresswoman Maxine Waters (on the left) and Activist Renita Holmes (right) on Facebook.<sup>66</sup> The photograph was shot on August 23, 2011 at the Congressional Black Caucus Town Hall Meeting in Miami, hosted by Congresswoman Frederica Wilson. The two women in the photograph occupy almost the entire frame of the photo. A few people are in the background, though the focus is clearly on the two women. The people in the background are blurred due to movement. Waters's (left) cream-colored suit stands in

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<sup>66</sup> Facebook is an online social networking website. It enables people to share pictures, ideas, news, etc. with an online audience made up of their 'friends.' Individuals, businesses, musicians, organizations, or whoever chooses to can set up a 'profile' or 'page.' Usually individuals create profiles and public figures, businesses, and organizations create pages. Through Facebook users can add 'friends,' though these need not be people they are actually friends with in day-to-day life. Users can set up their profiles with different levels of privacy, from the most secure where only the user themselves can see what they post to completely open to anyone. 'Posts' include pictures, links to websites, and text. In this post Anthony included text and a photo. Then, her 'friends' could see it, but no one else. When Holmes was 'tagged' in the photo, she could also see the photo. Anthony and Holmes became 'friends' on Facebook and then Holmes was able to comment on the photo.

stark contrast to Holmes's (right) checkered shirt, as Holmes is kneeled down on the floor and grasps each of Waters's hands. Holmes is positioned in a pose lower in the frame<sup>67</sup> than Waters and indicates a feeling of gratitude, humility, and thankfulness. Yet, Waters and Holmes look directly at each other gesturing toward some kind of more even exchange.



Figure 5-6. Facebook conversation, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> This pose mimics the well-known pose in the etching used to promote abolition. Not sure if I want to make that leap, but if I do, a few key differences are: gender (women), two people so the person's wishes are not gone unnoticed, it's a photograph, and the two people are identified (not anonymous black people).



Anthony posted this photo on Facebook in order to identify Holmes, who she did not know before taking the picture. Because the image may be hard to read, I will reproduce the transcript here. One of the things I want to draw attention to is the timing of the comments: the first one comes in just four minutes after Anthony posted the picture, within one hour the woman is identified as ‘Madame Renita Holmes,’ and three days later Holmes herself has commented on the photo. Note that Anthony’s Facebook name is “Donna Lynn.” Also, where it reads “-- with Renita BigEMamam Holmes” following Anthony’s post is a ‘tag’ and was added after someone identified her as the person in the photo. ‘Tagging’ someone means that they are linked to the photograph. Usually people ‘tag’ people in photographs, but users can ‘tag’ anyone they wish to associate them with a particular image. The underlined sections indicated a hyperlink (a link to another profile or page). The post prompted the following comments and also three “likes,” from Addonis Parker, a Miami-based artist, Zen Flower, and Renita BigEmama Holmes.

August 24

5:34 PM - Donna Lynn: If anyone knows the person (right) in this photo or is FB friends with her, please tag. Thanks :) -- with Renita BigEmama Homes.

5:38 PM - Zen Flower: Awesome photo:-)

5:34 PM - Tishana Trainor: This picture is pregnant with emotion. Look at the grip on their hands.

5:50 PM - Donna Lynn: Wow, thanks TT! Thanks Zen!

6:12 PM - Zen Flower: Definitely agree with kindred, great work wodes..

6:29 PM - Larry Spring: That is Madame Renita Holmes.

6:31 PM - Donna Lynn: Larry: thank you! please tag her :)

August 27

12:53 PM - Renita BigEMama Holmes: Thank you so kindly for capturing a moment I have awaited for years since first we met this woman has assisted and empowered US It is my Heritage I speak to and my Ancestors I listen to about Black Womens Leadership and Development in Dirty South 305 Miami. You captured the Essence Donna Lynn and MAMA Miami (Inner city and Urban Motherhood) and WAAIVE /MAGGNUM.MAMA MAKEBA Project

We see through this conversation that Anthony's photograph meant a great deal to Renita Holmes. As an activist, she works aggressively issues of violence that affect Overtown and Liberty City. She is particularly focused on ending the seemingly random shootings that have taken the lives of many of the young people in these two areas. Her goal for the youth in the neighborhood is to be able to experience their childhood in a better way than is currently possible: to play, to have food to eat, and to have the opportunity for better education. As an activist her work involves unrelenting efforts though it may go unnoticed. In the photograph Waters is looking directly at Holmes, and the Facebook post amplifies the effect of "being seen." Anthony saw this moment and photographed it, she posted the photograph on Facebook, Holmes was identified, Holmes was able to see herself, and others were able to see her. As Holmes explained, she was grateful that Anthony posted the picture as a document of the moment she was able to meet Waters. A moment that she has "await[ed] for years." The multiple moments of being seen demonstrate how Anthony's photograph and art practice involves witnessing and also participating in the public sphere.

This kind of participation in the public sphere is not without its challenges. The internet poses some problems in that once the photographs are posted online, it is fairly easy for anyone to copy them and claim them as their own. This has happened to

Anthony on a number of occasions. One time, a photograph appeared online in a Nigerian new source without attributing it to Anthony. Photos she has posted on Facebook have been copied to other people's profiles, but the watermark she had added to the photograph had been cropped out of the image. On the one hand it shows that people feel a connection to these photos, and on the other it shows a disregard for Anthony's work. Unfortunately, this means that Anthony has been more cautious about posting photographs on Facebook. However, she continues to use Facebook as a tool for engagement with people. She posts *about* the photographs she is shooting, such as "Photographing Edwidge Danticat today," or "Congrats to Northwestern for winning their game," but only rarely posts an actual image.

*"I'm just a proud auntie": FotoKonbit Panel at MOCA, January 8, 2011*

"I'm just a proud auntie," remarked Leonie Hermantin, deputy director of the Lambi Fund,<sup>68</sup> following a panel presentation about FotoKonbit at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami. The panel was held on Saturday, January 8, 2011, almost one year to the day after the 2010 earthquake. It was held as part of the public programming during the Bruce Weber<sup>69</sup> exhibition. The panel members included Noelle

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<sup>68</sup> The Lambi Fund is an organization whose "goal is to help strengthen civil society in Haiti as a necessary foundation for democracy and development" (Mission on Website March 23, 2012). They have four main project areas including sustainable development, community micro-credit, environment, and organizational leadership and training.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Weber is best known as a fashion photographer. The exhibition that was on display at MOCA during the panel was a series documenting Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood. From MOCA's website: "The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), North Miami will present Bruce Weber: Haiti / Little Haiti from November 19, 2010 through February 13, 2011. This extraordinary exhibition of photographs of Miami's Haitian community by celebrated photographer Bruce Weber is part of MOCA's Knight Exhibition Series and includes approximately 75 photographs taken by Weber from 2003 to 2010. Bruce Weber: Haiti / Little Haiti is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami and is curated by MOCA Executive Director and Chief Curator Bonnie Clearwater." The exhibition was conceived of

Théard, Marie Arago, Maggie Steber, Jan Mapou, and Ralph Dupoux.<sup>70</sup> Théard and Arago are two of the founding members of FotoKonbit, along with Tatiana Mora-Liatud.<sup>71</sup> Steber is a well-known photojournalist, whose work has centered on Haiti for over 25 years. She is a member FotoKonbit's advisory board. Mapou is a writer, cultural activist, and owner of Libreri Mapou in Little Haiti, which serves as a bookstore and cultural center along the main drag of NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. He is also a member of the advisory board. Dupoux is a Haitian-born photographer and a member/teacher with FotoKonbit. A brief presentation by Théard about FotoKonbit was accompanied by a slide show of photographs from the workshops from the past year. Steber and Mapou spoke and then the floor was open to questions.

What was striking about Steber and Mapou's remarks was the affection with which they spoke. They reflected on what the project means for them and how they think it plays a role in life in Haiti and elsewhere. There was an emphasis on pride, the significance of the project, and how the photographs made them feel. As advisors to the project, their comments reflected their support of the project, and also generational shifts. Steber and Mapou are older than the FotoKonbit photographers, and this was drawn attention to by Steber and Mapou in their remarks. Other audience members also commented on how the "young" people (referring to Théard, Arago, Liatud, and Dupoux) are doing good work and making them proud.

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prior to the 2010 earthquake, and it just so happened that the exhibition coincided with the one year anniversary of this moment.

<sup>70</sup> Dupoux was originally not listed as being on the panel. He is a photographer and teacher with FotoKonbit along with Théard, Arago, and several others. He became part of the panel when it seemed clear that his recent trip to Haiti for a workshop was going to be central to the discussion. So he joined the panel. But, I wanted to make clear for proper documentation that his name was not listed on the programming information.

<sup>71</sup> She was in the audience and was acknowledged at the end, but did not speak as part of the panel.

Maggie Steber: I'm particularly proud of these young people. They're all young Haitians, including Marie, whose heart is Haitian, because they aren't just going in and having these workshops. They go back and they go back and they go back to the same place and they create a photo club and the photo club then starts among themselves to see that, 'oh, you know what, maybe we can start to photograph portraits of families and weddings and maybe we can also make a statement about what we see going on and,' so they're really building a foundation for a much larger idea and I just think they're magnificent young people, and these are the young people also who will rebuild Haiti, so I'm very heartened by that.

Jan Mapou: There is one thing that Noelle didn't say – that I am a teacher, a Kreyol teacher . . . it is an honor to be here. I am their Kreyol teacher. I have nothing to do with photography. I don't know how to shoot . . . it would be the worst photograph in the world, I'm telling you. When I take a picture I cut the head off, I get the foot. So, however, I am here, I am here to encourage and support FotoKonbit and I think it's a very great project for these girls to be leaving their families and to go to Haiti and teach and learn Haitian folks in Haiti . . . I am the owner of Libreri Mapou and also I am the director of Sosyete Koukouy, an organization, nonprofit promoting Haitian art and also promoting the Haitian Kreyol in the diaspora.

As was made clear during the question and answer period, most of the audience were not only proud of the FotoKonbit team, but felt a close kinship to the project and the people involved. The excerpts below show sense of pride in the project and a kinship to the people involved:

Marlon Hill, local attorney and nephew of Rosie Gordon Wallace, who runs the Diaspora Vibe Gallery and Cultural Incubator: Happy New Year everyone. I just want to say we're very proud of you.

Kerry McLaney, Miami-based photographer from Haiti: Yeah, that's great. I think you guys are doing a great job and I've seen it from the beginning, so I'm really proud too, so, congratulations.

The enthusiastic response and overall familial spirit of the panel is representative of how FotoKonbit, as a project, resonated with the audience; people wanted to assert their connection to it from the beginning, they wanted to express their pride, and they wanted to validate the work of the “young people” in their ‘community’ (whether that meant

Haitian, or Miamian, or artists, I am not sure). These responses show how the role of the photographer who works in public spaces is not only important for the artwork they produce, but also for the kinds of connections they are able to make between seemingly disparate spaces or places - in this case, Miami (diaspora) and Haiti.

Referring back to Part I of this chapter, the idea of representation proved to be a particular point of interest not only for the photographers who intentionally focused on ideas of representation, but also for audience members, who recognized how these photographs represented something different about Haiti.

Jan Mapou: I can communicate to you my impressions and also my feelings when I am looking at those pictures . . . There is communication, a communication between the person looking at the picture and also the picture itself and the person pushing the button – the photographer. You know, all of these pictures tell a story. The story of my country . . . This is what life in Haiti, after 200 years of independence, in country that broke the chain of slavery and became the 1<sup>st</sup> black independent nation in the world. That’s all I want to say. Those pictures send a message. A very vibrant message . . . You can see those hats – that reminds me of my mother who is, my godmother, who is in Cuba, and live in Haiti for a short period of time, and this is what she was doing for a living – hats, shoes, and uh, baskets, and this is the type of things that we live on and we never forgot. And, all of them have a story to tell. If you looking at this it’s the products from Haiti, yum, *maison belle*. When you remember that, you remember the whole story of you family, of your life, of your childhood in Haiti, and also the stuff there - they’re carrying, the product. When you’re looking at it you see the woman who is carrying all that load for a long distance, sometimes for hours and hours and then returning to the village, selling nothing or maybe just a little bit.

Mapou referred to two photographs, in particular, that resonated with him. The first was a photograph of hats. This photo stirred a sense of nostalgia for a country where he no longer lives. For him, the photograph also reflects the mundane tasks of taking items to market and then having to carry them back if they are not sold.

Steber is an experienced photographer who has spent years photographing Haiti. While she appreciates the formal qualities of the images what she is particularly drawn to is how they represent Haiti differently than the news photographs many people are

accustomed to. Usually, photographs of Haiti are created and circulated by photographers from outside of Haiti. As she explains, the “foreign photographers . . . whether we mean to or not, we always go with some sort of agenda.” She does not exclude herself from this category. She is a foreign photographer and when she shoots in Haiti, it is for a news publication or for her body of work dealing with Haiti. As she comments, it is not necessarily always a negative agenda - such as seeking out violence or death - but it is important to be aware of the fact that there is an agenda.

Maggie Steber: Well, there’s so many things you can say about these pictures. First of all, they’re, I think they are exquisite photographs and, I say this because I think they’re very honest photographs. You know, I’ve been working in Haiti for 25 years and I’ve covered turmoil and I’ve gone at times when it was very peaceful because there’s a lot to see when it’s peaceful as well as when it’s, when there’s a lot of trouble. And there’s so many foreign photographers who go and work in Haiti. And of course it’s compelling, it’s a compelling place to work and there are many reasons that people go. But, I think whether we mean to or not, we always go with some sort of agenda – looking for something. And, um, that’s not necessarily a bad thing, but it, I don’t want to say something that strong, but I’m going to say it – It sort of imposes the continual imperialistic view of country that many people don’t understand and they don’t know the history of, they don’t know the culture, they don’t even understand why the Kreyol language is such an important thing.

She continues by describing the photographs created by the FotoKonbit photographers.

She finds them to be “honest photographs” that develop a new body of images that portray Haiti. Photography has not been very common in Haiti because of the expense of the equipment, and in the past the dearth of places where negatives and prints could be made. FotoKonbit brings photography back into circulation in Haiti. The photographs that are produced create “documentation of Haiti by Haitians” and “it’s like creating a giant family album.” The representations cover the beauty of the country in the vistas, colors, and smiling people, and also some of the harsh realities including tent cities, lack

of food and water, and political turmoil. Steber supports the efforts of FotoKonbit and says she finds it “thrilling” that this work is being done.

Maggie Steber: I just feel that they’re very honest photographs and that because it’s Haitians taking the pictures, they are photographing what is important to them and I think looking, I can say, looking for myself at these pictures, I learned even more than I thought I knew about Haiti because there’s a purity and there’s no agenda. It’s just people looking at each other, and especially what has survived after the earthquake and what is important to their daily lives. And, they’re just, I think they’re some of the most beautiful pictures I’ve ever seen anybody take of Haiti, and believe me, I’ve looked at a lot of pictures taken in Haiti. Not just my own. But, hundreds of photographers. Because that’s how photographers are – they want to see what everybody else is doing. But, I just think they’re, um, it’s like creating a giant family album. And this is the first time that I think, because I think FotoKonbit is going to continue to grow in this way and that it’s going to create a record, a documentation of Haiti by Haitians and that never happens except through the art, the music, but with photography, it really hasn’t happened. I find it thrilling, really.

I began this section with Leonie Hermantin, and I want to end here as well.

Hermantin expresses her pride especially in relation to their work in rural communities.

After the earthquake many people fled the hard-hit Port-au-Prince for the countryside.

Tent camps were set up outside of Port-au-Prince and further out in rural areas as well.

One of those was Camp Perrin.

Leonie Hermantin: Well, you know, I’m just a proud auntie. I’m really, really proud of you guys, and I also want to commend you for having gone to Camp Perrin, having gone to the countryside, as you know I work in Haiti’s rural communities, and that’s an area that has been overlooked, particularly in the aftermath of the earthquake. We know that rural communities were the area where everyone fled to, send food back to Haiti. So, you know on the eve of the earthquake, I really want to recognize that you have honored with your pictures, folks who were there who were some of the first responders at time to the refugees from the earthquake.

She acknowledges FotoKonbit for their work at Camp Perrin because the photographs offer another perspective on Haiti. As she says, when people go to Haiti what they notice is the dirt. In these photographs, what struck her was the amount of effort people went



through to present themselves and their living spaces in a tidy, well-groomed manner.

This runs counter to the images she is accustomed to seeing outside of Haiti which tend to portray the grit of the city of Port-au-Prince.

Leonie Hermatin: I also, I'm just blown away by the images of the tent cities. Um, what we've seen are usually, and when we go to Haiti, for all of us who have gone to Haiti, you see dirt, you see, you know particularly in Port au Prince, you just want to get out of it because it's so dirty, and yet, when you look at the space, how people have kept their spaces clean in spite of the fact . . . that all the elements are conspiring against them. Whether it's rain, whether it's whatever, and yet they have a, they have kept their personal spaces so clean, and their children so well-groomed. I mean if anyone knows anything about black hair, to have this kid, this little girls, with their hair so well-kept, it's it's a affirmation of life, a demonstration. Even that little girl who was washing the clothes, her hair was well done, so this is the expression of absolute, you know, love. Again, we don't see that very often and I really thank you for bringing that to the surface.

Hermatin ends by saying that the time put into making oneself presentable for the camera (or for life in general) is “an affirmation of life, a demonstration . . . This is the expression of absolute . . . love.” Taking her comment further, I think that these photographs represent a similar affirmation of life and expression of love. The photographers who created these images live with the people that they photograph. They photograph things that are familiar to them and that they want the world to see, affirming their presence.

### *Part III: Photographing for Future Archives*

Théard and Anthony's work enters into and transforms future archives, as it isn't only what we encounter visually in our own moment that matters, but the kinds of things we leave for the future. Though archives are often thought to be something of a storehouse of relics, they are not something belonging to the past, but are in fact of our

moment.<sup>72</sup> They are created made through the discursive entanglements that we bring to them. They do not simply exist. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot asserts, “Archives assemble. Their assembly work is not limited to a more or less passive act of collecting. Rather, it is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical understanding” (1997:52). Further, “pastness” is a position. In other words, “the past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something *over there* only because I am *here*. But nothing is inherently over there or here” (ibid. 15, emphasis in original). Archival representations, just as photography itself, is created and mediated.<sup>73</sup> Théard and Anthony are actively engaged in creating documents that speak to our present moment and leave traces of it for the future. Those traces for the future are their documentary photographs that will become our future archives.

bell hooks wrote that photography played an important role in her life, and offered a way to construct an identity based on photo-memories. “We are awed by what our snapshots reveal, what they enable us to remember. The word *remember* (*re-member*) evokes the coming together of several parts, fragments becoming a whole . . . Using images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye” (1995:64, emphasis in original). But, rather than only constructing or reconstructing memories, the photographs Théard and Anthony create “leave evidence” (Interview with author, March 1, 2011) and “build archives” (Interview with author, April 26, 2011) for the future.

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<sup>72</sup> I thank Nathan Connolly for this astute insight that ‘history’ is in the present, not the ‘past’ revealing itself.

<sup>73</sup> See also Sekula, Allan (1989) *The Body and the Archive*. In *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. R. Bolton, ed. Pp. 343-388. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Photographs are distinctive in their ability to be reproduced without losing the integrity of the image itself. Technologies like the Internet, digital cameras, email, and social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others, have shifted the way many people interact with photography. Images are shared, viewed, and commented on. Diana Taylor notes that while the technology might be new, this shift in knowledge production and circulation has happened before – in the shift from embodied culture to print culture in the 1800s. As she explains, “print made it possible to separate knower from known and transmit knowledge from letters, books, and other documents over broad stretches of time and space” (2010). We see similar processes taking shape now as photographs are shared via the Internet. Yet, the print photograph itself is still what takes up physical space in museum collections and archives. While new technologies have enabled a broader public sphere for the circulation of images, it remains to be seen what will be documented, saved, or archived, and how this process will occur. Taylor expresses similar concerns as she comments on how rapidly changing technology means that we will possess items stored on devices that we may not be able to access (2010). So, while the term ‘archive’ has seen an expanded usage in our lexicon, our practices of documentation and preservation for the future have not yet been determined.

Théard and Anthony take on the task not only of representation and artistic practice as social practice in their contemporary environments, but also of creating new archival imagery through their respective projects. Anthony accomplishes this through her commitment to documenting black Miami. Théard’s documentary photographs and her work with FotoKonbit produce new images of black people transnationally. The power of the photographs Anthony and Théard produce is that they are not the scientific typologies

of the past nor are they over-glossed positive images either. They reveal the artists' own thought processes about the type of photographs they have encountered and their commitment to crafting a black photographic practice that will show how they and the people they photograph participate in self-representation. Ultimately, their work and art practice attests to the current role of artists in our society as not only one who makes representations, but as a person who responds to what they see with knowledge of how these images are influenced by history and how they will function in the years to come.

## Chapter 6

### Memories and Archives

In 2004, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez was a visiting artist in upstate New York, and as soon as she arrived for her visit, students at the institution were eager to see her film-based art work. She barely had time to settle into her room before they asked her to prepare a film to show on the same day. Rodriguez unpacked her things and got to work splicing, combining, scratching, and coloring on 16mm film, and had a short piece ready to show that evening. As she began to screen the film the projector stopped working. Rodriguez hurriedly pulled the film out of the projector, took out the “offending frames,” as she described it, and then put it back into play. The archivist who was standing next to her was distressed.

“That’s not the right way to handle film,” she told Rodriguez referring to how the artist had grabbed the film out of the projector, ripped apart the film strip, and put it back together.

Rodriguez responded, “well, this is my film so I can – and in fact, this film is made up of a lot of other films that I cut up – so that’s that.”<sup>74</sup>

When the archivist saw what Rodriguez was doing with the film strips in the creation of her artworks, she was distraught at the idea that the artist was, in a sense, destroying an archival document. Some of the footage Rodriguez had acquired from other people either through trade or purchase, sometimes on websites like eBay. Her personal

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<sup>74</sup> Field notes from December 17, 2009.

film archive includes footage from Pepsi and Clairol commercials, ethnographic footage from Africa, reels of Betty Boop, and 1920s peep shows. She collects this kind of archival film as well as creates her own 16mm film and digital video and sound. Then, she scratches, paints, cuts, and joins film and sound to craft her artworks. Making her own marks on the film, Rodriguez was altering the archival; marking it, scratching it, making it into something new. Was she also preserving it by making it something new? What new insights did her intervention bring to the film footage? As Rodriguez recounted this story to me, I was captivated by the layered meanings that corresponded similarly to the layered works she was creating. I was intrigued by the idea that her work had upset the archivist so much. What was so precious about the films that, in the archivist's opinion, Rodriguez should not have cut them, scratched them, or otherwise altered them?

Rodriguez told me this story in 2009, in the early stages of the in-depth fieldwork for this research. Over lunch on a particularly warm December day at a Brazilian restaurant in Miami Beach with the artist and her sister, Juana Maria Rodriguez, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, we talked about the many issues this story raised. The conversation revolved around temporality, archives, and affect. The two sisters approach the ideas from different perspectives. Juana thinking about the theoretical and practical implications of rethinking the effect of affect on cultural production and scholarship on gender and sexuality. Dinorah working directly with archival objects in her work as an experimental filmmaker. Sitting in between the two sisters over lunch was like sitting at the intersection of an intellectual ping pong match. One story led to the next, to the next. I could barely keep up my note taking, but was glad

that they were both eager to think through some of the issues I wanted to address in my research.

At the time, it was not immediately apparent to me why Rodriguez's handling of the film would have caused such a stir. But, reflecting on it years later, after actually having done more archival research myself, I see why the archivist, in her role as preserver of cultural heritage and documents, would not react positively to the artist's intervention. For the archivist, the archival film is the thing to be preserved. There is room for interpretation, but not for actual invention and changing of the physical objects. In archives, people go to great lengths to assure access to materials and also the care of these materials so they can be accessed over and over again in the future. Yet, archives and archival objects are not permanent in the way they are often imagined. Rodriguez's challenge to the archival object presents a tension between preservation and interpretation, archives and art, history and feelings.

In this chapter I analyze how artists reinterpret and intervene in archival information and imagery in the production of artwork. Previous chapters have addressed how artists engage the landscape and produce new representations that contribute to a new and growing archive for the future. The artists in this chapter use materials that are typically considered already part of an 'archive,' including found moving picture reels, negatives uncovered in a family's collection, old photographs, and letters. Each of the artists alters the archival material in such a way that potentially destroys archival power. Yet, I argue that intervening and manipulating archival objects transforms them into representations of affect and memory that are also significant in a consideration of

history. This is especially significant in the context of Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora histories, which have not always been documented via traditional means of historical narratives and long-standing institutional archives. Caribbean history is intertwined with memory, not separate from it.

After discussing more about Caribbean memories, histories, archives, and affect, I turn to the work of several artists. In the first half of the chapter, I discuss two artists, Nereida Garcia-Ferraz and Elizabeth Cerejido. I focus on these artists' photographic works and their relationship to family photographs, history, and albums. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the work of Maria Martinez-Cañas and return finally to Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, with particular attention to their manipulation of archival documents. In the process they transform the archival materials and offer insight into how history and memory are produced.

### *Caribbean Memories, Archives, and Affect*

The texture of Caribbean history and memory has been shaped by the very histories and memories it tries to contain. Global movements associated with the Atlantic slave trade, colonial economies, Revolutions, independence, and contemporary migrations all involve complicated layers of memories and histories which are sometimes at odds with each other. Diasporic histories and memories test the limits even further because people are distanced from places of origin, from sources of knowledge, documentation, and repetition. What are history and memory but a series of repetitions, whether our own personal stories or larger public ones? Caribbean writers and scholars emphasize memory



and embodiment as the place of stories from the past. Memories and histories reside in places, bodies, texts, images, tastes, and sounds.

Archives have traditionally held the power to interpret history because what is stored within the archive has been viewed as history, as the truth. Archives are typically the place, physical or digital, where collections of objects (including documents, photographs, and other such materials) are stored. Speaking about the power of archives, Diana Taylor has argued that archives draw their power from the things held within their collections and the logics of their organization. Materials in archives, Taylor asserts are “nameable, storeable, and preservable, imbued with a power and authority” sometimes just because they are in an archive. (2010) Yet, the archive cannot be taken for granted. It is not a place that simply exists; it is produced (Trouillot 1997). There is no such thing as a “pure and simple” truth emerging from the archives, as Jacques Derrida maintained in *Archive Fever*. Everything is a production, an interpretation, a re-interpretation, a representation.

Some histories have often fallen outside of the archival, especially when they have been considered ‘unarchivable’ under the standard definition. Things like oral histories, storytelling performance, personal notes, artworks, dance, and music are not within the traditional realm of the archive. Also, materials which were not deemed important enough to be preserved are not in official archives. Not all cities, countries, groups, organizations, et cetera archive materials, and even if they do, these are generally not accessible to broad publics. This kind of archival unevenness affects the kinds of histories we are able to tell, and this is certainly the case with people who have not held positions of power, including women, queer people, and people of color.

In the Caribbean and in diaspora, histories of violence from the slave trade to colonization have rendered both historical accounts and memory contested sites of competing narratives and imagery. Many accounts of Caribbean history were built on travel narratives (texts), including some written by anthropologists, and images (postcards and photographs). In other words, views from outside that produced what came to be known as the region's history.<sup>75</sup> Writing about the European colonial enterprise and writing globally, Mary Louise Pratt asked the fundamental question: "How has travel and exploration *writing produced* 'the rest of the world' for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory?" (1992:5) The accounts written by others were not merely read, they actually helped to construct histories. The aftermath of these kinds of travel accounts can be seen in places like museums, that are structured to generate an overarching narrative.<sup>76</sup> Ginetta Candelario (2007) writes that in the Dominican Republic, travel narratives helped to embed an incomplete meta-narrative about the nation into present day institutions like museums.

Within the discipline of anthropology we can see how this has taken shape, when anthropologists like Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham have not been regarded with the same scholarly weight as other forebears. This has undoubtedly affected the kinds of histories and archives we draw upon in contemporary research. Hurston's

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<sup>75</sup> See also Geertz, Clifford (2000[1973]) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.; Clifford, James (1988) *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.; and Levi-Strauss, Claude (1973 [1955]) *Tristes Tropiques*. John and Doreen Weightman, transl. New York: Penguin Books.

<sup>76</sup> See also Candelario, Ginetta E. B. (2007) *Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham: Duke University Press.; Fusco, Coco (1995) *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. New York: The New Press.; and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara (1998) *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

research has been bracketed off into the category of folklore, and Dunham is largely known for her contributions to dance. Archival erasure cuts both ways here because folklore and dance are valuable in understanding people's lives, histories, and memories. However, these fields have been set aside as performative, and not regarded as a place of historical knowledge. There are some shifts happening with the increased use of digital technology. Broader public access has opened up some of these avenues. For instance, Dunham's dance techniques and field recordings are being archived by the Library of Congress using digital video, to record them, and the internet to share them broadly. The Library of Congress has also archived and shared Hurston's field recordings, such as railroad songs in Florida.

The struggle over whose history is represented in written accounts has informed much postmodern Caribbean scholarship and raised questions about history, memory, and representation.<sup>77</sup> In his 1992 Nobel lecture, Derek Walcott differentiated between History, with a capital 'H,' and history, with the former being the colonial view of the region. By way of example, he said, "The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts" (Walcott 1992). The ruins are the remains of the colonial enterprise, and they are regarded as History. The sugar plantations where Europeans created wealth with the labor and lives of enslaved people, and the forts, which were the entry point of the enslaved with they were transported from Africa and the exit point of profit producing crops like sugar. There is no History of the landscape, because History did not regard the

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<sup>77</sup> See also Benitez-Rojo, Antonio (2001 [1996]) *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. J. Maraniss, transl. Durham: Duke University Press.; Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (1997) *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.; and Ortiz, Fernando (2003 [1947]) *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Durham: Duke University Press.

people, culture, or landscape other than the one the colonial enterprise had created.

Walcott spoke vividly about visual representation as well:

If you wish to understand that consoling pity with which the islands were regarded, look at the tinted engravings of Antillean forests, with their proper palm trees, ferns, and waterfalls. They have a civilizing decency, like Botanical Gardens, as if the sky were a glass ceiling under which a colonized vegetation is arranged for quiet walks and carriage rides. Those views are incised with a pathos that guides the engraver's tool and the topographer's pencil, and it is this pathos which, tenderly ironic, gave villages names like Felicity. A century looked at a landscape furious with vegetation in the wrong light and with the wrong eye. It is such pictures that are saddening rather than the tropics itself. These delicate engravings of sugar mills and harbors, of native women in costume, are seen as part of History, that History which looked over the shoulder of the engraver and, later, the photographer. History can alter the eye and the moving hand to conform a view of itself; it can rename places for the nostalgia in an echo; it can temper the glare of tropical light to elegiac monotony in prose, the tone of judgment in Conrad, in the travel journals of Trollope. (Walcott 1992)

History, whether textual or visual was produced from a certain perspective. Krista Thompson has further written about these themes particularly through the postcards Bahamian and Jamaican landscapes. The postcards produced a touristic vision of the Caribbean that was so widely spread it became a visual icon. Pictures of palm trees, laboring men and women, and seascapes predominate this visual and imaginative field. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Thompson discusses visual system as 'tropicalization,' the creation of place-images that then characterized the Caribbean outwardly.

Memory, experience, and affect function as counter history.<sup>78</sup> Walcott argued that the Caribbean, as it exists for the people who live there, is primarily about memory. "All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, *arcs-en-ciel*. That is the effort, the labor of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods

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<sup>78</sup>More could be included here about black women and feminist writing as well. Some of this was covered in Chapter 5. For a good review see Farah Jasmine Smith, 2007 essay in *Signs*.

form bamboo frames, phrase by phrase.” (Walcott 1992) The Caribbean is made of memory and of imagination.

When what might typically constitute ‘archives’ does not exist, other forms become even more important. Studying transnational communication, Karen Richman (2005) wrote about the use of cassette tapes sent between the US and Haiti instead of written letters. The tapes were not mere stand-ins for the written text, they were something else altogether. The tapes communicated peoples’ stories, longings, and desires. They contained peoples’ voices including particularities of intonation and expression. Michel-Rolph Trouillot explained that from the time he was young, history was more than what was written on paper. In the opening of his book, *Silencing the Past*, he wrote, “I grew up in a family where history sat at the dinner table” (xvii). History was what was around him. It was the stories told in his family. It was their memories and his. Caribbean history, in Trouillot’s estimation lives, breathes, and changes. It is affective and personified.

Memory has a particularly strong relationship with exile. In exile, memory is often the only place people have. In their memories people can imagine a home that sometimes cannot be found anywhere else. Ruth Behar, writing about Cuban exile, explains that “[r]emembering is, indeed, the key theme of our issue, as it perhaps must be in any project focusing on the imagining of nationality and homeland. Perhaps that is why personal essays and poetry, both of which readily lend themselves to the exploration of memory’s ambiguities, have played such an important role here” (Behar 1995:14). Myriam Chancy has written about her own experience with memory, history, and exile in her own life and in the works of Afro-Caribbean writers. Having left Haiti at a young age

to live in Canada with her family, Chancy grew up removed from the Caribbean context. But, she wrote that “It has been through memory--my own and that of family members--that I have been able to keep a vital link to Haiti” (Chancy 1997:xiv). These fragmentary memories include “the heat that enveloped the tropical summers of my early childhood; the walks on dust-laden mountain roads leading past the street vendors . . . the weekend escapes to grey sand-covered beaches to wallow in the aquamarine depths of the sea; the fruits--sweet and orange flesh encased in pliant green shells” (xiv). But, these fragments mask the fact that Chancy grew up and was educated without knowing much about Caribbean history or contemporary life. Education was a top priority for her exile family, but the further she progressed in her education the more distanced she became from her own history. Chancy writes that she knew much about the history of Canada, but did not know this history of people of African descent in Canada or anywhere else. She writes, “the more I advanced in school, the more I found that my personal and communal histories had been expunged from the official records. I did not exist . . . I was as invisible to myself as other women of color had been made to me” (xvi). Memory, for Chancy became important in her connection with Haiti because official histories did not include the stories her memories held.

In my description of affect in relationship to archive, I draw on the work of Ann Cvetkovich (2003). In her analysis of the archive of trauma in relationship to lesbian life, she offers an alternative ‘archive,’ an ‘archive of feelings.’ This archive exists “In the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories” (8). In the production of an archive of feelings, “memory becomes a valuable historical resource” as do “ephemeral and personal collections of objects” (8). Memory and

ephemeral objects “stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge” (8). I find this analysis helpful in thinking about artists’ work because they visualize affect - emotions, feelings, memory - in their artworks. In relationship to both the Caribbean and diaspora, where history has been contested and shaped over and over again, memory and affect complicate the meaning of archives.

The rest of this chapter analyzes how artists both use and create their own archives. By intervening in archives artists visualize memory and produce new documents for future histories.

### *Part I: Picturing Family and Memory*

Nereida García-Ferraz and Elizabeth Cerejido, who both left Cuba with their families in 1970, use photography to address questions of memory, history, family, and place. Their work raises questions about memory and reconstructing family histories based on one’s own remembering and experiences. How do artists use both memory and photography to find footing on shifting ground (i.e. in exile)? How have artists disrupted the idea of the photography as objective historical document? How do artists repurpose popular photography to document and represent the family?

Photography is a particularly potent artistic tool for exploring memory because of its dual role as both a document and a work of art. In particular, family photo albums can be considered what Marianne Hirsch calls an “imagetext,” a narrative told through pictures from a specific perspective (1997:11). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century photography of the family, according to Hirsch, functioned to immobilize “the flow of family life into

a series of snapshots” and perpetuate “familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history.” Yet, this is a history that is imagined and one that “real families cannot uphold” (Hirsch 1997:7) Susan Sontag viewed family photographs as a “portable kit” of memories that families carry around with them (1977:8). Family pictures have existed since the early days of photography, yet the advent of the Kodak camera in 1888, turned photography into a populist medium. I discussed this briefly in Chapter 5, with reference to how black people were able to take control of self-representation through the production of their own photographs of families and everyday life. Kodak was marketed toward the amateur photographer, and through this, the camera has become one of the most basic tools of documenting family life and preserving family histories and memories for the future. This kind of photography altered the way people remember. Looking at family photographs people could see how they looked as children and how relatives they never met looked when they were alive. It is reasonable to wonder whether we remember an event because it happened or because we have seen a picture of it.

The photograph, as an object in particular, takes on a special meaning for people who migrate or are in exile, including people who left Cuba. Many families who left Cuba carried only a few photographs, if any, when they left. The photographs became prized objects that were dreamt about and pondered over. For those who left the island as children, photographs represented a home they once knew but only vaguely remembered. As Ruth Behar writes, “pictures were a substitute for the Cuba I longed to see with my own eyes but couldn’t” (Behar 2007:12). These photographs contain memories and



emotions as well as history. They are part of an “affective archive,” or an archive of feelings (Cvetkovich 2003:261).

Both Hirsch and Sontag were speaking to photography in the realm of the printed photograph, prevalent until recent years. Contemporary digital technology changes the way we interact with images and the way we perceive the archetypal family album, and photography more generally – pictures are taken with much more frequency, posted and shared online, and many are never even printed, raising new questions about how we conceptualize family photographs and albums as well as photographic practice in the general public.<sup>79</sup> However, the question of whether the photograph or the memory comes first is still relevant. How are memories connected to photographs? How do artists’ renderings of photographs act as memory and history?

García-Ferraz and Cerejido’s photographic artworks re-imagine and reconstruct the “family album” through their simultaneous reference to the photographic object and their manipulation of the object itself and the meaning it holds. As interpretations of the “family picture,” García-Ferraz and Cerejido’s photographs move beyond generic family photographs and stretch into the *imagination* of a family photograph and the family album. They recreate the family album through their imaginations of history and memory by telling parts of their own life stories, their struggles with migration from Cuba, and their attempts to make sense out of their lives while understanding their family histories. Dealing with family pictures, Garcia-Ferraz and Cerejido challenge us to think family histories and memories in relation to photography. Engaging with this theme as artists

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<sup>79</sup> Even in places where people lack access to personal computers, many people are able to access the internet on cell phones, as artists in Trinidad and Tobago told me when I visited in 2010. Cuba presents a much different scenario, which has changed over the course of my fieldwork. Internet is still difficult to access in Cuba, and I am not sure whether the increased use of cell phones has led to an increase in sharing of photos online.

enables a focus on documenting the family, and also offers room for interpretation of families and histories that are not possible through straightforward documentary photography. Affect is made visible in a typically archival medium.

*Nereida García-Ferraz*

Nereida García-Ferraz was born in Havana in 1954. When she was sixteen years old, in 1970, she and her family migrated to the United States. They moved to Chicago as that was where her father found work. She grew up in Chicago and earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1981, where she focused primarily on painting and toward the end of her degree she became interested in photography.

Her interest in photography was sparked when she was able to return to Cuba for the first time since she had left on the Antonio Maceo Brigade in 1979. The Antonio Maceo Brigade, or the *Brigada Antonio Maceo*, began in 1977 when President Jimmy Carter removed the ban on travel to Cuba. The group named itself after Antonio Maceo, a black Cuban military strategist who fought for Cuba's independence from Spain in the nineteenth century. The Brigades consisted of young Cubans who wanted to travel to Cuba as a way to work toward normalizing relations between Cuba and the U.S. All of the people who participated in the Brigades were those who had left Cuba as children, and therefore did not make the choice to leave the island, but were taken by their parents. (Ruiz and Korrol 2006:49-50)

The trips by the Brigade were monumental because previously, both the US and Cuba did not allow Cubans who left Cuba to return. Most young Cubans who participated wanted to learn about the country and the people that they had been made to leave

behind. They wanted to reconnect or connect for the first time with their families and other young Cubans. This was a powerful political act because although regulations have varied over the years most people who left Cuban during the early part of the Revolution that began in 1959 (the exile generation) declared that they would never return to Cuba while Castro was in power. García-Ferraz's family did not actually leave until 1970, but they had requested permission to leave in 1960, marking them as part of the exile generation. In Cuba, this generation was referred to disparagingly as *gusanos* (worms of the Revolution) - people who many Cubans felt had betrayed their country by leaving instead of working toward the ideals of the Revolution.

García-Ferraz was only a child when her family left, and like many young people of her generation wanted to return to Cuba. She felt like an outsider in school at the Art Institute where there were only two or three other Cubans. She had a strong desire to connect with Cubans and most of all to see what she and her family had left behind- including her grandmother. As she explains, the trip was “almost like dying and going back” (Interview with author, 2008). During her trip to Cuba, she connected to the place and people through photography by making a series of family portraits. Since her family had few photographs with them in the U.S. and fading memories of the country they left behind, she explains that she was the “in-between person” the one “bringing images and letters and things from my mother to my grandmother” (ibid.). García-Ferraz was the only one in her family that has ever returned to Cuba. Her grandmother has since passed away and her mother and grandmother never saw one another in person again. After the series of family portraits, she returned to drawing and painting again because she felt that

the photographs were not able to express the full range of emotion and imagination that she wanted to portray.

Since her first trip back to Cuba, she returned many more times and on her subsequent trips she was also able to connect with Cuban artists inside and outside of Cuba. Her film, *Fuego de Tierra*, chronicles the life and work of the late Ana Mendieta, an artist whom she met on one of the Brigade trips. She has not returned recently since the Bush government has imposed some of the tightest restrictions on travel to Cuba since the early 1960s.

More recently, García-Ferraz's work is in a range of media including photography, painting, and drawing. Since 2001, she has lived in Miami. She moved to Miami from Chicago because she wanted to be closer to her mother who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. During my fieldwork, she worked out of a studio at 801 Projects, a group studio and exhibition space located in the Jose Marti Building on SW 3rd Avenue and Calle Ocho in Miami. This space is smaller than her large warehouse space in Chicago. However it is also more social, an aspect she has come to appreciate. At the café below the studio, Tinta y Café, she often meets clients, curators, or interviewers like me before showing them her studio upstairs. The social nature has led to more collaborations and also mentorship of younger artists working out of 801 Projects.

Already an established artist by the time she moved to Miami, García-Ferraz has been awarded numerous honors and a handful of them include the Richard Diebenkorn Fellowship at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2000, a Ford Foundation Fellowship for research and completion of a book of essays about Cuban identity in 1995, and the Illinois Arts Council Visual Arts Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts

Fellowship in 1989. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and some of her most recent shows include *Unbroken Ties: Dialogues in Cuban Art* at the Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art in 2008, *Here and There: Deterritorializing Miami and Havana* at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts in 2005, *Beyond Havana: Intersecting Time and Space* at the Bettcher Gallery in Miami in 2004, and *Ver Para Creer* at the San Jose Center for Latino Arts in 1999. In addition to her work as an artist, she has also taught and lectured at Miami Dade College, the Mexican Museum of San Francisco, University of California, Berkeley, and De Paul University.

### *Elizabeth Cerejido*

Elizabeth Cerejido was born in Cuba in 1969, and less than a year later she and her mother moved to Miami. Her father was supposed to come soon after, but was delayed and in 1975 he was arrested and sent to prison. During this tumultuous time in Cuba many people were sent to prison for infractions ranging from minor to major offenses. Often these incarcerations were politically motivated, though nothing has been definitely confirmed regarding her father's case. A long ten years later her father arrived in Miami via the Mariel Boatlift. The Mariel Boatlift was prompted in 1980 when Cubans stormed the Peruvian embassy in Havana demanding political asylum. Following that, Castro opened the Port of Mariel and 125,000 Cubans left the island for Miami (Pedraza 1996:269). Families from Miami either came by boat or sent boats to retrieve their relatives, but they were directed to fit as many people as possible onto the boats- relatives and strangers alike. Many of those who left during this time were those who had been

imprisoned. The Mariel Boatlift also included many gay people and the largest proportion of black Cubans to arrive in Miami.

Cerejido grew up in Miami's Little Havana and earned her Bachelor of Arts in Art History in 2002 from Florida International University. She is currently working toward her Master of Arts in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Miami. Her thesis focuses on 1970s photography in Cuba. Cerejido has traveled back and forth between Cuba and Miami seeking to understand the place where she was born, the place where her father was imprisoned, and the people, especially artists, working in Cuba today. For her the fact that she travels back and forth makes her feel like an "ambassador of the possibilities" of change that exist for the relationship between Cubans in Cuba and abroad (Cerejido 2008).

In addition to her academic work about Cuba, she has been active politically in Miami, voicing her discontent with the blockade against Cuba. The blockade began in 1961 and restricts the flow of people, goods, and money between Cuba and the U.S. In reaction to Fidel Castro ceding power to his brother Raul Castro, many in Miami and around the world began to speak of "the transition." Who would take control of Cuba? Could the U.S. and Cuba have normal relationship? Cerejido wrote an article for *Yes!* magazine in reaction to the transition and the ways it was being discussed in Miami. She explains "I belong to a second-generation of Cuban-Americans whose lives have been shaped by the politics of intolerance that have long defined the relationship between two opposing realities. We have been robbed of the opportunity to be part of the process that shapes the US-Cuba political discourse" (Cerejido 2008). The dominance of the political outlook of Cuban exiles of the 1960s have overshadowed many of the voices like

Cerejido's who want to work toward normalizing relationships between the two countries.

Cerejido has worked simultaneously as an artist, curator, and art historian. As a former curator at the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University for six years she organized and curated many projects including: *Vision Revealed: Selections from the work of Abelardo Morell*; *Lespri Endepandan: Discovering Haitian Sculpture*; *Mexterminator vs. Global Predator – A Solo Performance by Guillermo Gómez Peña*; *Rubén Torres Llorca: Modelo Para Armar / Easy-to-Build*; and *A Room of One's Own: Teresita Fernández, María Elena González, Quisqueya Henríquez, and María Martínez-Cañas*. In 1999, Cerejido received the Florida Consortium for Visual and Media Artists Fellowship. The Bernice Steinbaum Gallery in Miami represented her work for several years. Her work is part of museum collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, the Miami Art Museum, Lehigh University Art Galleries in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Centro de las Artes Visuales in Lima Peru. Some of her recent exhibitions include *Shadows, Disappearances and Illusions* at the Miami Art Museum in 2008, *Re-Constructing a Family Portrait-Redux* at Magnan Emrich Contemporary Art in New York, *An Old Fashion Love Story* at Chelsea Galleria in Miami in 2006, and *Breaking Barriers: The Next Chapter* at the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale in 2001.

Cerejido works out of a studio in her home in Miami. Her work has been primarily in photography and more recently in video and sound. Prior to addressing her personal story through photography, she worked commercially as a photographer creating portraits and working as a journalistic photographer. In the late 1990s, she created a series of black

and white nude portraits that focus on the formal qualities of body shapes and the photographic medium. Since the early 2000s, she has been working more from her own personal history and she addresses issues of identity, memory, and the construct of family. *Absence* (2002) and *Re-constructing a Family Portrait* (2004) are two solo exhibitions that represent an important marker in her artistic career, as they are conceptual in nature and depart heavily from her earlier, figurative black and white work.

### *Reworking Old Family Photographs*

Both García-Ferraz and Cerejido utilize family photography to create their artworks. Garcia-Ferraz uses actual family photographs and documents, and Cerejido utilizes pictures of the family in a more abstract manner.

Garcia-Ferraz uses old family photographs and transforms them into new artworks, creating new meanings – or a layering of meanings. Instead of relying upon photography’s ability to capture a moment in time, she edits what the photograph makes visible by using text, layering of images, digital coloring and blurring effects, and layering of objects with the photographs.





Figure 6-1. Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, *Bambolas*, Digital Photograph, 2004.

One piece, entitled *Bambolas* (2004), meaning dolls, pictures her passport with a black and white frontal photo of García-Ferraz as a child is visible in the upper left corner. In profile view, facing the artist’s portrait, a doll missing its left arm lays on the passport. Its missing arm lies to the left side of the passport. The word ‘Nulo,’ or null, is printed below her image. This is a word that was stamped into all Cubans’ passports when they left Cuba. When people left Cuba as exiles, their passports were invalidated and they were officially not allowed back into the country.

While García-Ferraz and her family left Cuba in 1970, they had actually applied to leave in 1960, directly following the Cuban Revolution. It was one month before the artist’s fifteenth birthday that her family received their visas for their “*definitive departure*” (García-Ferraz 2003:61). She writes in an essay, “Not the Golden Age,” in *By Heart/De Memoria Cuban Women’s Journeys In and Out of Exile*, that waiting for ten years was difficult because she never knew when she would need to leave. She recounts, “I remember that I learned to keep my eyes fixed on the landscape: I knew that one fine

day I wouldn't be there any more, so I enjoyed it all in a very special way, as if to keep it from escaping my memory, to keep the archive of my mind from betraying me” (2003:57). García-Ferraz is commenting on the two broken dolls in the image, the one laying on top of the passport, and the young girl, the artist herself, pictured in the photograph in the passport. *Bambolas* pictures the young girl who spent her entire childhood getting ready to leave her home and her country. In the piece, she uses the official document of the passport, one type of archive, in a newly created digital photograph to comment on her own narrative, therefore rendering a representation of the past that is more vivid than the archival passport on its own.

It has long been discussed that the medium of photography itself conjures the interplay between history and memory, art and artifact. How do photographs function for historical understanding? How do they function as memory triggers? Roland Barthes writes that “not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory . . . but it actually blocks memory, quickly becoming a counter-memory” (1980:91). In Barthes estimation, memory is life and history is dead, like the photograph (1980:92). When we look at old photographs they come to replace the function of memory and memory-images. For Siegfried Kracauer, “memory-images” are what we remember because they are significant to us and “memory-images are at odds with photographic representation” because they are fragments (1993:425). Memories are fragments and photographs portray a wholeness. In opposition to Sontag's interpretation of family photographs as a “portable kit,” Barthes and Kracauer focus on the power of memory over the photographic object. Sontag's emphasis is on the document and how it acts as both document and memory aid. It is a portable kit in our minds, and in her explanation, the collection builds the kit in our

minds in conjunction with the images themselves.<sup>80</sup> Memory and documentation work with each other. They feed each other. That is particularly evident in artists' work, where memory and affect is integrated into the historical document of the photograph.

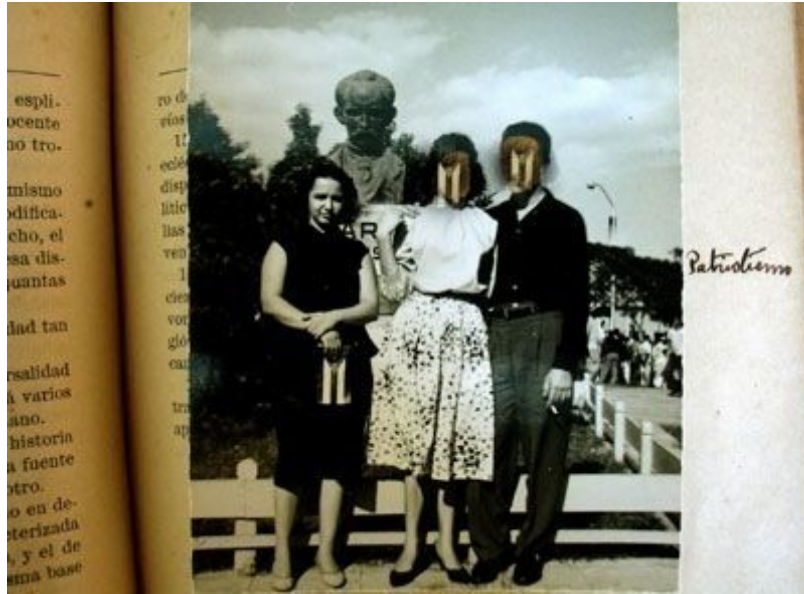


Figure 6-2. Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, *Retrato de Familia*, Digital Photograph, 2006.  
Another image by Garcia-Ferraz, *Retrato de Familia* (2006), meaning Family

Portrait, consists of a family photo in which a group of three people are posed in front of a statue of Jose Marti, a well-known Cuban intellectual whose ideas were central to the Revolution. Two faces have been blurred out with the image of the Cuban flag, a symbol of the Cuban nation. The flag is the same one that the woman on the left hand side of the photograph holds in her hand, but the ones covering the faces are distorted. To the right of the image, cursive handwritten text reads 'patriotism.' The photograph is laying on top of a book written in Spanish, and though most of the words are cut off, the word 'historia' is visible.

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<sup>80</sup> Her partner Annie Leibovitz shot family photographs in a documentary, but atypical style. Her focus was not on the 'happy family' type of picture, but on the everyday family picture. She describes that these photographs did not always highlight the positive aspects of her family, but the real moments. I do not think that Sontag made specific reference to her works, but undoubtedly, her theorization on photography was influenced through her relationship with Leibovitz.

Juxtaposing the family portrait with the words ‘historia’ and ‘patriotism’ García-Ferraz comments on the Revolution, her family, and the idea of a people belonging to a nation. She questions the meaning of history, patriotism, and belonging to a homeland by blurring out two of the faces with the Cuban flag. While the people in the portrait appear content, she disrupts the smooth narrative through her interventions into the photograph. Using easily recognizable symbols- the family, a book, a statue of Jose Marti, and the Cuban flag - García-Ferraz utilizes the power of repetition and reproduction to make her points clear to the viewer. Eduardo Cadava explains that “[t]he extent to which memory and thought can be said to belong to the possibility of repetition, reproduction, citation, and inscription determines their relation to photography. Like the camera that seeks to fix a moment of history, thought wishes to bring history within the grasp of a concept” (Cadava 1997:xviii). García-Ferraz’s use of potent symbols fills in the gaps that are present in memory, history, and photography. “Both historiography and photography are media of historical investigation” (Cadava 1997:xviii) and García-Ferraz portrays modes of historical investigation in this image by questioning the family, the nation, and the Revolution. As she explains,

These photographs . . . have helped me to rebuild myself, to place pieces of the puzzle, searching always for that bigger image that will help me understand what paths everyone took to get to the places they are today . . . these photos have always revealed much more than simple emulsion on paper or the magic of a gaze fixed on the future. They have always, for some reason, come to frame my own surroundings. They bring the consolation of knowing that, at one time, my family lived whole eras in a single place, and belonged to a place: the island (2003:59).

Living most of her early life waiting for the day her family would leave Cuba, the original old family pictures that she works from function to construct an imaginary home-space.

Portraits, in a general sense, are meant to represent a likeness. But, how do we know what someone really looked like after the moment of the photographic capture has passed? Or, in other words, how do we know what happened or what is our built up memory of an occurrence constructed through multiple viewings of images? The likeness within the image cannot stand on its own. Kracauer explains that “were it not for the oral tradition, the image alone would not have sufficed to reconstruct the [person]” (ibid.). For Kracauer, memory and photography work together filling in the gaps of the other whereas for Barthes, the photograph renders memory ineffective. Garcia Ferraz combines the likeness-qualities of the portrait with her own interventions of new images and text, based on stories she has heard or on her own life experiences.

### *Documenting Loss*

Elizabeth Cerejido’s work examines similar themes as Garcia-Ferraz, but she utilizes a different approach as we can see in the series titled *Absence* from 2002. She began work on this in 2000, when two personal events prompted a new direction in her work – her mother’s diagnosis of Alzheimer’s and the sudden death of her father a year and a half later. As a result of these two personal and traumatic losses, she began to address the issues that had defined her life through the lens of her mother and her parent’s life story. She addresses memory and memory loss through documentary-style images that document the history of her parents’ everyday lives within their apartment.



Figure 6-3. Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.



Figure 6-4. Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.



Figure 6-5. Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.



Figure 6-6. Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.

*Absence* is a series of color, black and white photographs, and two video installations about her mother's diagnosis of Alzheimer's and her father's death. The photographs are 22 x 19 inches and were printed in an edition of four. The title *Absence*, "alludes to the absence of [her] father while also making specific reference to the gradual and inevitable absence of [her] mother's memory" (Cerejido 2002). There are thirteen images in the series, though they are not always shown together. No matter how many photographs are displayed, the series always begins with her mother's portrait (far left) and unplugged sewing machine (far right). There are photographs that depict only white text on a black background such as, "My father's umbrella," that recall items that were once in the apartment but cannot be found. Most of the text images reference her father who has passed away. The text images always come in between photographs of objects and they do not start or end a series. The unplugged sewing machine that concludes the series stands as a "symbol of her illness." Cerejido's mother's "lifetime profession as a seamstress [is] now transformed into a furniture piece" and further into an object to be photographed and displayed (Cerejido 2002). Through the documentation of her parents' belongings and the spaces they formerly inhabited, Cerejido is both adding to and destroying memory. Through the images, she creates photographs of what has been there but also cuts off any possibility of remembering it differently. However, given her mother's personal struggle with memory loss the photograph may be the only thing left.



Figure 6-7. Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.

The notion of memory and its fragmentation is made clearer by the everyday objects Cerejido includes in the series. Cerejido photographed everyday objects that gained increasing importance as her mother’s ability to use them declined. In the images we see documentation of notes on the refrigerator, phone, and air conditioner- what Cerejido calls, “daily reminders of her condition” (Cerejido 2002). This image is a photograph of notes on the refrigerator. To the right there is a list of “MEDICINA,” medicine, to be taken at different times of the day along with meals- “DESAYUNO,” breakfast, “ALMUERZO 1:00PM,” lunch, “CENA 7:00PM,” dinner, and “AL ACOSTARSE,” when it bothers you. On the left there are various notes that serve as reminders, such as the one of the bottom which reads, “Pagar la cantina,” a note reminding her mother to pay the food service that delivers food to her since she can no longer cook for herself. The magnets mask the seriousness of the notes on the refrigerator. They are colorful and depict the Coca-Cola logo on a miniature box, a mug, and a plate. Ironically, they reference festivities while the notes depict every single, mundane tasks and medicines to be taken throughout the day.



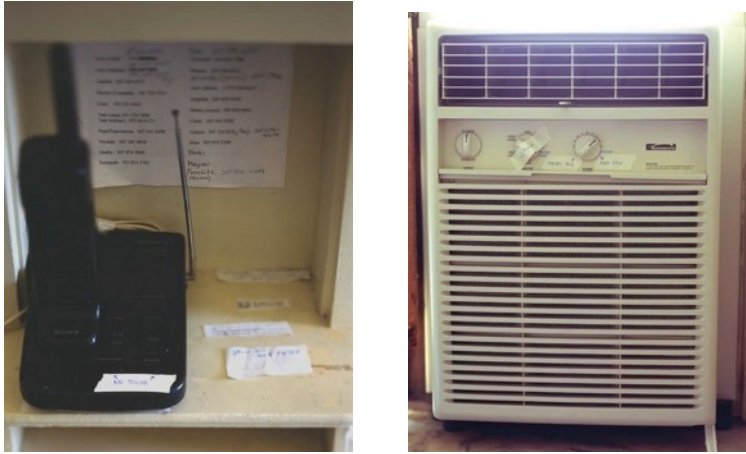


Figure 6-8. (left) Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.  
Figure 6-9. (right) Elizabeth Cerejido, photograph from *Absence* series, 2002.

Similar notes appear within the images of the telephone and the air conditioner. They portray symbols of memory loss and also more clearly reveal the immigrant story so central to Cerejido and her mother's life. The notes on the equipment are not only reminders of what to do, but instructions written in Spanish, their primary language. On the phone, there is a sign in the foreground that reads "NO TOCAR" or don't touch. Behind the phone are a list of phone numbers, some typed some written in by hand, that list out the numbers of friends, family, and doctors they may need to call. The air conditioner also contains notes about instructions for use including signs which indicate "MAS COLOR," hotter, and "MAS FRIO," cooler. The part of the air conditioner that changes the overall function is taped over and reads "NO TOCAR," don't touch.

The portrayal of her mother and the objects in photographs depicts their aura and also the way the photograph distances us from their aura. Utilizing Benjamin's concept of the aura with regard to the portrait of Cerejido's mother, we can see that the reproducible photograph detaches the subject from her unique existence and also enables her mother to be held in the viewer's eye at a distance. The objects are also seen as detached from the

surroundings. Eduardo Cadava further explains that “[c]laiming to bring us closer to history, closer to the immanence, the real time, of an event, the media obscures its relation to distance and death” (Cadava 1997:xxiv). However, for Barthes the photograph is always close to death. Becoming the subject of a portrait is an “experience of a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter” (1980:14). All of the subjects of Cerejido’s portraits are in fact specters, or ghosts. They are historical documents of her mother and the way her parents lived, but they are a flash in a moment of time. Peering into their lives, her mother’s face, and the objects in the apartment have a quality akin to a ghost-like presence. With the death of her father and her mother’s ailing health, Cerejido uses photography to both become closer and farther away from death. Perhaps, as Kafka has said, “We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes” (*in* Barthes 1980:53). If, for Kafka stories are a way for him to get the story out of himself and “shut his eyes,” then photographs are Cerejido’s use of the camera’s lens to shut her eyes and come to terms with her personal loss. The series also stands as a historical testimony to her parents’ lives and their immigration to the U.S.

García-Ferraz and Cerejido’s portrayal and intervention into old photographs, documents, and spaces reconstructs the notion of the family album. Marianne Hirsch explains that “[f]amily pictures depend on such a narrative act of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generation” (Hirsch 1997:xii). As interpretations of the “family picture,” their photographs artistically interpret everyday family photographs and stretch our

concepts of the family photograph and family album, and highlight and challenge ideas about photography's permanence and the relationship to history, memory, family, and place.

### *Part II: Intervening in Archives*

Maria Martinez-Cañas and Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez work with archival objects in their work too. While Garcia-Ferraz and Cerejido's work interprets family histories and memories through the production of a new works, Martinez-Cañas and Rodriguez intervene and destroy archives in the creation of their artwork. These interventions threaten what is upheld as the archival document - objects meant to be preserved and carefully accessed.

#### *Maria Martinez-Cañas*

Maria Martinez-Cañas was born in Havana, Cuba in 1960, and on August 18, when the artist was three months old, she and her family left the country for Miami. In 1964, the family moved again, this time to Puerto Rico. As a teenager, Martinez-Cañas began working with Polaroid photography when her parents gave her a Polaroid Swinger camera as a gift. Her fascination with the processes of photography inspired her to ask her parents to help her build a darkroom in their home. With the darkroom in working order, she produced work, and in 1977, at age 17, exhibited in her first exhibition titled *Reflejos* at the Galeria Aboy in San Juan. She left Puerto Rico to attend college, and earned her Bachelors degree from the Philadelphia College of Art. Then, she went on to earn her Masters degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1985, she

was awarded a Fulbright-Hays grant to travel to and research in Spain. She spent a year conducting research in archives including the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, Archivo de Indias in Seville and the Archivo de Simancas in Valladolid. She was particularly interested in materials about conquest and colonization of Cuba and the Americas. After she completed the Fulbright in Spain, she returned briefly to Chicago, and then moved to Miami. That was in 1986, and she has lived in Miami since then. Living in multiple locations, she explained that “I normally describe myself as a Cuban-born, Puerto Rican grown, American citizen. And that makes me who I am. The three cultures have had an impact in my life” (interview with author, December 17, 2010). Martinez-Cañas’s early work was shaped by her efforts to understand her roots, and an identity formed across three cultures.

While in Spain she worked with maps she found in the archives to understand how Spanish colonizers such as Christopher Columbus pictured Cuba. As she explained, “I needed to understand, why was it that I felt so Cuban even though I only lived in the island a short time” (Martinez-Cañas 2010). The maps helped her place herself geographically. In Spain, she said she also found a place where she felt as if she had “finally arrived home” (Martinez-Cañas 2010). However, Martinez-Cañas did not stay in Spain. She has settled in Miami, primarily to be close to her parents who had moved to Miami from Puerto Rico while she was in college.

Martinez-Cañas works with a variety of photographic processes to produce her artwork. These include photograms, black and white darkroom photography, digital photography and alteration, and combining other materials into photographic works such as dust, tree branches, and dirt. Martinez-Cañas is influenced by American photographers

who have worked in a more straightforwardly photographic way; taking pictures of people, things, or places. For instance, Harry Callahan and Diane Arbus. However, her own work leans toward the the work of artists who draw, paint, or sculpt because of how the images are formed on paper. She is not the kind of photographer who goes out and takes pictures of people in the streets. As she wrote in an artist statement, “I have always understood photography as a layering process in the sense that collage and montage inspire and define the creation of a photographic image” (Martinez-Cañas 2013). She uses the technology of the photographic to produce works on paper.

Her studio, which is attached to her home, is a laboratory complete with its own darkroom. When I visited in 2010 for our interview, large sheets of paper hung on the wall, ready for the artist to begin experimentation for new works. The darkroom occupies a small part of the studio and because her prints are often large, she uses a technique of roll printing. This means that she rolls up the exposed paper and carefully runs it through the chemicals to expose the print. She uses many processes in the production of her work, and has consistently pushed the boundaries of ‘the photographic’ by incorporating traditional and experimental practices of image-making.

The artist’s primary motivation for creating work is based on her own life experiences. Sometimes something in her life necessitates a shift in the work, and sometimes the work changes her. “Number one, I don’t make my work for anybody. I make my work because I have an immense desire to express myself, and my work allows me, my work is in total connection with my life. You know, I deal with the issues that are important to me in my life at that time” (interview with author, December 17, 2010). Over the course of her career, her thematic focus has shifted from trying to understand

her own identity and her relationship to Cuba (throughout the 1980s and 1990s) to analyzing personal life events (2000s). Her work has engaged the archival throughout, from her early use of maps in Spain to the work about lies and deception that comprised the exhibition *Tetraology*.

*Between Truth and Fiction: Tetraology*

*Tetraology* was a four part exhibition of four series, *Lies*, *Adaptation*, *Tracing*, and *Duplicity as Identity*. The works were all produced in the five years prior to the exhibition, which was mounted at the Freedom Tower in Miami from December 2, 2009 - January 29, 2010. The works were selected and curated by Gean Moreno. In the exhibition space each series occupied its own section, but they were placed so that the viewer could reflect on how one series related to another. Vivian Donnell Rodriguez, one of the organizers of the exhibition, wrote that the “work which was created as four unique series but when seen together articulates a singular and distinct voice” (Martinez-Cañas 2009:3). That singular voice is what Martinez-Cañas described as her break from nostalgia. Through the works in this show, she made a turn from focusing on her Cuban background, identity, and literally and figuratively placing herself on the map, as she had done through her previous work with maps and totems. In this exhibition, her aim was to relate a larger narrative about lies and deception, based on her life, yet not related to a longing for home.

Yet, the exhibition’s relationship to Cuba is difficult to untangle. Even curator, Moreno ascribes the theme of “exile” to the work in the catalogue (Martinez-Cañas 2009). Some of this connection might be because the show took place in the Freedom

Tower, the place where hundred of Cuban migrants resided and received medical care while paperwork was processed in the 1960s. Now the building is part of Miami Dade College, and has been repurposed as an art exhibition space and cultural venue. These works, as the artist explained, helped her express her own sense of exile: "Throughout the years and with my photographs I have tried to reinvent the past. To search, and deal with, a personal identity. My photographs are events that transcend one another as a never ending chain from the past to the present" (Viso 2002). The connection between Cuba and the exhibition reflects on the historical and contemporary underpinnings present in Miami as well as Martinez-Cañas's personal and family history. However, the works in the series are meant to be an examination of a particular aspect of her life, rather than a nostalgic re-memory of Cuba.

These works are the artist's reflection on the blurry line between truth and fiction, and the concepts of illusion and perception. The artist was prompted to deal with these concerns her work in 2003 after her father, Jose Martinez-Cañas had been accused of forging a certificate of authenticity for paintings by two Cuban artists, Amelia Palaez and Mario Carreno. Her father, to whom she dedicated the show, was an art collector and owner of the gallery, Elite Fine Art in Coral Gables. He specialized in Latin American art. After the accusation, at least a dozen newspaper articles were published in both English and Spanish newspapers in Miami and elsewhere. The artist explained that what hurt her most was that the art world was so fast to denigrate her father and his gallery. Without knowing what really happened, Martinez-Cañas felt that people she once trusted were strangers because they were so fast to turn their backs on she and her family. Martinez-Cañas's own encounter with the line between truth and fiction prompted her to

produce four bodies of work that each hinge on that blurry line. The four series are, as she explained, “were the four stages of mourning” (interview with author, December 17, 2010), and she wanted the viewers to know exactly what this work was about so that she could have closure on the experience. She recalled telling Moreno, the curator, to be clear about what the work was about. “I remember I said, I want you, when you’re writing the essay, I want you to say specifically what this work is all about. I don’t want us to go into the bs-ing about letting the viewer figure it out. No no no. I want you to say exactly and pinpoint, because that is the basis of all this work, and to me that was really important” (ibid.).



Figure 6-10. Maria Martinez-Cañas, *Lies: East West*, Pigment Print on Archival Watercolor Paper, 34 x 25 inches, 2005.

The images in the first series, *Lies*, are blurry portraits. They are pigment prints on archival watercolor paper. Printed on watercolor paper, the images are removed from the real, of the photographic. Their blurring mimics the fragmentation and elusiveness of



memory. It is incomplete and relies on further details to become sedimented. Martinez-Cañas explained that *Lies* deals with the idea that “anybody believes what they read” (interview with author, December 17, 2010). This was the first series she began working on after her father had been accused of forgery. Suddenly everything she thought she had believed was being questioned - in her mind as well as in the minds of others.

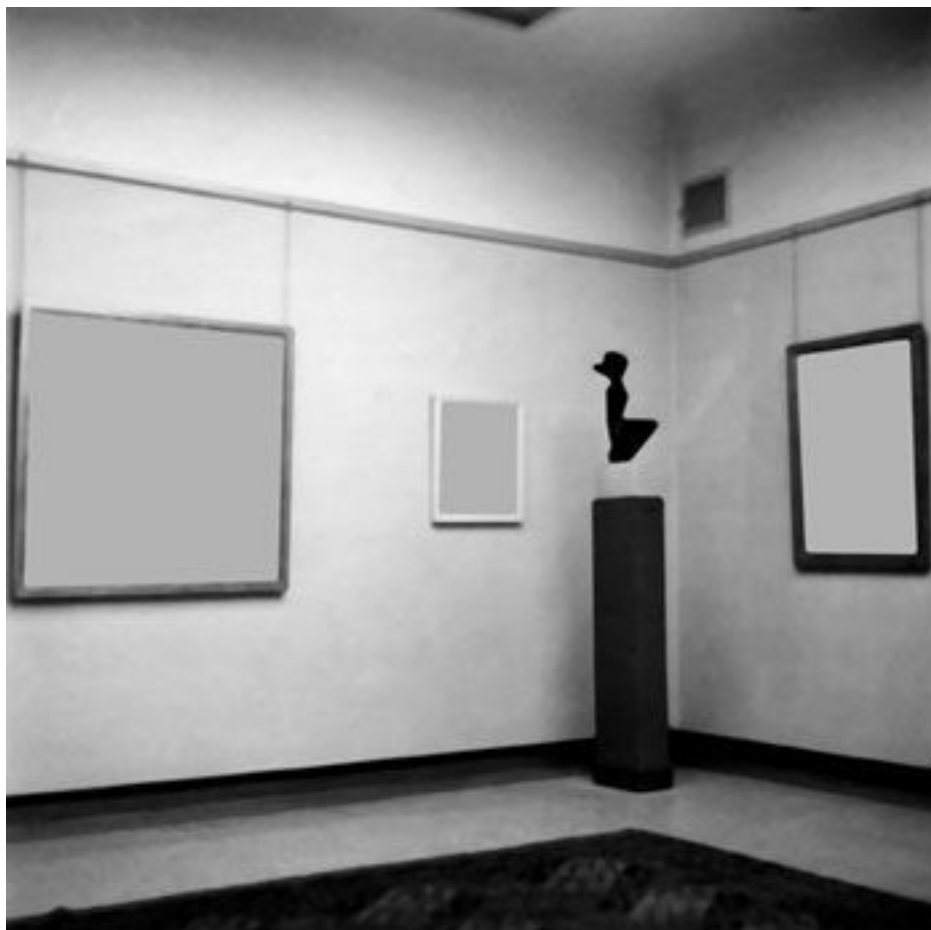


Figure 6-11. Maria Martinez-Cañas, *Adaptation: IX*, Pigment Print on Archival Watercolor Paper, 16 x 16 inches, 2006.

The next two series, *Adaptation* and *Tracing* were created using the photographic archive of Cuban curator Jose Gomez-Sicre. Gomez-Sicre was born in Mantanzas, Cuba

in 1916. He practiced law after graduating from the University of Havana in 1941. After he moved to the US, he took courses in Art History, and began collecting the work of Latin American artists. He was soon representing Latin American artists to an international audience, serving in various advisory roles, including as an advisor to MoMA in New York. He was the founder and director of The Art Museum of the Americas, which still operates today in Washington, DC.

In 2004, Martinez-Cañas acquired Gomez-Sicre's two boxes containing photographic art archive. She had the boxes for two years before she opened them and looked through their contents. She found images from the 40s - 60s, including Gomez-Sicre's travels to meet artists, see exhibitions, and other personal trips. At the time, Martinez-Cañas was at work producing new bodies of work based on concepts of what constitutes history and memory. Using another person's photographs as the basis for her artwork exposes the artifice of the photographic image and the concept of the photographer as the documentarian. In *Adaptation* and *Tracing*, Martinez-Cañas uses two different interventions. In *Adaptation* she removes imagery from the scene, and in *Tracing*, she adds her own mark on top of the photographic image.

The image above is from the series *Adaptation*. In this series, Martinez-Cañas removed the artworks from Gomez-Sicre's photographs, and then printed the resulting image on watercolor paper. There are two transformations there. The first is removing the very type of object she herself is creating. Looking at the image, it seems that artwork should fill in the white spaces on the wall, but nothing is there. Only the structures of the exhibition space remains. The second transformation is the printing of a photograph onto watercolor paper. Similarly to the *Lies* series, the texture of the paper distances this

photographic image from the realm of photography. This also distances the object itself from the truth-making assumptions of photography.

When Martinez-Cañas showed this work to Julie Saul, her art dealer in New York at the Julie Saul Gallery, the dealer was unsure of what to make of the artist's removing of artworks within an artwork. Martinez-Cañas recalled the conversation when we spoke in 2010. As she explained, her dealer in New York said, "but you're removing the artwork. Art is what makes you who you are" (interview with author, December 17, 2010). Martinez- Cañas, having just created the works, was perhaps too close to the work and the experience itself to see what the dealer was concerned with. But as time passed she said, the concepts behind the work became clearer. "Now it makes sense to me. Absolutely. I was removing, I was really negating my own identity as a person." After the traumatic event of the accusation of her father and the media campaign, she said she was "angry at the art world" and she "didn't want to be an artist anymore" (ibid.) Removing the artworks from another person's images was as she said, "so much a reaction." That reaction was an artist's reaction, even though she was not sure she even wanted to be an artist anymore. By removing the artworks, she was removing herself as well. But, not completely because she intervened in the photograph to visualize her feelings, revealing an affective archive. She said, "I couldn't explain to my dealer in New York why I had done work that was removing artworks at that time" (ibid.). *Adpatation* envisions museums without artists' work.



Figure 6-12. Maria Martinez-Cañas, *Tracing: Untitled 40*, Archival Pigment Print on Stretched Canvas, 40 x 40, 2007.

In the series, *Tracing*, Martinez-Cañas selected images from Gomez-Sicre’s archive. Then she scanned the images into her computer, and printed them on stretched canvas. She placed vellum paper on top of select portions of each image, and used a pencil to trace parts of the image. Martinez-Cañas explained that the tracing symbolized that she was “remaking a reality;” making her own reality (Martinez-Cañas 2010). In this new reality it is not clear whether Martinez-Cañas is merely tracing what existed in the image already or adding to it. As she said, the tracing was adding her own interpretation to the images. As an photographically based artist, Martinez-Cañas approached this subject through the conceptual qualities of the medium. As she wrote in her artist

statement, the works combine “photography’s ability to make an exact trace of the outside world with the actual tracing by hand of an existing image” (Martinez-Cañas 2009). She was “making history” by making them her own (Martinez-Cañas 2010). Art critic Roni Feinstein commented that the “line drawings flatten, simplify and seemingly transform photographic ‘fact’ into graphic ‘fiction,’” (Feinstein 2010). Drawing on top of photographs and masking certain parts of the image calls into question the factual information in the photograph. Feinstein further elaborates that printing the photographs onto canvas makes them “hybrid works” and they “offer competing levels of realism and artifice” (2010). Moving the black and white photographic document from its typical form on silver gelatin paper onto the medium of the painting pushes the works further into the territory of fiction.



Figure 6-13. Maria Martinez-Cañas, *Duplicity as Identity: 40%*, Archival Pigment Print on Canvas, 43 x 43 inches, 2008.

The final series in the exhibition was *Duplicity as Identity*. In this series, Martinez-Cañas incrementally combines portraits of herself and her father, from 10% to 90%. Curator Gean Moreno wrote the catalogue that this series “becomes a game of equivocation, of mistaken identities” (Martinez-Cañas 2009). The resemblance of father and daughter is one part of this story, but it continues into the conceptual as the viewer is confronted with images that seem to follow them around the room. The blended images are not perfectly align and distort our sense of vision. They make the eyes feel blurry. Returning to the first series in this four part body of work, there is a blurring of realities

in these images as well. Martinez-Cañas closes *Tetralogy* with the man who began her quest to consider perception, reality, truth, and fiction.

All of the works in the four series present challenges to both the art world conceptions of art and archival notions of historical documents. In each of the four series, Martinez-Cañas appropriates and intervenes in images that she has either found or was given. The artist utilizes these images in different ways in each series. In *Lies*, she manipulates the images so that the details are unrecognizable. In *Adaptation*, she removes significant aspects of the photograph. In *Tracing*, the original images are printed on canvas and then the artist draws on top of them. In the final series, *Duplicity as Identity*, the artist blends two portraits together, refiguring the tradition of portraiture which has been to capture a likeness of a person, not to confuse one identity for another. These interventions suggest new ways of thinking about archives, history, and affective experience. Through them the artist presents documents from the archives, especially evident in *Adaptation* and *Tracing*, and at the same time shows her own feelings about an emotional subject in her life and in her family's history through her manipulation of the images and the transformation of the documents into artworks.

#### *Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez*

Rodriguez works primarily in film as an experimental filmmaker, meaning she pushes the boundaries of what it means to work with film. Some of her pieces are films meant to be viewed as we typically view films and video - projected on a screen or from a screen. For instance, *Un nombre de Mujer* (2001), a short film less than five minutes long, is a imaginative tale about what happens after receiving a mysterious phone call.

Rodriguez calls this film a “media collage” and it includes 16mm film and digital video. The film features Cuban actress Magaly Agüero and music by 1960’s Cuban pop idols, Los Zafiros, along with appearances by Rodriguez herself. The artist’s body of work also includes filmic installations, like the piece *Elusive Landscape*, which I discussed in Chapter 4. *Elusive Landscape* was a filmic installation in five Miami parks. *Elusive Landscape* included both found film and newly produced film, in a similar fashion to her entire body of work. Some characteristics of her films are their narrative structure, use of material, and engagement with societal issues including gender, sexuality, history, and race. Her films are considered “experimental” because they do not have a typical narrative arc, of a beginning, middle, and end, and because she experiments with material, form, and presentation methods. A third form of her work includes the use of the material of film itself in installations as she did in the piece called *Ephemera* (2009). In that work, she hung film strips from a Grand Poinciana in the Miami Beach Botanical Garden. Through the various forms of filmmaking, Rodriguez’s work produces its own affective archive and exemplifies the tension around archival objects and artworks.

I first interviewed Rodriguez for my dissertation during the early stages of my preliminary fieldwork in 2007. Because of this, I visited and re-visited with Rodriguez from 2007 through 2011, asking additional questions as I refined my research project. We sat together for many hours at her dining room table and in her studio. When I first arrived at her home in the northern end of Miami Beach, she led me inside and said, “This is my tiny little studio,” pointing to the back part of her house that in Miami is called the Florida room. I did not think it was so tiny. I thought it was lovely and also meticulously organized. Set in the midst of a busy family that includes two daughters, a



grandson, and a dog, her studio is at once a lab, a family hub, and a quiet space to work in the middle of the night.



Figure 6-14. (top) Photograph of Rodriguez's Studio, by author, 2007.

Figure 6-15. (bottom) Photographs of Rodriguez's Studio, by author, 2007.

Rodriguez's studio separated from the rest of the house with two glass French doors. The studio's back wall is a wall of windows and looks out over the back yard. "This is sort of the office area," Dinorah said pointing to the right-hand side of the studio where her silver MacPro laptop is on a desk. It is connected to a larger monitor behind for film editing using FinalCut Pro. "Over here is the painting area," she explained pointing to the left, and the desk-sized light box which she uses to illuminate the film as she leans over it with a magnifying glass to scratch it, draw on it, and paint it. The perimeter of the studio is filled with carefully organized reels of film and mini DV tapes on shelves, counters, and in a small refrigerator. A large rolling chair enables her to move between the spaces with ease. In the space that connects the painting and office areas is an archaic looking device mounted on a sturdy bookcase. She told me that it is a film cutter which she uses to splice and combine film footage- the foundation of her art practice and creation of experimental films. Her films are made out of her own footage and archival footage of others that she often buys on eBay. (Interview with author, June 28, 2007)

Rodriguez explained how she manipulates films by looking at them, feeling their motion and energy, and intervening in them by scratching and painting on the film itself.<sup>81</sup>

They start like this: I scratch. In this one here, you see that I'm scratching out, and then painting in. So this is an African dancer. This takes, you can imagine, what it takes, how long it takes to do. It's frame by frame. Each frame is different. It's all done by hand. And, of course, it moves. When you project it, it moves. Then, I further do things to it once it becomes a video digitally.

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<sup>81</sup> The material for the extended passages that follow are excerpts from my interview with Dinorah de Jesús Rodriguez at her home studio in Miami Beach on June 28, 2007.



Figure 6-16. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, film still.

I can see movement in these strips the same way that a composer could hear music when they look at a sheet of music. I could look at this and sense how slow it's moving, how quickly it's moving. She has a gesture here, where she opens her mouth. At the very beginning - I don't know if you could find it with the magnifier. Ok, right here, she opens her mouth for 2 frames. I know that's only two frames that she's opening her mouth. It's an eighth of a second. Ok. I know this. I have a sense of the movement when I'm working on stuff that's already filmed. It's moving at 24 frames per second. She's a dancer - she's doing a twirling motion. And I knew, for instance, how long I had to cut the strip to get that motion from beginning to end; the part that I wanted of the motion.

I have an intrinsic relationship after 30 years of doing this- with the speed and the motion of the film.



Figure 6-17. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, Drawing on Film.

I do some things that are like animating on a frame. I'll actually take black leader and make things happen on my own. Where the motion is not the standard 24 frames motion, but rather, every single frame is different.



Figure 6-18. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez, example of hand-crafted film.

Rodriguez’s work uses film to a full extent. She makes use of its material qualities, its associations with memory and history, and its narrative ability. Because she scratches and cuts films, her work can be thought of as destroying archives. She does not hold “old” films to be precious materials. Rather they are materials for the production of new works. In the process of creating the new works, Rodriguez is herself making an archive through her studio practice and also in the visual and sonic elements of the films themselves.

Rodriguez creates her works in her studio, where she has created her own archive of found and new films and sounds. Her art practice involves manipulating that archive to incite an encounter with specific ideas and themes. Her art works and artistic practice reveals how we view archives (as precious) and the alterations possible in archives. It was through talking with Rodriguez and her sister that I first thought about the possibilities of the affective archive. Rodriguez’s body of work constitutes both a filmic and affective archive; her feelings, emotions, thought, are expressed on top of existing documents and complemented with new ones.

The films mimic how memory functions through their imaginative use of color, blurring, and masking out of scenes through her use of scratching, coloring, and digital alteration. Viewing her body of work as a whole, it becomes even more apparent because

some images are repeated over and over again - like memory flashes. The birds in the image above appear in numerous works including *Un nombre de Mujer* (2001), *Ellos y Nosotros* (2010), *Sonambula* (2011), among others. One aspect of the sedimentation memories and histories is repetition. In repeating her own imagery combined with archival footage, Rodriguez creates her own history out of memory, experience, and emotion. While she destroys archives on the one hand, she builds something on the other.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I discussed how artists interpret and intervene in archives. The close relationship between history and memory is made clearer through their works. In the Caribbean context, history is memory and memory is history. But, there is often a deference to the institutional powers, which deem certain histories as the truth. This also relates to the power of the archives versus the significance attributed to memory or affect. Artists Elizabeth Cerejido and Nereida Garcia-Ferraz visualize their familial relationships by creating works that include reference to personal family histories. Cerejido does this by photographing her parents' apartment before they move out of it permanently. Garcia-Ferraz digitally manipulates family photographs and in doing so she layers in her perceptions and experiences. Maria Martinez-Cañas also uses personal archives, but she uses them to comment on the line between truth and fiction as well as offer a critique of the art world. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez uses archival film in the creation of new works, pushing against the boundaries of the preciousness of archival documents. In her practice, she also produces a new archive through her studio practice of collecting and storing films and through her own repetition of imagery.

Photography and film are used frequently in their works, showing the link between the photographic or filmic document and history. What is documented on film is often believed to be real. The analysis in this chapter shows how artists are intervening in the archival, using their roles as artists to create new documents, or an affective archive.

## Chapter 7

### **Performance in the Archive: The End and the Beginning**

“*Somos o no somos*” Elizabeth Doud declared at Jennylin Duany’s funeral on January 20, 2010. Doud struggled through tears to find the words to say goodbye to her friend and collaborator, who had passed away at age 39. I stood in the crowded Woodland South cemetery in Kendall next to artists, family members, and friends. For a deeply sad event marking the passing of a vibrant artist, this funeral was filled with warmth and uplifting spirit. At her wake the night before, we watched videos of Duany’s performances, witnessing the power of her art to speak to so many issues in our world from self-image and identity to bee extinction. At the wake and funeral, people hugged, leaned on each other, cried, laughed, and shared rum. The power of Doud’s words that morning carried to everyone’s ears, and it kept ringing in mine. I have thought of these words often since that day. “*Somos o no somos*” We are or we are not. To be or not to be. Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez was also a close friend and collaborator of Duany’s. Standing next to me, at the funeral service as Doud said these words, she told me that this was their rallying cry before heading out onto the stage. The rhetorical question spoken at the funeral and at the edge of the stage served the same purpose. It was a call to gather strength and courage. At the edge of the stage, the words spoke to performing one’s art in front of an audience. At the funeral, the call spoke to what was necessary to move forward in life in the face of tragic loss.

Artists of all kinds who produce work need to summon this kind of strength to create work and to circulate it in the public sphere. While Duany's performances were theatrical in nature, performed on a stage, sometimes assuming a character, visual artists work also contains elements of the performative. Viewing artwork as performative transforms objects into actions.

In the chapters preceding this one I analyzed artists' work and the context of its production. I focused on women artists of Caribbean descent who work in the field of contemporary visual art. The research presented was conducted in Miami from 2007 – 2011, a period of a simultaneous rise in artistic activity in Miami and economic decline in the US. I sought to address questions of the aesthetics and politics of artistic production in diasporic spaces. I analyzed what it means to live in a place (Miami), looking at the making and unmaking of Caribbean space in Miami through neighborhoods and through the production of artwork. Miami is a city home to many people originally from (or whose parents are from) the Caribbean. In the Introduction, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3, I historicize the visual connections between Miami and the Caribbean as 'tropical' terrains. The city is a diasporic space, and in many ways an in-between space between the US and the Caribbean and Latin America. Despite this close connection, I show throughout the text that there are many instances of unmaking Caribbean space and a lack of recognition for the full diversity of Caribbean arts practices and artists in the city. Artists use their role as artists to comment on their experiences in the city and elsewhere. Through their work, I highlight how artists define their practice and visualize their experiences and perspectives. Drawing a correlation between Caribbean migrations and discourse with the production of art in Miami is a way to learn more about artwork related to a Caribbean



context, but also outside of it – in diaspora. There is a hidden terrain in Miami. As I state in the introduction, and show throughout the text, while Miami has the potential to be a hub of Caribbean artistic production (in the visual arts), at the moment, it has a long way to go. In dance, music, and performing arts there is more attention to Caribbean-ness or Caribbean diasporic ideas, and this would be a worthwhile extension of this research.

### *Endings and Beginnings*

In terms of my own research, this marks the end and also the beginning. While seeking answers to some questions, there were others that arose. The limitations of this research, both the time to conduct more research and the space to write about it in these pages, has shaped what I have ultimately included in this text. I would like to note here some areas for future research. First, I focused on women artists for this dissertation. This was a worthwhile pursuit given that many women artists' work is not as well known as men artists. However, only a cursory analysis of gender was possible without more fully understanding men's roles in the art world, their artistic processes, and artworks. Sexuality is another area that could have been discussed more thoroughly in this text. Many of the artists are queer, identifying along the range of GLBTQ identities. However, few of the artists make this a focus of their work, and that made including further analysis of sexuality seem like superfluous text. Even though I narrowed my research to focus on women artists, I still had more material than I could include in this text. Regrettably, there are artists I worked with whose work I could not include in these pages. Also, I only analyzed and presented a small number of works by each artist. I chose to focus thematically, and grouped artists together in chapters drawing out particular ways their

work related to the core themes of diaspora aesthetics, cultural politics, and archives. These themes seemed relevant to the artists, as a number of works addressed these concerns. Also, in the field of anthropology, these are contemporary areas of debate and interest, building on longstanding concerns in the field of art and anthropology.

Migration and diaspora in Miami and the Caribbean was a central theme of this dissertation. The Caribbean is a vast region and even larger when diasporas are included. There are many countries, histories, memories, and movements. There were limitations on what I could address, and this speaks to the trade offs involved in moving between the local, global, and the diasporic. Finally, as I mentioned earlier in this concluding chapter and elsewhere in the text, performing arts like dance and music are critical forms of artistic practice. Further analysis of these forms in relation to Caribbean diaspora would supplement my research on visual arts. Additionally, an analysis of the convergence among art forms would paint a larger picture of the arts across Caribbean spaces.

This ethnography was based on interviews and participant observation. I could also imagine a more comprehensive survey of artists in Miami and other cities that would complement the detailed approach of ethnographic and visual analysis. The National Endowment for the Arts publishes an annual report on artists including disciplinary focus, income, and place of residence. Perhaps another study could focus on other kinds of data including sentiment, mobility, and aesthetic inspiration.

This study of Caribbean diaspora and visual art in Miami looked at the city and the arts as part of the larger diasporic transnational Caribbean spaces, and made connections between Miami and the larger Caribbean region and surrounding discourse. Moving forward, it would be worthwhile to add to this study with an analysis of

transnational spaces and practices of Caribbean art. These spaces, including other cities and the Internet, are changing modalities of contemporary Caribbean art production, circulation, and consumption.

As this project comes to a close, there are some key events that will continue to change the arts landscape in Miami as well as the connection between Miami and the Caribbean through the arts.

Among the changes are geographic shifts in the spaces of cultural production. During my fieldwork, a lot of arts activity was taking place in Wynwood and the Design District. Some artists had studios there. There were cutting edge galleries in the area – especially in Wynwood. As I discussed in Chapter 3, some change was already happening in 2010 – 2011. Galleries and artist-run spaces were closing. This continues. More restaurants and shops are opening in Wynwood, but fewer artists are finding spaces to work in the neighborhood. Some artists have moved into studios in Downtown Miami. Many of the artists I write about had already set up studios in their homes, which are spread throughout the city – from Miami Beach to Kendall. Some real estate developers in Downtown Miami are now considering operating studio spaces buildings that they cannot rent at market rates. It remains to be seen how this will work in Downtown, and if this will spur Caribbean artistic activity. I think that the artists who have been able to set up studios in their homes have made the decision to stop moving around in search of a place to work. Instead, they will likely participate in new exhibition spaces that will probably open in Downtown following the artist studios. A new Whole Foods is slated to open in 2014, and this will certainly change the dynamic of the neighborhood from “up-and-coming” to “arrived.” Artists already working in Downtown including Leyden

Rodriguez-Casanova have expressed the desire to find “new models” of collaborating with real estate developers and businesses. Wynwood and the Design District suffered at the hand of their own success. They became so popular with the general public that the areas were filled with food trucks, art walk nights that looked like street festivals, more businesses, and less affordable space for galleries and studios. Now many also recognize the gentrification of these neighborhoods as less than desirable. Instead of replicating what has already occurred, Rodriguez-Casanova explained that in Downtown he wanted to find a model of longer-term stability.<sup>82</sup>

In terms of museums, the Miami Art Museum will move into its new home on Biscayne Bay at the end of 2013. It will be known as the Perez Art Museum Miami, in recognition of a gift of funds and artwork by Jorge Perez.<sup>83</sup> Perez gave a large portion of his collection of Latin American art to the museum, and he has explained in interviews that he thinks it is significant for Miami’s population, and youth especially, to “know our roots.” In the next few years the museum will also include works by Caribbean artists, and there are plans to draw more attention to this region as connected to but different from Latin America. Artist Hew Locke has been commissioned to produce a large-scale installation for the museum. Locke is based in Edinburgh, and spent time in Guyana while he was growing up. Locke was in the *Global Caribbean* exhibition curated by Edouard Duval-Carrie that I discussed in Chapter 3. The installation will feature a boat

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<sup>82</sup> Fieldnotes from ArtTuesday panel at Freedom Tower, May 14, 2013.

<sup>83</sup> The renaming of the museum was met with uproar and contention when it was announced in December 2012, during Art Fair/Art Basel Week. The new museum location had been paid for in part by a tax referendum. Many of those who spoke out against the renaming, primarily local artists, explained that the name Miami Art Museum signaled the city’s role in the museum rather than the name of an individual. News media and Jorge Perez suggested the controversy had to do with ethnic bias because of Perez’s Spanish/Latin American surname. In my opinion, in a city like Miami, this was certainly not the reason for the complaints. Nevertheless, the new museum will bear Perez’s name once it moves to the new location. There has been some slight grumbling, but the tenor of the conversation has subdued.

and address themes of migration and history. Earlier this year (2013), the museum hosted a conversation between Locke and Kobena Mercer. They discussed his work and aspects of aesthetics in diaspora. This is a shift for the museum, which like other Miami institutions tend to focus on Latin America (and Cuba in particular) as a locus. There seems to be a broadened scope accompanying the construction of the new museum. Another museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami is also adding space to its facility. MOCA continues to add programming that reaches out to the North Miami community, which is predominantly Haitian, as well as the larger city. Some of the programs include art workshops for teenagers and adults, seminar-style lectures, and of course, exhibitions and artist talks. The Frost Museum at Florida International University is preparing for a full year of events commemorating the arrival of Ponce de Leon in Florida 500 years ago. Looking at the relationship between Spain, the US, and the Caribbean, the exhibitions include a range of artists. These are just a few of the institutional changes and upcoming events, but they will have an influence on the arts in Miami as it is redefined yet again in the upcoming years.

Artists will also play a large role in shaping what comes next in Miami. It has been 11 years since the arrival of Art Basel in 2002, which in many ways marked the transition to a new arts moment in Miami. Art Basel is now part of a larger “Art Fair Week” including other fairs like Art Miami, Scope, and Pulse. In addition there are hundreds of surrounding events including popup shops, street performances, and concerts. This annual event is no longer a new phenomenon, but still rallies a lot of artistic energy in the city. The more time that passes the more Miami’s arts scene molds itself, not necessarily around one identity, but with more room to think and create

diasporically. New artists continue to move to the city from other countries and from other cities in the US. Young and emerging artists have become more established. Arts organizations (often founded by artists) continue to develop. While the gentrification in some areas has caused some artists to close their spaces, these artists have continued to produce work and think of new ways to engage the public. Foundations including the Knight Arts Foundation encourage the innovative production and use of art in the public sphere, and through arts funding competitions the foundation has provided the funds for many interdisciplinary arts projects in the city.<sup>84</sup>

### *Performance in the Archive*

My ideas about the connections between artwork, performance, memory, and archives developed as I conducted research about artists and their work, looking for a way to grasp the work that I saw artists doing – through the production of work and in the product of the art object itself. Understanding the relationship between these two processes has been at the core of my research, responding partially to older ethnographic work about art objects without discussion of artists and also because of my interest in artists' everyday practices. Some of these practices include adapting to new places, continuing to create work in the face of many obstacles, like earning a living wage, exile, migration, and the general struggle of the creative process. As I sought to understand the function of their work for themselves and broader society, it seemed to me that their work was as much aesthetic object as it was an embodiment of action; the action of art making.

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<sup>84</sup> The Knight Arts Foundation also operates in other cities where the Knight Ridder companies operate(d), including Philadelphia and Detroit.

Some artists utilize the performative actions of artwork explicitly, such as in the performance art of Ana Mendieta. Mendieta enacted mostly private performances in natural landscapes and documented herself using film and photography. Henry Bial writes that the “‘performative’ is similar – in form, in intent, in effect – to a theatrical performance” (2004:175). But, “On another level, the term ‘performative’ refers to a specific philosophical concept concerning the nature and potential of language” (ibid). Drawing on J.L. Austin’s framing of the performative with regard to language, Bial connects performance to action within or outside of the theatrical context. Austin “defined the ‘performative’ as an utterance that does not make a statement – i.e. that does not express truly or falsely an already-existing condition – but in fact performs an action . . . ‘to *say* something is to *do* something’ . . . Significantly, however, Austin excludes theatrical speech from his discussion because it does not seriously reflect the intent of the speaker.” (Bial 2004:175) Writing about the work of Ana Mendieta, Jane Blocker argues that to think of artists’ work through the lens of performativity “configures the artists’ work as something more than an object or a theatrical performance; it helps reinforce the claim that the work actually makes something happen” (1999:26). Mendieta and other artists who utilize performance in their art practice produce actions and also documents.

The performances and documents are often separated in time and space, blurring temporal and geographic boundaries. Peggy Phelan notes that part of the power of performance is the “impossibility of maintaining the distinction between temporal tenses, between an absolutely singular beginning and ending, between living and dying. What performance studies learns most deeply from performance is the generative force of those ‘betweens.’” (Phelan and Lane 1998:8) Phelan argues that “performance’s only life is in

the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance.” (1996[1993]:146) While it is true that certain types of performance exist only in the moment they are being performed, this is not the entirety of the performative. Performative actions live in memories, in bodies, in spaces, and in documents. When Ana Mendieta pressed her body against a tree, carving a human shape into its trunk, she carved herself into history even if the residue on the tree is no longer visible. Mendieta also documented her performances on film through photography and video, creating even longer lasting affects of her performative actions.

Combining threads of anthropology, performance studies, and history makes room for the kind of thinking that addresses the multifaceted nature of artworks and art production. In the case of this research, where I was interested in the relationship between art and migration in a diasporic city, artists’ work spoke to this relationship through the work that the artists’ produced and also in the manner in which it was created. As I discussed, artists and their work are rendered in different degrees of visibility based on their social location (e.g. race, gender, class) and suppositions about Caribbean art practice including expectations for “craft” artwork or subject matter (e.g. tropical landscapes). Artists counter these practices by crafting their work to enact performances in the archive; making visible what is often made to seem invisible. They use their roles as cultural commentators to critique socio-cultural dynamics.

Artists’ work offers, on an intimate level, insight into their lives and surroundings, and on a larger level represents a counter-narrative to written history. Roland Barthes, writing about photography, proposes that images involve at least two points of entry to



the photograph - the *studium* and the *punctum* (1980). The *studium* is what is perceived in the image in relation to one's own experiences and knowledge. The *punctum* is the second layer of the image; the aspect of the image that pulls at one's emotions. To grasp the meaning of the images means to see both what is there in the image (such as a boat) and also to interpret the deeper meaning, the emotional meaning (such as the pain of exile or the memory of slavery – both associated with boats). Dwight Conquergood (2002) and Diana Taylor (2003) also suggest at least two ways to understand art based on different ways of knowing- the historical, written narrative (for Conquergood, the “map” and for Taylor, the “archive”) and the embodied memory or practice (the “story” and the “repertoire”).

If the archive has been thought of as a place, a storehouse of objects and documents, where are our creative expressions and our memories – like those that artists bring to attention? Traditionally, the archive consists of materials that are supposed to “stand the test of time.” These include, for example, texts, documents, bones and buildings. The repertoire consists of supposed ephemeral acts, like performances, gestures, orality, movement, and singing which are thought of as “nonreproducible knowledge” (Taylor 2003:20). It is thus assumed that something in the archive is stable and something in the repertoire is malleable. But, performance can enter the archive through documentation. Performance can “offer another aspect of history, one grounded in the repertoire as well as in the archive, focused on embodied practices that distill meaning from past events, store them, and find embodied modalities to express them in the here-and-now, yet with an eye to the future” (Taylor 2006:71). The power of this kind of archival representation is that it is not constrained to recount history chronologically,

or in a linear fashion; positioning the authority of inscription in the archive to people and things normally excluded from these records.

Archives have remained pertinent and useful in an increasingly digital world, as their power has been contested and many of their sources opened up for public access and interpretation. This shift from paper-based to digital technologies is a cultural shift as wide sweeping as the invention of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, putting the means of production into the hands of the public. (Taylor 2010) Contemporarily, new practices for ‘archiving’ are being shaped by many people including researchers, students, artists, and specialists in archives, library sciences, digital media, and information technology - such as digitizing documents and materials produced in other formats, presenting ‘archives’ online to multiple publics, and connecting the archival to the contemporary. What was previously thought of as ‘un-archivable’ is now being preserved and circulated.

Diana Taylor and Joseph Roach both suggest that forms of embodied practice are the counter point to ‘archive.’ I argue that these two concepts are not dichotomous opposites, but intertwining elements in socio-cultural experience, artistic production, and historical narratives. In many cases visual art exists dually as tangible object and embodied action – there is the process and product. Art and other representations, then, are neither solely in the archive nor ephemeral embodiment but a performance in the archive. Because they exist as things, they alter the seemingly closed doors of archival, but because they are processes, they contain aspects of the embodied and performative. When this kind of work is preserved in some fashion, I think of it as performing an intervention into the ‘archive’ – a performance in the archive.

*An Anthropologist and Artist in the Nation's Art Museum*

I began analyzing and writing my dissertation in residence at the Smithsonian American Art Museum from 2011 through 2012. As a fellow in the museum dedicated to collecting and showing American art, I had to more directly consider the implications of the research I was doing about Caribbean diaspora in the United States, and artists who blur the lines between who is an 'American' or 'Caribbean' artist. What is 'American' or 'Caribbean' art anyway? Is the goal of studying art really to bind it to national identifiers? If this was not my project, and it was not, I had to re-situate the way I was thinking about artists' work according to the work they were actually making, not predicated on their identities. This was a shift in the way art is studied, in anthropology and art history. I wanted to base my analysis on the artists' work, and more specifically since this was an ethnographically grounded project, I primarily analyzed artwork they made or showed during the course of my fieldwork. I also wanted to talk about their lives as artists and the process of making work.

The fellowship positioned me, theoretically and physically, to think critically about these concerns and also to discuss these issues with curators, visiting scholars and artists, and fellow fellows. I sometimes felt out of place. An anthropologist and artist among art historians. Prior to the fellowship, I did not feel these distinctions so sharply. I had taken courses in art history as an undergraduate and graduate student, alongside courses on art production, visual culture, and film. I was prepared to think visually about artists' work. I was eager to hone these skills of visual analysis. I was not prepared to think art historically. I was not familiar with the American art canon or with well-known American art historical figures like Winslow Homer. I might have heard his name, but I

could not discuss the context of his work. Further, my work focused contemporarily, something that scared most people. “You work with living artists? They can read what you are writing about them.” These are the comments of concern the my project raised. “Yes, I work with artists who are working right now. I sometimes email or text them if I have questions about their work or a biographical detail,” I would tell them matter of fact. As an anthropologist this was the norm. People are going to read what we write. I hope they read what I write, at least. If not, I’ll at least tell the artists I wrote it. These schisms between disciplines, which had not been so apparent to me before, were all around me at the Smithsonian. It was clear to me more than it had been before that this research was an ethnographic project about contemporary artists. It intersects with art history, but also stands in opposition to what most art historians would expect.

Once I understood that I was able to synchronize my expectations for the project while addressing concerns and methods of art history, at least to a degree. The questions they asked me about an artists’ background, training, influences, schools of thought, and their relationship to American art transformed how I had been thinking about the artists’ lives and works. This project speaks to a larger Caribbean context that informed the inception of the project - through an interest in the relationship between migrations and art - as well as how the artists were making work as artists in the United States.

“Aren’t they American artists?” my advisor at the Smithsonian, E. Carmen Ramos pointedly and rhetorically asked me. Ramos had just begun her work as curator at the museum with the goal of curating a show about the Latino presence in American art. Disappointingly, the museum’s collections showed little Latino presence. Her task was to collect the work of Latino artists who had an influence on American art and organize an

exhibition of these works. “Right,” I thought, in response to her question. They are American artists. They are artists living and working in the United States. But, they are often invisible in the accounts of ‘American’ art. When viewed through the lens of ‘American-ness,’ the artworks of people of color, Caribbean or not, are still missing. American-ness still largely stands for ‘white’ in the art world. Buzzwords of diversity and inclusion abound and have made some inroads for the ‘other’ artists. However, in the context of *the American Art Museum*, as in the museum responsible for showing the work of artists living and working in the United States, ‘other’ artists really cannot be sectioned off to special exhibitions, themed months, or diversity days.

During the year of my fellowship I did additional archival research at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and in the Archives of American Art. It will not be hard to summarize the content that was available about the artists I write about because there was scant material. Miami-based artists represented in the museum’s collection as of 2011 included Maria Brito, Maria Martinez-Cañas, and Carlos Betancourt. The Archives of American Art holds two boxes of Helen Kohen’s papers. Within those papers were letters and invitations from artists and museums, including the invitation to Ana Mendieta’s exhibition at the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami. With Ramos’s guidance, I know the museum’s collections have grown since I was in residence. For the past two years, Ramos has been collecting work for the 2013 exhibition, *The Latin Presence in American Art*. I had the chance to view some of the works that were being purchased including works by Ana Mendieta and Vik Muniz. But, this is not enough. As of 2010, approximately 22,000 people born in the Caribbean and Latin America were living in the United States (Greico, et al. 2010:2). This number only

includes foreign-born people, not people with roots in those regions who were born in the US, and of course, this number does not include undocumented people. My point is that there are certainly artists among the thousands of people, and these artists should be represented in our nation's museum. The collection of the materials for the 2013 show will certainly bolster the available materials, but since the focus is primarily on "Latin American" artists, "Caribbean" artists from places such as The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, and Jamaica who are now living or lived in the US, are likely not included in the current focus.

I enacted my own method of including more artists in the nation's history. It is a part scholarship and part artwork project called, *Archival Performances*. As a large part of my research and analysis came to involve thinking about the meanings of histories and archives, I felt strongly that my work at the Smithsonian should leave a larger mark. People who search for the artists I worked with should be able to find them in the database of the museum. While I could not add artists' work to the collection, I could add the papers from my files to the vertical files.

The vertical files are paper-based files that contain the ephemera of art production and circulation. Materials in the files include artist's resumes and statements, gallery invitations, sketches, and catalogues. The files do not contain personal letters or original artworks. They are located in the library of the American Art Museum. They are technically open to the public, but anyone who wants to access them needs to be escorted by someone affiliated with the museum. It is room of filing cabinets with hanging files organized alphabetically and includes files associated with artists, galleries, museums, and art organizations. Most of the material in the files was donated by curators or visiting

scholars. I inquired about how I could make this kind of contribution, and set out to collect and donate papers of artists during my time as a fellow.

I wrote letters to many artists and asked them to send me additional materials to supplement what I had in my own files. I wrote to artists in my dissertation research as well as other artists. I supplied them with an envelope to fill with materials and requested that they send them by a specific date, before the end of my fellowship. As the materials came in I scanned almost everything. I did this to have my own digital record of it as well as to form the visual part of the art piece I was creating through this archival performance. At the deadline date, I compiled a list of the artists, all of the material I had collected, and submitted it to the library. I waited as they reviewed the list and the materials. In October 2012, I received the list: Elizabeth Cerejido, Maria Martinez-Cañas, Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez, Deborah Willis, and Carlos Betancourt. Files for these artists are now in the vertical files in the library. They will be there as a curatorial and public resource. When someone searches for one of these artists in the database of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, their name will come up and direct them to the vertical files. The library was not able to accept all of the material I submitted and they mailed boxes of papers back to me.

The artists whose materials are included in the vertical files are selected by the museum staff and curators based on a few criteria: importance to American art (a subjective and vague measure); if they already had materials in the vertical files; and/or, their artwork is in the museum's collection. Many of the materials are included in the vertical files by former curators; depositing materials upon departure from the museum. From the staff I learned that space and staffing are concerns. They would like to accept

more, but do not have the physical storage space to house it nor the staff to organize and file the documents.

Since the museum could not accept all of the material I had gathered, I discussed this project with Cristina Favretto, head of the Special Collections at the University of Miami, and Joanne Hyppolite, Director of HistoryMiami. Both had similar suggestions, “place the files,” meaning since the American Art Museum could not accept all of the files, the next step is to find another archive or collection for the material so that in the end all of the files will be ‘placed.’ The archives and ephemera about the artists’ work will be scattered among institutions, functioning like the migrations of people searching for a place to call home.

This *Archival Performance* functioned as both scholarship and artwork. As an anthropologist who found myself more involved in archives and history than I ever thought I would be, I learned the significance of archival and historical representation. As a researcher and a teacher, I know how valuable it is to find materials on the topic I am writing or teaching about. I know the joy of finding original material to work with in analysis. While I try to theoretically reframe the archive, the fact is that archives still exist and they are helpful. We can think about reframing archives to the public sphere, or the digital sphere, but paper-based archives in institutions have existed for a long time and with a particular kind of weight. There is an archival authority in institutional archives. On a practical level, it is also difficult to maintain archives. While paper is still one of the most stable materials, the appropriate conditions for paper are difficult for the average person to maintain. In Miami, for instance, I can barely keep up with my own paper materials in a climate that is hot, humid, and sunny. Book jackets have faded from



sun exposure. Drawings have browned and edges have curled. While still usable, if this kind of damage has happened in only a couple of years, I would not want this kind of fate for what I think are the significant papers of artists' lives and careers. Numerous moves from Miami to Ann Arbor to DC and more to come I am sure, I have also sadly lost books or just misplaced them. Physical objects also take up space. Space that in cities is expensive and for me, at least, is always temporary. Placing materials in archives can help them live a longer life.

As an artwork, this piece, and perhaps this whole dissertation, is my own performance in the archive. I am working to write artists into our future history in my dissertation. When I speak about artists in presentations I bring them to people's attention. And, collecting and donating artists' materials, enacts a performance in an actual archive. There are at least two parts to the artwork, the documentation and the performance. I worked to document each step of the process visually with the intention of one day exhibiting that documentation as an artwork. I scanned the artists' materials, personal notes, and outgoing and returning envelopes. I donated all of the artists' materials, and kept the personal notes and envelopes as physical traces of the project. I envision that when exhibited all of these materials would be shown together. A visual archive and documentation of this performance.

### *On the Absences and Presences of Artists and their Work*

The layered presences and absences of artists and their work reveal the significance of archives and performances. In drawing on the dual meaning of 'work' – artwork and labor – I argue that artists' work is not only the finished product of the art piece, but in

the practice and production of their ideas in visual forms. In Chapter 3, I discussed how a lack of historical knowledge has led to the unmaking of Caribbean spaces in Miami, such as the neighborhood of Wynwood. Once it was slated as an arts district, aspects of Wynwood's Puerto Rican history were no longer visible to the broader public nor the art galleries and restaurants that now call the neighborhood home. On the other hand, neighborhoods like Little Haiti are making Caribbean space, drawing on local histories and creating institutions such as the Little Haiti Cultural Art Center, where the exhibition *Global Caribbean* was held from 2009 – 2013. Chapter 4 draws on a combination of archival materials and artworks in a discussion about the relationship between migration and art as a process of being and becoming. I look to our archives to analyze migrations from the perspective of rootedness and the landscape in contrast to an analysis of migrations focused on separations and water. Two of the artists in that chapter, Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez and Antonia Wright draw on aspects of the performative in work that engages the landscape, causing viewers to interact with the work in a way that is different from other forms of two-dimensional artwork. In Chapter 5, analysis of representations of blackness and gender, indicates how artists like Noelle Théard and Donnalyn Anthony produce works and projects that act as performative documents in the archive. Creating new documents for our current and future archives, their work changes the potential for future historical understanding. They create documents. In Chapter 6 I focus on archives and their relationship to memory through artists' work. I draw on both personal and institutional archives, discussing how artists alter these documents to produce new works.

Artists regularly refashion and refigure current models to produce artwork that reflect contemporary life. On the edge between in/visibility, artists actively work to

visually inscribe themselves in future histories. In the context of Miami, as diasporic city, where migrations are an ever-present reality, inscribing oneself and asserting the validity of experience through the creation of an object, affirms visibility. It solidifies footing on the shifting ground, which has so long been associated with Caribbean realities. The works artists produce are not merely beautiful objects akin to the ones in the collections of the cabinets of curiosities of early scientists and explorers. The objects produce and reflect culture as well as experience. The very existence of the artwork changes the possibilities of migration and visibility, not only in Miami, but globally.

**Afterword**  
**Anthropology at Home**

*Going Home*

Locating my fieldwork in Miami meant going home to do research. I am originally from Miami and worked there as an artist and high school photography teacher before leaving to study anthropology at the University of Michigan. I originally decided to pursue anthropology for my PhD because I wanted to research the city of my birth with specific attention to the Caribbean and the arts. I am not from the Caribbean, per se, though whether or not to include Miami as a Caribbean city is up for debate. I was nonetheless influenced by the city where I grew up. My mother's side of the family moved to Miami from New York amidst the migration of many other Jewish people in the 1940s. With tan-ish skin and brown curly hair, I am often identified as Latina by other people, and when I try to explain that I am not people look confused. "Oh, you're not from Cuba?" people ask. "That's funny because you really look Cuban" they usually continue. I then explain that my family came to the US from a lot of different countries. I am of Sephardic and Ashkenzic descent, and my family has been in Miami since the 1940s. I really am from Miami; despite the rumors that this is an impossibility.

I grew up in Miami Beach, lived in the same house with my family there until I left for college in Boulder, Colorado. My first return to Miami was after college graduation.

After working several odd jobs in Boulder, I moved back to Miami and taught photography to high school students while developing my own practice as an artist. I applied to graduate school proposing a multi-sited project, but as all projects must be fine tuned, it turned out to make the most sense to base my research in one location. That one location was Miami for reasons that included intellectual and artistic curiosity about the city and the people who live there, and my personal connection to the city as a place I call home no matter where I live. To understand other places and people in the future, I felt strongly that I had to start at home. On a practical note, I knew I could stay with my parents to conduct preliminary research, drastically reducing the financial costs of ethnographic research in the US. Also, my parents and other family members were willing research assistants who helped by saving newspaper articles and alerting me to noteworthy people and events in the years of conducting research. Personally, going home also meant that I would have the rare opportunity to think, learn, research, and write about the city where I am from. Intellectually and artistically, Miami is a fascinating diasporic space where new arrivals have influenced the culture as much as, if not more, than long-term residents.

Doing fieldwork in the place where I grew up, transformed once familiar places into new sites altogether. They changed with the passage of time, and also because I had to reflect on the city in a different way – not only as a resident, but also as an anthropologist. Streets I had frequented, as a child on my way to school became streets that I drove on to get to artists' houses. Even people that I knew – like neighbors or friends of my parents – are now people that I interact with as an anthropologist trying to make sense of artistic production and Caribbean diaspora in Miami. Most challenging for

me, was that, somehow, in writing, I had to try to parse out so many of the things I find perplexing about the city – like the disregard for schedules, the crazy driving, the sprawling geography, the fraught politics, the warm embraces of strangers, and the constant switch of languages in everyday life. I sometimes thought it might be easier to do research in a city in which I do not have such a long personal and familial history, but then, it would be a much different project. And, I think I would have felt that I missed out on getting to know the city all over again.

*1980*

I was born in 1980. The same year of the Mariel Boatlift. The same year as the Arthur McDuffie riots. The 1980s in Miami were particularly marked by the arrivals of more people from Cuba and Haiti, and also noticeable and visible growing racial tensions<sup>85</sup>.

During the Mariel Boatlift 125,000 Cubans arrived on the shores of Miami and caused upheaval for the new arrivals as well as for Cuban Miami's right-winged old guard. In an unusual agreement between the US and Cuba, thousands of Cubans were allowed to leave through the Mariel harbor as their relatives from Miami came to retrieve them, or paid someone else to do it. In order to leave, they were required to take many more passengers than originally planned, including the thousands of people that Castro let out of prisons and mental institutions for the occasion. At the same time that hundreds

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<sup>85</sup> I say noticeable or visible because there have been racial tensions in the city from the beginning – when Europeans arrived to settle the area occupied by native people; when slave-based labor fueled the plantation economy; when racially discriminatory laws acted to constrain life and livelihood, etc. In the 1980s, there was visibility of migrants from Cuba and Haiti on television and print news media, and the McDuffie Riots were a very visible demonstration of anger and frustration.

of thousands of Cuban immigrants arrived on Miami's shores other immigrants were making a similar journey. However, not all immigrants were treated equally and President Reagan decided the second largest group of immigrants, Haitians, would not be allowed to stay in Miami despite the fact that Cubans were allowed to remain. He issued an ordinance that all Haitian immigrants arriving after September 21, 1981, would be returned to Haiti. The influx of somewhere between 55,000 and 100,000 Haitian immigrants by boat to Miami from 1972 – 1981 was halted. Haitians were seen as only seeking economic enhancement and not political refugee status. The new agreement also explained that upon arrival, Haitians would have to say that they were claiming political refugee status explicitly. They would not be asked by the Coast Guard. From 1981 – 1990, 22,940 Haitians were interdicted at sea and Immigration and Naturalization Services considered only 11 of them as qualified to seek asylum in the US. (Wasem 1995)

As new migrants arrived from Cuba and Haiti (even prior to the Mariel Boatlift), tensions were growing in the city's black and African-American communities and neighborhoods. In May of 1980, the discontent came to a head in what is known as the McDuffie Riots. The riots ensued after four police officers were acquitted on charges in the death of Arthur McDuffie, who had been involved in a high-speed chase with the police officers. The officers were white and McDuffie was African-American, inciting anger over ongoing issues with race, violence, and treatment in the city. Riots broke out in Overtown and Liberty City after the acquittal. The riots have been noted as one of the worst race riots in the US.

These two historic occurrences, in addition to many other day-to-day events, in 1980 have shaped the way I see the world, and significantly, Miami. Immigration, race, geography, politics, and power have been a driving force in the city, and my earliest memories.

While I was growing up in Miami the idea of going to Cuba was out of the question. As neither of my parents is Cuban, I didn't exactly know why I, in particular, wasn't allowed to go to Cuba. In fact, my grandparents went to Cuba for their honeymoon. However, it was just something I knew, and I never asked why. I wasn't really even allowed to talk about Cuba until I got to the University of Colorado. In Boulder, a leftist outpost in the Rocky Mountains, Cuba was synonymous with Revolution and Ché Guevara not with exile, pain, loss, and *el bloqueo*. In Boulder, the fact that I was from Miami also meant that I was close to Cuba, close to the Revolution, though no one who thought that actually knew anything about Miami, especially the fact that Miami was anything but close to the Revolution. Slowly, and quietly, without telling my parents I began working my way to Cuba. My first trip was on the study abroad program Semester at Sea, my second was to a conference about women, my third was for my undergraduate thesis on Judaism in Havana, my fourth was the trip when I brought my mother, my fifth was for preliminary research about women artists in Cuba, and my sixth was for the Havana Biennial. When my parents' friends first heard that I had gone to Cuba as an undergraduate student they were shocked and appalled. How could my parents have let their daughter travel to the "island of the enemy"?

Over time my parents' friends in Miami have come to understand or at least tolerate my interest in Cuba. I think they sometimes brush it off as an academic interest. Even



though much has changed in Miami since my initial trips in the early 2000s, there are still many people who do not like the fact that I have been to Cuba. The only thing that makes it tolerable for them is the idea that I am doing research. There was one time, during my third trip in 2002, though, that after some initial anger, my childhood orthodontist asked my parents to ask me to visit his childhood home in Santiago de Cuba. I did. I took pictures of the house, the park, and other places in the city and sent them to him. I know he never went back to Cuba before he passed so at least he was able to visualize the places he remembered.

As I said, much has changed in Miami since I was growing up and since my earliest travels to Cuba over ten years ago. Since then, immigration to Miami has continued, from Cuba as well as more South American countries including Argentina. The overall political sentiment in Miami has shifted, and become somewhat less intensely conservative. Some of this is because people have gotten older and have settled into life in Miami in a way they had not before. Another factor is that the younger generations and newer arrivals do not feel the same sense of political exile as the earlier arrivals. Also, the growing population of people from more places acts to spread out the concerns. But, the Caribbean and Latin America are as present as ever in Miami, making it a compelling place to study the region and its diasporas. This general idea of Miami's connectedness to the Caribbean and Latin America has remained a constant since I began my research even while other factors such as the economy have fluctuated.

*My Family and Miami*



Figure 0-1. Papa Joe Drawing Grandma Doris, c. 1940s, photographer unknown.

The story of my family is also an immigrant story, but one that happened many years before I was born. I am of mixed Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish descent. Each of my great-grandparents was born in a different country from Spain to Poland and eventually found their way to New York's Lower East Side. My grandparents were all born in New York, and my grandparents on my mother's side moved to Miami when they were young, with their families, and met there while attending the University of Miami. My family's story of arrival to the United States and to Miami has always intrigued me and I continue to visit my grandmother to comb through her photo albums and ask her questions about our past. My interest in Miami goes beyond my own family's story. I have wanted to understand how Miami has changed with each successive wave of people to arrive, from before my family's arrival to the present day.

I have often referred to Miami as a family member when I'm showing visitors around, as in it's ok if I find some things I don't like about it, but that's never how I would want other people to think of my city. However, as an anthropologist, I feel that I can't be too heavy handed on either the praise or the criticism, and maybe that's the way it is with family too. One of the ways I have come to know my city on many levels is actually getting out into it, navigating the streets, talking to people – in other words, as an anthropologist.

### *An Anthropologist at Home*

I came to anthropology as a graduate student without a background in the discipline, but with an appreciation for methodology that focused on interacting with people. I had studied Art and Ethnic Studies as an undergraduate and had worked for two years as a high school photography teacher. I came to anthropology for my Ph.D. because of its methodology; a methodology that necessitates talking to people, engaging with them in their everyday lives, and learning about a place, people, and way of life intimately over the course of many years. I also came to anthropology because the discipline would allow me to do this project - to talk with artists in Miami about their lives and their work with a purpose - and to continue producing my own artwork without needing to rely on the sales of my artwork to earn a living. I wanted to engage personally and professionally with the entanglements between Miami and the Caribbean not as a side interest but as the major focus of my life. As an emerging artist in Miami I suppose I could have called artists and asked to talk with them about their work, but I never did. As an anthropologist it is now my work.

My connections to the Caribbean are primarily through my own travel and work in and about Cuba and through my partner, Lisa, who emigrated from Trinidad as a student when she was 18. A map of the Caribbean, which stretches from Miami to Trinidad and Tobago has hung at the entrance to our homes in Ann Arbor and Miami, a constant reminder of where we are each from. While my own work in the Caribbean started before Lisa and I met, ideas of the Caribbean can no longer only be a bracketed “research interest” or even only a “personal interest.” It is part of my everyday life. Immigration concerns, phone calls, emails, Skype calls, mail delivered to our house for everyone who lives out of the country, learning to cook new foods, and physical travel back and forth have connected me more deeply than before. I have come to see Miami, and really many places that have large Caribbean populations, as more like living on the northern edge of the islands. It is through Lisa and her family that I have traveled throughout the Caribbean, not only to Trinidad and Tobago, but also The Bahamas, where her father has worked for three years, and the Cayman Islands, where her brother and his family resides. Lisa has also been an enthusiastic conference travel partner. She came with me to the Caribbean Studies Association conference in Bahia, Brasil, and the American Anthropological Association and Latin American Studies Association conferences in San Francisco, among others. Her academically external perspective has helped me to frame my research. She works in the field of Information Technology, so though she is quite removed from literature and theoretical ideas about the Caribbean, I love running ideas by her or asking her about the context in which she grew up. Her experience in Miami as a Caribbean person has certainly informed my practice as an anthropologist interested in Caribbean diaspora in the United States.

In anthropology, the idea of “going home” to do research has had a tenuous relationship with the more classical version of ethnography in “exotic places.” The mythic tale in anthropology is of the “Lone Ethnographer” who rides off into the sunset in search of “his native.” While in the land of “his native,” he undergoes a series of trials and tribulations in an attempt to “discover” all there is to know about “him.” After completing his journey, the “Lone Ethnographer” returns home to write about his adventures; above all, to give a “‘true’ account of ‘the culture’” (Rosaldo 1993 [1989]:30). This depiction demonstrates the way that anthropology has glorified the “non-native” quest for “native” truth. However, when an anthropologist does research “at home” it can be called “native anthropology.” That is, someone who is “native” to a place going back there to do anthropology. For example, someone from Jamaica who studies in the US and then returns to Jamaica to conduct research. This research is often subject to interrogations about the work’s authenticity. It is assumed that by rights of birth there is a kind of “authenticity” being achieved by someone studying their own people, but at the same time, that authenticity is challenged by the notion that it is subjective.

As Kirin Narayan points out “the extent to which anyone is an authentic insider is questionable” (23). Being an “insider” or an “outsider” does not guarantee more authentic research. One cannot be all knowing of a particular people or place. Instead of viewing country of origin as the sole marker of “native” status, Narayan focuses our attention on the “loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study” (23). These loci are multiple and include education, sexual orientation, gender, class, ethnicity, race, ability, etc. Thus, there are many ways that we identify or do not

identify with the people we study, and these loci need to be acknowledged. Narayan proposes that “at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identification amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” (23). By shifting the focus away from singular, all powerful identity markers, we are then able to focus on the “quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our text” (23). Have we established good working relationships with the people we want to represent? Are we being fair to their views? What are our intentions in the research and publication? To whom are we accountable? Amidst the predicaments of authenticity and multiple identifications, it seems to me that there is little value in carrying on the term “native anthropologist.” Since we all are positioned along axis of identifications and power relations it makes more sense to examine the ways in which anthropologists that have “gone home” to do research have dealt with these challenges. How do we position ourselves in relation to the people they represent? While there are challenges posed by working with people that we can relate to, there are also exciting possibilities opened up by anthropologists who “go home” to do research. There are ways that “going home” enables reflection along with theorization that produces nuanced knowledge inaccessible by other modes of research. Reflecting on her own research in India, Narayan explains that by going back to India to do research she was able to reframe her childhood experiences with her professional social analyst vocabulary. For example, she recounts that “I knew that servants were frequently shouted at and that they wore ill-fitting, cast-off clothes, but I did not call this ‘social inequality’” (32). In her reexamination of her past and present in India, she is able to assess herself and the experiences that have shaped her as a person and as an

anthropologist. Narayan explains that “going home” produces knowledge in a different way than “going away.”

In some ways, the study of one’s own society involves an inverse process from the study of an alien one. Instead of learning conceptual categories and then, through fieldwork, finding the contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have preexisting experience absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known. The reframing essentially involves locating vivid particulars within cultural patterns, sociological relations, and historical shifts . . . Yet, given the diversity within cultural domains and across groups, even the most experienced of ‘native’ anthropologists cannot know everything about his or her own society (Aguilar 1981). In fact, by opening up access to hidden stores of research materials, the study of anthropology can also lead to the discovery of many strange and unfamiliar aspects of one’s own society (cf. Stewart 1989:14) (32)

The key difference Narayan points to is how we approach information about places that are more known than unknown by reframing what we believe we already know.

Since I was from Miami, it was critical for me to remember to pay close attention to the details of life while doing my fieldwork. I looked around while I was driving, while I was walking, while I was sitting outside having lunch. I took different routes to get to familiar places. I approached the study of art in Miami as much as an anthropologist as I did as an artist who was born in Miami. I met new people and I did new things. I asked people about Miami and their experiences even though many thought I might already know these things because I am from the city. I tried to remember to ask people to tell me things they thought I “already knew” just because I was familiar with the city.

Anthropology is founded on the idea that the anthropologist will travel somewhere foreign and come back with stories of the natives. However, in recent years anthropology has become a passport home for many people allowing us to study the places where we are from. Ruth Behar has often described how anthropology has become her passport home to Cuba, an island she left with her parents at the age of five. Anthropology has

been a passport since its inception, with the notion of ‘travel’ at the very heart of the discipline. For me, understanding the place I am from has meant understanding a region that has so strongly affected Miami and me - the Caribbean.

Over the course of my research, looking so closely at my home city as a field site, I became increasingly drawn to use of space, memory of place, and how we learn and experience through ‘ground level’ work, sometimes just by walking the streets. Streets are a fundamental part of our existence in places, whether the streets are paved or made of dirt and sand. Miami is not known as a walking city, but noticing how I move from place to place – by what route and means, and how other people make the same journey – I came to know more about its socio-geographic terrain. That is, how both the physical terrain and the culture construct and influence one another. Art is a significant component of this socio-geographic terrain because it colors the visual planes – the artwork on billboards, bus shelters, gallery windows, walls, and inside museums, galleries, and libraries. The artists I worked with also share an interest in getting to know the place where they’re living – through photography, performance, painting, and public work. Their engagement with place, whether it was Miami or somewhere else, opened up avenues for others share in that experience. Being an anthropologist at home necessitated that I slow down and notice the small things that create the larger picture. Perhaps in an effort to remember this kind of attention to nuance, I often find myself taking pictures of my feet, marking where I am at certain moments. As if to say, I was here in this place, and I’m trying to understand what that means.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Artist Biographies

I have included brief artist biographies for reference. Artists listed here are the artists I interviewed formally and informally for my research from 2007 – 2011. They include predominantly female artists as women's work and gender was the central theme of my research. I also interviewed a few male artists in the course of my fieldwork - some formally and some informally. The material in the biographies is drawn from artist's website, interview transcripts, new articles, and artist's curriculum vitae and bios. Artists are listed alphabetically. When available, artist's websites are listed. These biographies are not comprehensive, but rather provide brief glimpses into the artist's background, education, exhibitions, and recognitions.

**Donnalyn Anthony** is a visual journalist and artist based in Miami, Florida. She holds a Bachelors degree in Art from South Carolina State University in 2002, and is currently (as of 2013) pursuing a degree in Photographic Technology at Miami Dade College, where she also serves as a staff photographer for the student newspaper, *The Reporter*. Anthony has also worked as a photographer with the *Miami Times*, and as a teacher in Atlanta and Miami. Anthony's website is [www.iamdonnalyn.com](http://www.iamdonnalyn.com)

**Carlos Betancourt** was born and raised in Puerto Rico. He moved to Miami Beach in 1981, and is currently based in Miami. Betancourt's work includes photography, sculpture, and installations. Betancourt studied at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale and Miami Dade College. His work is held in collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Miami Art Museum, and the Museum of Latin American Art. Betancourt has also worked on large-scale public commissions with Art in Public Places in Miami. His work has been recognized by several grants including the Florida Department of State Millennium Cultural Recognition Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Grant, and the Miami Beach Arts Council Grant. Betancourt's website is [www.carlosbetancourt.com](http://www.carlosbetancourt.com).

**Maria Brito** was born in Havana and lives in Miami. She earned MFA and BE degrees from the University of Miami, and BFA and MS degrees from Florida International University. Brito has received numerous fellowships and grants, including the South Florida Consortium Fellowship, Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowship Grant, and Florida Arts Council Fellowship. Her work has been exhibited at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, and Wolfson Art Gallery at Miami Dade College. Brito's work is in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution and the Cintas Collection.

**Elizabeth Cerejido** is an artist, independent curator, and scholar who specializes in modern and contemporary Latin American and Latino art and photography, with a focus in Cuban visual culture, cultural politics and identity. Cerejido was born in Cuba and

lives and works in Miami. As a curator she has worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in Miami, and The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University. Her artwork has been exhibited at the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Florida Atlantic University, and Leigh University Art Gallery. In 1999, she was awarded the Florida Consortium for Visual and Media Arts Fellowship.

**Claudine Charles** is an artist working primarily with textiles. She was born in Haiti and lives in the Cutler Bay area of Miami. Her textile work includes hand-painted silk scarves and ties. Charles's work has been exhibited at the Miami Dade College's West Campus and Miami Dade College's Homestead Artspace. Charles also works as a Geometry teacher in the Miami Dade County Public School System.

**Edouard Duval-Carrie** is an artist working in painting and sculpture. He was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and migrated to Puerto Rico with his family when he was a child. Duval-Carrie earned a BA from Loyola College in Montreal, and studied at Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Duval-Carrie currently lives and works in Miami. His work addresses Haitian themes and history, and has been exhibited and collected worldwide including at the Miami Art Museum, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Polk Art Museum, and The Studio Museum of Harlem. In 1995, his work was recognized with the South Florida Cultural Consortium Visual Art Fellowship. Duval-Carrie is active as a curator as well. He organized the Global Caribbean exhibition series from 2010 – 2013. Duval-Carrie's website is [www.edouard-duval-carrie.com](http://www.edouard-duval-carrie.com).

**Jennylin Duany** was a performing artist based in Miami. She is best known for her collaborative works with Elizabeth Doud including the shows *Cabaret Unkempt* and *Sipping Fury*. Duany was recognized for her work by Adrienne Arsht Center in Miami and the National Performance Network. Duany also worked as the residency and education coordinator for the Miami Dade College Cultura del Lobo series. She passed away on January 17, 2010.

**Susan Feliciano** is an artist originally from New York, and based in Miami. Feliciano earned her BFA from Florida International University in 2001, after earning a BA in Psychology in 1993 from the same institution. In 2005, she earned an MS in Art Education. The Fulbright Memorial Fund recognized Feliciano's work in 2004, when she earned a study grant to Tokyo, Japan through the Institute of International Education. Feliciano's work has been exhibited throughout South Florida, and her work is in private collections in Miami, Atlanta, Los Angeles, London, and Tokyo. Feliciano has been an art educator in Miami Dade County Public Schools since 1998. She is artist in residence at the ArtCenter South Florida, where she has worked since 2008. Feliciano's website is [www.inkimaru.com](http://www.inkimaru.com).

**Adler Guerrier** was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and lives and works in Miami. He earned a BFA from the New World School of the Arts in Miami, and is represented by the David Castillo Gallery in Miami. In 2008, Guerrier was among the artists selected for the Whitney Biennial. His work includes drawing, prints, photography, sculpture, and

video. Guerrier also works with the artist-run gallery space, Dimensions Variable with Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova and France Trombly. Guerrier's website is:

[dig.thenextfewhours.com/ag/](http://dig.thenextfewhours.com/ag/).

**Ayanna Jolivet McCloud** is an artist and writer. She earned her BA in Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute Chicago. Born and currently based in Houston, Jolivet McCloud has also lived in Miami, New York, and Chicago. Her work is multifaceted and includes performance, sculpture, curation, and collaborative works. She is the founder of labotanica; a flexible, shape-shifting organization that engages communities through programming, writing, and exhibitions. She has participated in residences in the US, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Jolivet McCloud's artwork has been exhibited at the New Museum in New York; The Joanna in Houston; Unit B Gallery in San Antonio; Brooklyn Arts Council in New York; Diaspora Vibe Gallery in Miami; and at Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires, among others. Her work has been recognized through an Individual Artist Grant through Houston Arts Alliance and an Idea Fund grant through the Warhol Foundation.

**Francesca Lalanne** was born in Miami and grew up in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Lalanne lives in Rochester and works in painting, sculpture, drawing, installation, and video. She earned her MFA from the Rochester Institute of Technology in 2012, BFA in Visual Arts from Florida International University in 2005, and her BA in Architecture in 2002 from Florida International University. Her work has been shown at Women's Park in Miami, Beard Art Center Gallery, Edgezones, and Four Walls Gallery. Lalanne's work has been

recognized by a Wallace Center Purchase Prize Award in 2012. She is also the founder of Humanissimus, a non-profit arts project. Lalanne's website is [www.francescalalanne.com](http://www.francescalalanne.com).

**Maria Martinez-Cañas** was born in Havana, Cuba. She received a BFA in Photography from the Philadelphia College of Art and an MFA in Photography from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. An artist who works with innovative, non-traditional photographic media, she has exhibited extensively in the United States and abroad, with 35 one-person exhibitions and over 250 group exhibitions. She is the recipient of a Cintas Fellowship; a National Endowment for the Arts award; and a Fulbright-Hays Grant, among others. Her works are included in the permanent collections of The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco; The Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC; among others. Martinez-Cañas's website is [www.mariamartinez-cañas.com](http://www.mariamartinez-cañas.com).

**Charo Oquet** is an interdisciplinary artist working in multiple mediums including performance, metal, wood, textile, ceramic, photography, installation, and video. Her approach features and integrated and participatory process often carried out in collaboration with a close network of assistants, friends and family. Born in Santo Domingo, Oquet has lived in Miami and New Zealand. She now lives and works in

Miami. In 1996 Oquet founded the non-profit arts organization Miami Arts Collaborative, and in 2004, that organization became known as Edge Zones, which she still runs today. Creative Capital, Miami Dade County, and the State of Florida, among others, have recognized her work. Oquet's work is part of the permanent collection of The Frost Art Museum in Miami; The Bass Museum, Miami; New Zealand National Museum Wellington, New Zealand; Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art; Las Palmas de Gran Canarias in Spain; Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Zealand; Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Wellington, New Zealand; and Museo de las Casas Reales in the Dominican Republic. Oquet's website is [www.charooquet.com](http://www.charooquet.com).

**Jude Papaloko** was born in Port-Au-Prince Haiti, and lives in Miami. He works primarily in painting, influenced by spiritual and meditative practices. In addition to painting, Papaloko has also worked in sign painting, graphic design, and education. In 1999, he founded Miami Jakmel Gallery, art gallery and community space that remains active today. In 2005, he founded Papaloko4Kids, a nonprofit with the mission to empower children through the arts of music, dance, arts, and crafts. Papaloko is active in arts and education communities in Miami and throughout Haiti. He has exhibited in the US and Haiti. Papaloko's website is [www.judepapalokothegenus.com](http://www.judepapalokothegenus.com).

**Vickie Pierre** is an artist who works primarily in painting. She was born in New York and lives in Miami. She earned her BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1997, after attending Santa Monica Community College from 1991 – 1992. Her work has been exhibited at Scott White Contemporary Art, Polk Museum of Art, Miami Art Museum,

Ambrosino Gallery, Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, and African Cultural Heritage Center. Pierre also works as the Collection Registrar for Miami Dade College Museum and Galleries of Art and Design. She has been an artist in residence at ArtCenter South Florida and the Deering Estate.

**Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez** is a Miami-based artist working with moving image, visual art and performance. Her work is exhibited internationally in film festivals, museums, galleries, television, outdoor projections, and on-stage collaborations. She was born in Cuba, and has lived in New York, San Francisco, and Miami. Rodríguez studied filmmaking and theory with such visionary experimentalists as Trinh T. minh-ha, Barbara Hammer, Rob Nilsson, Kidlat Tahimik and the late Marlon Riggs and Warren Sonbert, among others. After a decade of working independently as an artist, in 1988, she earned a BA in Film Production from the School of Creative Arts at San Francisco State University. Rodríguez has received numerous fellowships, awards, commissions, prizes, grants and residencies in support of her interdisciplinary work from such organizations as The Knight Foundation, Funding Arts Network, Fundación Valparaíso, the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, Atlantic Center for the Arts, Tigertail Productions, Miami Light Project, San Francisco Festival 2000, among others. Rodríguez is also the co-founder and co-director of Flashlight Project, an educational mentoring program that works in partnership with various non-profit organizations. As a teaching artist she has worked with the Miami Art Museum, Bass Museum of Art, Girls' Club Collection, and the Miami-Dade Public Library System, Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester,



University of California at Davis, and Florida International University. Rodriguez's website is [solislandmediaworks.com/](http://solislandmediaworks.com/).

**Cristina Lei Rodriguez** is an artist who was born in and lives in Miami. She earned her MFA in Film, Video, and Performance from the California College of Art in 2002, and her BA in Art and Political Science from Middlebury College in 1996. She is represented by the Frederic Snitzer Gallery in Miami, and Brand New Gallery in Milan. Rodriguez has been an artist in residence at Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in Miami, International Studio and Curatorial Program in New York, and the Oakland Museum of California in Oakland. Rodriguez's website is [cristinaleirodriguez.com](http://cristinaleirodriguez.com).

**Lydia Rubio** is a multi-disciplinary who works with paintings, words, sculpture, and architecturally integrated installations. Rubio was born in Cuba and is based in Miami. She earned her Masters of Architecture from Harvard University's School of Design and a Bachelors degree in Architecture from the University of Florida. She has taught at Harvard School of Design, Parsons, and the University of Puerto Rico. Her artwork is in the permanent collections including the Museum of Fine Arts of Indiana University, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, University of Southern California at Los Angeles, Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, Miami Dade College, Lowe Art Museum, Frost Art Museum, and the Cintas Collection. She has shown at Beaux Arts Des Ameriques in Montreal, Cremata Gallery, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, and The Americas Collection. She is a recipient of the Creative Capital Professional Development Fellowship, Pollock

Krasner Fellowship, the State of Florida Individual Artist Fellowship in Painting, the Cintas Fellowship, and a Graham Foundation Award. Rubio's website is [lydiarubio.com](http://lydiarubio.com).

**Yomarie Silva** is a sculptor and a Professor at Miami Dade College. She earned her MFA and BFA from Florida International University. Silva was born in Puerto Rico, and has lived in Miami and New York. Silva's work has been exhibited at Florida International University, Miami Dade College, and the Deering Estate. From 2010 – 2011, Silva was an artist in residence at the Deering Estate.

**Alette Simmons-Jimenez** is a visual artist working with video, mixed media, sculpture, and installation. Simmons-Jimenez was born into a US military family and lived in nineteen different places while she was growing up. She earned a BFA from Newcomb Memorial College of Tulane University in New Orleans. She then moved to the Dominican Republic, where she lived for eighteen years. Simmons-Jimenez is currently based in Miami. Her work has been exhibited and held in permanent collections at the Mobile Museum of Art, Santo Domingo's Museo de Arte Moderno, and the Louisville 21c Museum, among others. The Florida Department of State, Miami-Dade Division of Cultural Affairs, the Knight Foundation, Optica International in Spain, the Mobile Museum of Art, the Renaissance Center in Tennessee, and others have recognized her artwork. In 2004, Simmons-Jimenez founded Artformz, an artist run exhibition space that was located in the Wynwood Arts District. As director of the project she created, curated and produced numerous exhibitions, including *Giants in the City* a 2008 Knight Arts Challenge winning project, the *Small Wonderz Art Salon* project, and *Artist Invites Artist*

an international exchange exhibit with artists from Valencia, Spain. Simmons-Jimenez's website is [www.alettesimmonsjimenez.com](http://www.alettesimmonsjimenez.com).

**Kristie Stephenson** was born in Kingston, Jamaica. She graduated from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in 1995, with a diploma in Graphic Design. She earned her MA in Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design. She currently lives in Belgium. Her work includes painting, sculpture, and video. Stephenson's website is [kristie-stephenson.blogspot.com](http://kristie-stephenson.blogspot.com).

**Noelle Théard** is a photographer and educator. Born in El Paso, Texas, is currently based in Miami and New York. She earned an MFA from Parsons, an MA in African Diaspora Studies from Florida International University, a BA in Journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, and a certificate in advanced studies from the Spéos Photography Institute in Paris, France. In addition to her own art work, Théard works with a number of institutions as an educator including the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, and Florida International University. Théard is the co-director of FotoKonbit, a non-profit organization created to engage and empower Haitians to tell their own stories and document their community through photography. Théard's photographic work in Haiti was featured in En Foco's journal, *Nueva Luz* in 2012. Théard's website is [www.noelletheard.com](http://www.noelletheard.com).

**Juana Valdes** is an artist based in Miami and New York. She works primarily in sculpture, but her work also includes works on paper. Valdes was born in Cabañas, Cuba, and has lived in the US since 1971. She earned a BFA from Parsons School of Design and an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Valdes's work has been recognized through grants, fellowships, and residencies from the Cuban Artist Fund Grant, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts, among others. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums including the Bronx River Art Center, Jersey City Museum, Center for Book Arts, and El Museo del Barrio. Valdes's website is [www.juanamvaldes.com](http://www.juanamvaldes.com).

**Antonia Wright** is a poet and photographer based in Miami. She earned an MFA in poetry from the New School University in New York in 2005, and studied at the International Center of Photography in 2008. She earned her BA in English from the University of Montana in 2002. Wright has been recognized as one of Miami's top "100 Creatives" by the *Miami New Times*. Her work has been shown at the Spinello Projects, David Castillo Gallery, Dorsch Gallery, The Tampa Museum of Art, The Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, The Frost Museum at Florida International University, and A+D Museum in Los Angeles. Wright has been an artist in residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, ArtCenter South Florida, and the Lotus House Shelter for women and children. She also works as the curator of the Wynwood Art Fair. Wright's website is [www.antonawright.com](http://www.antonawright.com).

## **Appendix B: General Miami-Caribbean/Art World Timeline**

### **(exact date unknown)**

Tequesta Indians live in the area along Biscayne Bay.

### **1492**

Christopher Columbus and crew sail from Spain in the first of four voyages to the “New World.” Makes landfall in the Caribbean.

### **1500s**

Spanish arrive in Florida

### **1518**

First direct transport of African people to the Americas as slaves. Marks the beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. (The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Timeline, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/4schools/Slavery2/Timeline.htm>)

### **1619**

Dutch traders begin to transport slaves from Africa to the Americas. (The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Timeline, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/4schools/Slavery2/Timeline.htm>)

### **1791**

Haitian Revolution (Haiti was then known as Saint Domingue) begins as a slave uprising led by Toussaint L’Ouverture.

### **1804**

Haiti gains independence from France on January 1, 1804.

### **1807**

Abolition of the Slave Trade Act passes in Britain and abolished British slave trade. (The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Timeline, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/4schools/Slavery2/Timeline.htm>)

### **1808**

United States passes legislation to abolish slavery.

### **1811**

Slavery is abolished in Spain and Spanish colonies. However, it persists in Cuba. (The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Timeline, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/4schools/Slavery2/Timeline.htm>)

### **1813**

Slave trade abolished by Sweden. (ibid.)

### **1814**

Slave trade abolished by the Netherlands. (ibid.)

1817

Slave trade abolished by France, but doesn't take effect until 1825. (ibid.)

**1819**

On February 22, 1819, Spain ceded Florida to the United States.

**1821**

Temple Pent arrived in Coconut Grove from The Bahamas. He attempted to homestead the area, but was not successful. However, he and his family remained in the area. They were the Coconut Grove's first permanent residents. (Bachin n.d.)

**1833**

Abolition of Slavery Act passed in Britain and abolishes slavery in Britain and the colonies. (The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Timeline,

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/4schools/Slavery2/Timeline.htm>)

**1844**

Dominican Republic gains independence from Spain

**1848**

Slavery abolished by France.

**1851**

Slave trade abolished by Brasil.

**1858**

Slavery abolished in Portuguese colonies.

**1861**

Slavery abolished in Dutch colonies in the Caribbean.

Civil War begins in the US with attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.

**1865**

Civil War ends in the US.

Slavery abolished in the US.

**1869**

Portugal abolishes slavery.

**1870s**

Many Bahamians work in Miami's agricultural industry. (Mohl 1988:83)

**1880s**

Collapse of Bahamian economy and many black workers leave The Bahamas to find work. Many go to the Florida Keys, and by the 1890s they had moved further north toward what would become the city of Miami. (Dunn 1997)

**1885**

Henry Flagler begins rail service between St. Augustine and New York. This was his first railroad purchase in Florida.

**1886**

Slavery abolished in Cuba.

**1888**

Slavery abolished in Brasil.

**1891**

Julia Tuttle buys land and arrives in Miami.

**1894 – 1895**

Great Freeze decimated Florida's citrus industry.

**1895**

Julia Tuttle offers land to Henry Flagler, proposing that he would extend the railroad to Miami. (Bachin)

**1896**

Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad extends to Miami at the urging of Julia Tuttle. Miami incorporated as a city on July 28.

Flagler and Tuttle create a district for the city's black residents. (The area would later be known as Colored Town and then Overtown.)

Eduardo Luis Gonzalez and his family move to Miami. They are the first known Cuban people to live in the city. (Bachin)

City of Miami incorporates on July 28, 1896.

**1898**

US defeats Spain in the Spanish American War, and Cuba is ceded to the US on December 10, 1898.

**1902**

Cuba gains independence from the US on May 20, 1902, but the Platt Amendment maintains US interests and ability to intervene in Cuba.

**1910**

The Miami Herald begins publication.

### **1913**

Lyric Theater opens in Colored Town (or what is now Overtown) in Miami, quickly becomes a popular place for black musicians such as Aretha Franklin and Ella Fitzgerald

### **1920**

In 1920, 25% of Miami's population was foreign born, and of that number, 65% were immigrants from the West Indies. Black islanders, mostly from the Bahamas, constituted 52% of the city's Black population and 16.3% of the entire population (29,571). (Mohl 1988:82)

### **1920**

Beginning of a land boom and population growth in Miami. Miami is marketed as a tropical paradise and tourism industry booms.

City of Miami renames streets based on a quadrant system. (Bachin)

### **1926**

Olympia Theater opens. It was the first building in Miami to have air conditioning.

Major Hurricane passes through Florida causing a lot of damage and death. The storm killed over 100 people. It is known as the 1926 Hurricane. This was before they began naming the storms.

### **1927**

Pan Am Airlines begins service between Key West and Havana. They ship mail, agricultural products, manufactured goods, and transported business commuters, tourists, and travelers. (Brown 1998:145)

### **1928**

Pan Am relocates to Miami. (Brown 1998:148)

1928 Hurricane passes through Florida, causing major damage.

### **1929**

Pan Am begins air service from Miami to San Juan via Havana and Camaguey, Port au Prince and Santo Domingo. (Brown 1998:148)

### **1930s**

Economic depression, known as the Great Depression occurs throughout the US. It was worsened in Florida by two major hurricanes and the end of the land boom.

### **1933**

On August 13, 1933, Gerardo Machado, then president of Cuba was overthrown. He fled to Miami. On August 17, 1933, the *Miami Herald* wrote, "Miami's gates will always



remain open to Cubans" (Bachin n.d.).

### **1941 - 1945**

World War II; base and training camps set up in Miami and Miami Beach, and at the end of the war returning GIs help to spur another land boom

### **1940 – 1950**

Population of the city of Miami rose from 172,000 to 249,000, and Miami Beach's population rose from 28,000 to 46,000; many new arrivals included former GIs stationed in Miami who either decided to stay following the war or returned with their families shortly afterwards. Many Jewish people moved to Miami and Miami Beach during this time and into the 1950s. (Moore 1994:25)

### **1950s**

Direct air service to the Caribbean causes a downturn in Miami tourism.

### **1952**

Lowe Art Gallery opens at the University of Miami.

### **1954**

Fifty-five Miami-based artists were included in an exhibition at the Palace of Fine Arts in Havana (Vasari Project)

Advertising posters for Pan Am depict the romance of air travel as well as the romance of "the tropics."

### **1956**

Coconut Grove Playhouse reopens.

### **1957**

François Duvalier aka 'Papa Doc,' a doctor and union leader, was elected president of Haiti, largely by terrorizing and rooting out all opponents. He maintained power and control of the country through *tontons macoutes* (private militia).

### **1958**

West Indies Federation of 10 British West Indian territories forms.

### **1959**

Beginning of Cuban Revolution and major wave of Cuban migration to Miami.

City of Miami's schools began desegregation. (Five years after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling that segregation was unconstitutional.)

### **1960**

Operation Pedro Pan begins, sending thousands of children from Cuba to the US.

## **1961**

The Cuban Hebrew Circle is founded, now called Temple Beth Shmuel, Cuban Hebrew Congregation, on Miami Beach (Heisler-Samuels 2001)

Bay of Pigs, a CIA sponsored invasion of Cuba; many Cuban exiles (in Brigade 2506) in Miami were involved in this attempt to overthrow Castro and the Revolution.

U.S. imposes partial trade embargo on Cuba (or el bloqueo), under the leadership of President Eisenhower

## **1962**

British West Indian Federation dissolves.

Cuban Missile Crisis.

Under President Kennedy, the U.S. trade embargo is widened and eventually makes all travel and commercial transactions with Cuba illegal for US. citizens.

Jamaica gains independence from the UK on August 6, 1962.

Trinidad and Tobago gains independence from the UK on August 31, 1962.

## **1964**

Duvalier changes Haitian constitution so that he can be elected president for life.

## **1966**

Guyana gains independence from the UK on May 22, 1966.

Barbados gains independence from the UK on November 30, 1966.

## **1970s**

*¿Qué Pasa U.S.A.?* television series on PBS

Economic and political struggles in the Caribbean lead to increasing immigration to Miami, particularly from Cuba and Haiti in addition to Jamaica, Trinidad, and The Bahamas.

## **1971**

François Duvalier dies and his son Jean-Claude aka 'Baby Doc' succeeds him as president of Haiti.

## **1973**

Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places program starts.

The Bahamas gains independence from the UK on July 10, 1973.

**1974**

Grenada gains independence from the UK on February 7, 1974.

**1975**

Suriname gains independence from The Netherlands on November 25, 1975.

**1977**

Art Gallery opens at Florida International University (now the Frost Museum)

Frederic Snitzer opens Opus Gallery in North Miami.

**1978**

First Calle Ocho Festival. (Vasari Project)

Dominica gain independence from the UK on November 3, 1978.

**1979**

Miami Beach Art Deco District recognized by National Register of Historic Places.

St. Lucia gains independence from the UK on February 22, 1979.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines gain independence from the UK on October 27, 1979.

**1980**

Marief Boatlift (about 125,000 Cubans arrive in Miami) and Haitian Boat Crisis (about 25,000 Haitians arrive in Miami).

“McDuffie Riots,” rioting and violence breaks out in Liberty City, Overtown, and Coconut Grove after four white police officers are acquitted of killing Arthur McDuffie, a Black man who was riding a motorcycle with a suspended license.

‘Hispanic’ as an ethnicity is added to the US Census.

By this time, Lemon City is known as Little Havana.

**1981**

Belize gains independence from the UK on September 21, 1981.

Antigua and Barbuda gain independence from the UK on November 1, 1981.

**1982**

Ana Mendieta exhibits work at the Lowe Art Museum and creates several works around Miami.

Mitchell Kaplan opens Books and Books in Coral Gables

**1983**

Jeanne-Claude and Christo's *Surrounded Islands*.

*Scarface* released. Depicts a Cuban immigrant who arrived via Mariel who becomes involved in drug trafficking.

St. Kitts and Nevis gain independence from the UK on September 19, 1983.

Opening of Cuban Museum of Art and Culture/*Museo Cubano de Arte y Cultura*

Exhibition - *The Miami Generation: Nine Cuban-American Artists/La Generacion de Miami: Nueve Artistas Cubano-Americanos*, October 10, 1983 – January 15, 1984, Giulio V. Blanc, Guest Curator, Margarita Cano, Project Director. Organized by the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture, Miami, in cooperation with the Miami-Dade Public Library System.

**1984**

Art Center/South Florida purchases buildings and opens on Lincoln Road.

**1985**

Miami Vice television series begins.

Jan Mapou opens Libreri Mapou in Little Haiti and founds Sosyete Koukouy.

**1986**

Duvalier regime in Haiti collapses and Baby Doc flees to France.

**1989**

Violence and rioting break out again in Miami following the shooting deaths of two black men by a Colombian police officer (Grenier and Stepick 1992:172-173).

**1990**

Jean-Bertrand Aristide is elected president of Haiti.

**1991**

Military coup ends Aristides's presidency in Haiti.

**1992**

Hurricane Andrew blows through Miami on August 24, destroying much of the southern part of the city and displacing many residents. At the time it was the most costly natural disaster in the US (Portes and Stepick 1993).

**1992 – 1994**

Increasing Cuban and Haitian immigration (on rafts or *balsas*; lending the name of *balseros* to those arriving from Cuba)

**1993**

Don and Mera Rubell open the Rubell Collection in Wynwood.

**1994**

Wet Foot Dry Foot Policy enacted as a variation of the Cuban Adjustment Acts.

Exiled Aristide returns to Haiti and resumes presidency facilitated by US military and UN troops.

**1995**

René Prével, former Haitian Prime Minister, is elected president of the country.

**1996**

Rosie Gordon Wallace founded Diaspora Vibe Gallery and Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator

The Historical Museum of Southern Florida launches research into Miami's Caribbean communities, and from 1996 – 1997 three exhibitions are produced: *Visions of the Caribbean*, *Calypso: A World Music*; and *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami*.

Neri Torres founds IFE-ILE

**1997**

UN troops begin to withdraw from Haiti.

**2000**

Bernice Steinbaum opens the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery at 36<sup>th</sup> Street and North Miami Avenue

**2001**

Art Basel is scheduled to open in 2001, but postpones due to the incident at the World Trade Towers in New York.

Josaphat J. Celestin, also known as Joe Celestin, becomes the first Haitian mayor of North Miami. He holds office from 2001 – 2005.

**2002**

Art Basel, the international Swiss art fair, comes to Miami Beach.

Diaspora Vibe Gallery moves into a space in the Design District.

**2003**

Charo Oquet founds Edge Zones and opens space in World Arts Building on North Miami Avenue.

**2004**

President George Bush tightens restrictions on Cuban-American travel and remittances to Cuba.

**2006**

*Miami Vice* the movie, released.

Fidel Castro cedes power to his brother Raul Castro.

**2009**

President Barack Obama reverses restrictive travel regulations for Cuban living in the US Cuban-Americans can now travel to Cuba as often as they are able and can send unlimited remittances to family on the island.

Rose and Carlos de la Cruz open the de la Cruz Collection in the Design District

**2010**

Major earthquakes in Haiti (January) and Chile (February).

Diaspora Vibe Gallery closes physical location, and moves to an online format.

In August 2010, Wyclef Jean announces his run for president of Haiti.

FotoKonbit founded by Noelle Theard, Marie Arago, and Tatiana Mora-Liatud.

Little Haiti Cultural Center opens.

**2012**

Bernice Steinbaum closes her gallery, the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

Charo Oquet closes the gallery space of Edge Zones.

Alette Simmons-Jimenez closes the gallery space of Artformz.

**2013**

Richard Blanco is the US inaugural poet.

Yoani Sanchez, Cuban blogger, visits Miami.

Miami Art Museum closes space in the Downtown Cultural Plaza (June), and plans to move into newly constructed building on Biscayne Bay in December 2013.

Frost Museum at FIU theme year commemorates Spanish arrival in Florida 500 years ago with exhibitions related to Spain and the Caribbean.

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