

REFLECTING ON WHITENESS IN RECENT CONTEMPORARY ARTWORK EXPLORING TRANSNATIONAL POLAND

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A complaint often made by artists of color (or those considered “other”) is that their artwork often gets conflated with their authorship. Part of the solution to this problem is to examine contemporary art made by white artists with an eye to their own possession of ethnicity. Indeed, decolonizing art history must involve a critical engagement with whiteness given it is the unacknowledged and often invisible ground of the discipline. In the early 2000s, significant scholarship exploring “whiteness studies” in art history began to emerge. For instance, American art historian Martin A. Berger published *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (2005), and the December 2001 issue of *Art Journal* included a special forum exploring whiteness.¹ Overall, though, there has not been any sustained attention to the topic.²

In this chapter, I argue that decolonization should make whiteness “strange” as British film and queer theorist Richard Dyer perspicaciously suggests.³ More recently, I did so by considering artworks by white artists as part of the writing of a transnational South Asian art history by mobilizing methods and frameworks that disrupted and kept in play the white/non-white and South Asian/non-South Asian binaries.⁴ Here, I will focus on the works of Jacek J. Kolasiński and Radek Szlaga, both of whom mobilize racial signifiers in their artistic practices but are of Polish descent. I examine their works in the broader context of the way race and ethnicity have played in shaping contemporary Poland, one of the most homogenous countries in Europe—a legacy in part of the Holocaust, continued racism in the post-1945 era, border shifts during the Soviet era, and mass deportations of non-Polish residents. Moreover, Poland was never part of the African slave trade or had any overseas colonies; and economically and culturally, the country is not a destination of interest for many contemporary non-white immigrants. More recently, Poland’s xenophobic government has further shored up its whiteness. During the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) Party’s first year in power in 2015, the new government immediately began xenophobic moves such as staunchly refusing to comply with European Union quotas for refugees primarily from Syria and other conflict areas.⁵ In stark contrast, the Polish government in 2019 allowed for about 400,000 Ukrainians to move and work in Poland “in what amounts to the largest migration into a European country in recent years.”⁶ When Russia began its assault on Ukraine in March 2022, Poland took on more refugees from

Ukraine. However, there have been reports of discrimination and violence against non-white individuals.⁷ In other words, there is inherent racism, not just xenophobia, at play: Poland will open its borders to refugees if they do not have a darker skin color. Both the works of Szlaga and Kolasiński put into relief the historical connections of Poland to non-white cultures and thereby implicitly reveal the hypocrisy of the PiS party. To do so, they mobilize signifiers culturally marked as Black, but to varying levels of success. Kolasiński's *Creole Archive* (2015–present) makes up the bulk of my discussion, but I begin by addressing a few paintings from Szlaga's 2015 solo exhibition in Warsaw, Poland.

Radek Szlaga's Exhibition *All the Brutes*

I visited Szlaga's exhibition of 19 paintings, all oil on canvas, at Galeria Leto in Warsaw in the fall of 2015. His work examined the novella *The Heart of Darkness* (1902) by Joseph Conrad. Born with the Polish name Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, he changed his name when he moved to Britain. The exhibition title *All the Brutes* refers to the cryptic phrase "Exterminate all the brutes!" written by Conrad's megalomaniac character Kurtz. *The Heart of Darkness* has been interpreted in various ways—from a trenchant critique of colonialism to a reinscription of racist depictions of Africa—and has been invoked by the artist Christopher Wool and filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, among others. Vietnam takes the place of Africa in Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*.

The Congo is widely considered to be *The Heart of Darkness's* setting and Szlaga makes a connection between the Congo and Poland in his diptych *Republics (Poland and Congo)* (2015), which depicts the almost-identical shapes of the two countries referenced in the title. The approach is not cartographic but semi-abstract. Szlaga's pairing might suggest loose parallels between the subjugation of Poland over the centuries and most recently by Russia and the colonization of the Congo by the French and the Belgians. Conrad's authorship and the setting of the novella provide a link between the two nations in *Republics (Poland and Congo)* (2015). At the same time, it brings into relief one key difference. Poland has itself been an aggressor in the past—in particular, in its subjugation of countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. While Poland had not set up a colony in Africa or anywhere else, there were plans to do so in Madagascar.⁸

Szlaga's own stake in these conversations remains opaque and as his work moves from abstraction to figuration of Black bodies, this becomes impossible to ignore. For instance, mug shots of African American males from Detroit, Michigan, in paintings such as *Portraits* (2015) allude to the disproportionate number of Black males who have been incarcerated in the United States. Exploring the prison industrial complex is an important subject matter, especially in relation to Detroit, which has a long history of racial tensions between Blacks and whites. Moreover, Detroit is also known for its large population of Poles. Szlaga's parents and brother moved to Detroit when he was 19. Szlaga, however, remained in Poland, where he was born, raised, and continues to live.⁹ Therefore, his connection to Detroit is a tenuous one. In other words, Szlaga does not have any connection to the Black men he represents, and this turns them into one-dimensional figurations rather than subjects with an agency.

In another example, the background of *Demi-God Surrounded by the Elegant Brutality of His Own Choosing* (2015) suggests that the racism sometimes applied to Conrad's conflation of Africa with darkness, savagery, and unbridled sexuality has been reconstituted in today's digital landscape. The painting depicts a desktop of a computer. In its foreground,

he brings together a cacophony of images that might be those culled from the internet, such as a representation of Joseph Conrad, a faint map of Africa, body parts (such as a penis, lungs, and heart), apes and images of what appear to be Black males as well as Black women vaguely resembling Sarah Baartmann. Known as the “Hottentot Venus,” Baartmann was displayed in Europe in the nineteenth century to prove the anatomical difference between Africans and Europeans. The (white) public could poke and prod her to point out her apparently large buttocks.¹⁰ All the elements of the painting are not distinctly rendered and are diminutive in size. Moreover, Szlaga has applied paint and strips of canvas in multiple layers to the canvas, resulting in a corrugated surface that largely obscures what is being depicted. While making connections between historical and contemporary racism is a worthy topic, invoking Baartmann, even if as an abstraction, is disturbing and taboo for anyone, especially for a white man.

Perhaps more problematic is *Cliché* (2014), which portrays a well-endowed Black male sitting on an unmade bed based on a widely circulated image on the internet. In this work, there is no obscuring of the figures. The depicted man confidently meets the viewer’s gaze. Szlaga has painted a little less than half of this horizontal canvas completely in grays, to blunt the sensationalism and shock value of the image and short-circuit our voyeurism. Another work *Chart* (2015) incorporates apes, firearms and a stockpile of bullets with penis heads. Both *Cliché* and *Chart* bring up the simultaneous hyper-sexualization and dehumanization of the Black male subject, whom postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon poignantly referred to as “sealed into that crushing objecthood” and “abraded into nonbeing.”¹¹ I have seen the image on which *Cliché* is based circulating on the internet, and when I first saw this work of Szlaga’s, I felt it was a biting indictment of the ongoing objectification and hyper-sexualization of the Black male body. I reported as much in my review of the exhibition in *Art in America*.¹² However, over time I have been increasingly uncomfortable with the aesthetic choices he has made that seem to dangerously reinscribe the very representations he means to subvert. Indeed, Szlaga is playing with signifiers that have long, complicated histories, and a block of gray can hardly attend to them in a meaningful way. Therefore, I neither show the images of the works I have discussed as part of presentations nor am I publishing them as part of this chapter. In an interview in the catalog accompanying his exhibition, Szlaga says the following regarding *Cliché*: “Yes. That’s me in the painting.”¹³ This bizarre statement seems to suggest an equivalency between his authorship and his (sexually charged) Black subject matter. American Studies scholar Tomasz Basiuk, based in Warsaw, writes that “Szlaga avoids excepting himself from the possibility of harboring unexamined racist views by implicating himself in the racializing gestures which he critically portrays and by doing so in a seemingly candid, almost confessional manner.”¹⁴ However, the signifiers he mobilizes cannot be so easily controlled: intentionality and being self-ironic is not enough.

What I have written thus far is not meant to be a wholesale indictment of the exhibition, given I discussed only a handful of works, but it is meant to act as a foil for the remainder of this chapter, in which I attempt to answer the following question through a deep exploration of the work of another artist of Polish descent, Jacek J. Kolasiński: under what conditions (if any) is it ever okay for a white artist to mobilize racial signifiers? To truly make whiteness “strange” per Dyer, I argue that it is important to move beyond the facile notion that white artists can never explore racialized signifiers. Such thinking is a trap because it implies only artists of color can do so, and this leads us back to the uneasy conflation of the authorship of artists of color with their work.

Jacek J. Kolasiński's *The Creole Archive*

Based in Miami, Florida, in the United States, Kolasiński began *The Creole Archive* in 2015. As I will argue, this work is more successful than the ones by Szlaga discussed above in shattering any illusion of Poland as disconnected from other cultures worldwide. His archive is ever-growing, and it is not possible to treat the elements of *The Creole Archive* as discrete as I did the paintings in the previous section. I will instead explore a constellation of parts of the archive and its conceptual underpinnings. Before doing so, I provide important historical context in this section and how the artist began this ambitious project.

The Creole Archive is inspired by his visits to “Little Haiti,” an area of Miami named for the many Haitian refugees of the 1980s who settled there. The site includes many restaurants, cultural centers, and bookstores that broadly deal with the African diaspora.¹⁵ During his visits, he would see many depictions of the Haitian Vodou spirit Ezili that resembled the doleful Black Madonna of Częstochowa – Czarna Madonna in Polish and also referred to as Our Lady of Częstochowa – a four-foot-high religious icon of the Virgin Mary with which he was familiar having grown up in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶ Both Ezili and the Black Madonna have darker skin and two slashes on their cheek. Their similarity is not accidental, and Kolasiński was aware of this. The transnational materialization of the Black Madonna as Ezili can be traced back to the presence of Poles in Haiti in the early nineteenth century. The movement of the Madonna from Poland to Haiti – and indeed to Miami – maps almost exactly Kolasiński’s shift from Krakow, Poland, which he left soon after Soviet rule ended, to Miami, where he has now lived more years than Poland.

While the Black Madonna is based in Poland, her origin story (or stories) suggest(s) she was born out of much more expansive transregional movements. There are several stories about the origin of the Madonna. One of them indicates she had been painted by the apostle St. Luke on a table used by the Holy Family 2,000 years ago.¹⁷ Indeed, the icon was already considered miraculous when it was brought to Poland. All accounts agree that the Black Madonna was brought to Częstochowa during the fourteenth century. Around 1430, looters broke the wooden board supporting the canvas and slashed it. Medieval restorers were unaware of the encaustic method, and their attempts were unsuccessful.

Several years later, the image was removed entirely and replaced with a new image of the Madonna, where one cheek bears two scars, referencing where the saber slashes of the paintings took place. Moreover, a fire in the monastery darkened her pigments that transformed the skin tone on her face to a burnt sienna color. Both the scars and skin color illustrate that she survived these calamities.

The Madonna is thought to have been brought to Haiti by Poles in the early nineteenth century. In 1802, 20,000 soldiers – a quarter of whom were from the Polish Dąbrowski Legions – were sent by Napoleon Bonaparte to Saint-Domingue, France’s wealthiest colony, to quell a rebellion led by the general Toussaint L’Ouverture, a formerly enslaved man. A year before this, Saint-Domingue adopted a constitution that abolished slavery and declared L’Ouverture leader for life. The Polish soldiers eventually became sympathetic to the cause of the enslaved population. They saw themselves in their struggle for independence against a mighty power. In 1797, Habsburg, Austria, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Russian Empire signed a treaty effectively dissolving the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Poles had allied themselves with the French in the hopes that they would help them win back their independence.¹⁸ When the rebels won the revolution in 1804, Saint-Domingue became officially renamed Haiti, the island’s original Taino name (Ayiti in Creole). The country’s first

president Jean-Jacques Dessalines has famously said that the Polish were the “white negroes of Europe,” given that Poles and Haitians shared similar stories of oppression and rootlessness.¹⁹ Dessalines guaranteed citizenship to any Pole who wanted it. Many of the original contingents of Polish soldiers had succumbed to yellow fever or died in battle. Still, about 400 of the survivors remained in the community now known as La Pologne. As the Poles settled down, their traditions began to meld with local ones. They resulted in the famous Polish icon of the Virgin Mary becoming a syncretic goddess in the Caribbean.

In Haiti and its diasporas, the Black Madonna with the two tell-tale scars on her face and darker skin is the Ezili Danto.²⁰ While the day-to-day practices of Vodou are attended to by women, few of the religion’s spirit forces, or Lwas, are feminine spirits: Ezili is an exception. She represents love, sexuality, prosperity, pleasure, maternity, creativity, and fertility forces.²¹ Queer, feminist, and Black studies scholar Omise’eke Tinsley notes that Danto “transform[s] what it means to be a woman in the first place.”²² Moreover, madivin and masisi, or transmasculine and transfeminine Haitians, are often under Ezili Danto’s patronage.²³ Catholic and Protestant spiritual communities do not welcome gender and sexually nonconforming subjects. It is not surprising that they are attracted to Ezili and the Vodou religion.²⁴ Tinsley provocatively suggests that Vodou has a queer present and arguably a queer past.²⁵ In fact, the Haitian revolution, in some accounts, began with the appearance of Elizi Danto at a Vodou ceremony at Bwa Kayiman on August 14, 1791.²⁶

Multiple Madonnas: 3D-Printed Sculptures

Kolasiński’s *The Creole Archive* does the vital work of making a queer and – as the title suggests – “creolizing” connection among disparate regions and, in this way, does not think about the nation as a kind of singular root but one that per Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant is “reaching out to meet other roots.”²⁷ Creolization refers to the process of cultural mixings in the Caribbean and is a result of slavery, plantation culture, and colonialism. Cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall has written that while hybridity often assumes the components that created it can be segregated, creolization suggests that the components are not identifiable given the ongoing flux associated with entanglement.²⁸ Importantly, Glissant believed that creolization could be applicable not only in the Caribbean but also across “all the world” (*Tout-monde*). That is, Kolasiński’s work suggests that by only focusing on the Caribbean as bound, it is likely that the connections between Poland and Haiti becomes less visible as does those to south Florida. Glissant’s ideas of creolization are more porous. Is it possible to consider Glissant’s thinking to geographies that have no connection to the Caribbean? How elastic one can be with Glissant’s thinking is beyond the scope of this paper but one that deserves further consideration.²⁹

Not surprisingly, Kolasiński’s archive is not meant to build fixed knowledge or truths. This idea is materialized in his archive in the serial production of 3D-printed Black Madonnas (see Figure 27.1). There are two basic types: one based on a carving he commissioned from a Poland-based artisan and figures from botanicas in Miami. Each one is different – the glitches typical of printers here are not seen as errors or as unwelcome. Kolasiński creates a mise-en-abyme through his production of multiple 3D-printed sculptures of the Black Madonna that range from being small enough to hold in one’s palms to about two feet. The sculptures are hand-painted, often with patterning, a hybrid of traditional Polish folkloric clothing and Haitian Vodou flags. Some are painted by his partner, father-in-law, and nieces:



Figure 27.1 Jacek J. Kolasiński, VN A002 (2018), mixed media, 30 × 20 cm. Courtesy of artist.

they are all genealogically connected to Haiti. The sculptures exemplify the seemingly interminable subjectivities through which Ezili queers fixed categorical meaning. Tinsley, too, suggests as much when she refers to Ezili variously as “manly black superwoman,” “beautiful femme queen, bull dyke, weeping willow, [and] dagger mistress,” among other names.³⁰ Most of the sculptures are painted with bright hues. One is entirely gilded in gold except for the face painted over in black; in fact, many of the Madonnas’ faces are obscured. These abstractions allow Ezili to retain their right to what Glissant would characterize as “opacity.”³¹ Glissant deploys this concept in relation to the postcolonial subject, who should not be appropriated by discourses of power that originate elsewhere. He further notes that opacity is “the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence.”³²

One Madonna sculpture is completely unpainted, revealing the raw plastic out of which all the figures are constructed. In this case, the plastic is a bright, mandarin orange color, and the many threads, which would typically be shaved off, are left intact here. Along with the other sculptures, this unfinished quality further cements that Ezili is always in (trans) formation. Worth noting is that the plastic Kolasiński utilizes to print his Madonnas is made of sugar and corn and, in this way, obliquely references Haitian plantation culture. Haiti was France’s wealthiest colony because of its sugar production. The physical process of printing his sculptures requires an incredible amount of heat – the plastic melts at roughly twice the temperature to boil water – and recalls the dangerous process of sugar refinement. In 1894, *The Illustrated American* magazine described the process as “very wild and terrible, like a caged cyclone” and morbidly notes that a worker had only one hope of



Figure 27.2 Jacek J. Kolasiński, *The Creole Archive* (2015–) selection of archival artefacts, mixed media, watercolor paper: 20 × 13 cm and 25 × 18 cm. Courtesy of artist.

escaping “perpetual torture”: death.³³ The tireless work of the island’s enslaved Indigenous population, the voices of which were silenced, is a manifestation of the hard-working yet muted Ezili Danto.

Archival Artefacts

The Black Madonna sculptures are part of a larger archive, the concerns of which overlap with and are co-extensive with Ezili Danto’s affinity for queer and gendered sexualities. The archive includes approximately 500 (as of the writing of this chapter) of what Kolasiński refers to as “archival artefacts” that collectively interlace Eastern European, North American, and African histories (see Figure 27.2). One cultural or historical artefact is affixed per sheet of watercolor paper, including several basic formal organizing elements. First, at the top of the sheet, Kolasiński incorporates the artefact: religious prayer cards, postcards, Polaroids of film stills, personal photographs and drawings, and screenshots of Instagram feeds. Toward the bottom, “EZILI DANTOR PROJECTS Creole Archive Special Collections” and a representation of Madonna’s head – around which is written the words “Creole,” “Black,” and “Madonna” in Luminari font – are typically stamped in red. The stamping metaphorically legitimizes the ephemera he assembles. However, these archival elements are not meant to consolidate an official historical archive. Moreover, there is no hierarchy: the artefacts can be put together in seemingly endless configurations.

Poland is invoked in various ways. For instance, artefacts referencing the Black Madonna of Częstochowa include postcards, religious prayer cards, and a Polaroid of a screenshot from a documentary of a 1960s procession of the Black Madonna in honor of 1,000 years of Christianity. Included are various medallions and pins, including one Kolasiński's step-father wore in the solidarity movement in the 1980s. The inclusion of personal ephemera such as this helps to prevent his archive from taking on a presence of objective truth.

Other artefacts reference Haiti and – sometimes obliquely – Poles in Haiti. For example, Kolasiński includes black-and-white Polaroids of stills captured by iPhone of the film *The Ashes (Popioły)*, 1965, directed by Andrzej Wajda and based on the eponymously titled book (1904) by Stefan Żeromski. The film does not reference Haiti directly, but it portrays the Polish Legions, a cadre eventually sent to Haiti, as particularly violent and excessive in their use of force. Kolasiński's use of Polaroid blurs the stills as if to question the official history, given the depictions of the soldiers are in contradistinction to how the Haitians portray the Legions. The archive includes representations of various individuals connected to the Haitian revolution, such as L'Ouverture, who rose through the ranks to lead the rebellion; the first president Jean-Jacques Dessalines; an unnamed Polish foot soldier; and Napoleon.

Miami and Little Haiti are invoked in artefacts incorporating several Catholic postcards depicting Ezili Danto and other deities found in botanicas for purchase. Kolasiński has included a black-and-white Polaroid of the Archbishop of Miami, who was known to be deeply involved in the contemporary Haitian community. Kolasiński also includes several Polaroid prints depicting the effect of gentrification on Little Haiti, the eventual decline of the botanicas, and the destruction of murals of Ezili Danto and Haitian heroes. He attended Vodou religious ceremonies at the Little Haiti Cultural Center. He includes several inkjet and Polaroid prints of images of the religious ceremonies taken with a digital camera. He was careful to only provide images in his archive of rituals, which were open to the public. He had been invited to private ceremonies, but he never took photographs there. It is instructive to consider the images of religious ceremonies alongside the Polaroid prints of images he took of film stills of experimental filmmaker Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1954), an unfinished black-and-white documentary film about dance and possession in Haitian Vodou.³⁴ The Polaroid prints produce abstracted images of the rituals. Deren became personally involved with the subjects she documented, allowing her access to traditions she otherwise might not have had. While this is what made her work so crucial since there had been nothing like it in the English language, it also was ethically dubious. Kolasiński's abstractions of the stills avoid any semblance of impropriety.

He incorporates Louisiana into the histories he is weaving together as part of *The Creole Archive*. For instance, two artefacts include inkjet prints of photographs of the slave quarters and various buildings of the Whitney Plantation Museum, located in Wallace, Louisiana – about a 45-minute drive from New Orleans.³⁵ This is the only museum in all of Louisiana focusing on the lives of enslaved people. During the early nineteenth century, amid the Haitian revolution, many whites and free people of color from Saint Domingue arrived with their slaves in Louisiana. The population of New Orleans doubled as a result. By incorporating this museum into the archive, Kolasiński acknowledges the forced movement of enslaved people to places outside of Haiti. These archival elements gesture toward the complex transregional histories unfolding from slavery.

From another angle, Kolasiński incorporates images of the Fon people of present-day Benin, who were enslaved, and others from West Africa and brought to Haiti (among other places). The Fon are known to have brought their Vodou practices with them. The Kreyòl

word “Vodou” is transculturated from the Fon Kingdom, where sacred energies were called “Vodun.”³⁶ The Fon Kingdom is evoked by a few of Kolański’s sculptures, specifically those bringing together the Polish and Haitian Madonnas. They are tied together in a fashion like that found in bocio objects of the Fon. As art historian Suzanne Preston Blier writes, these objects were not merely reflections of pain and anguish connected to state-issued slavery but served as a means of readdressing wrongs and dissipating attendant anxiety.³⁷ Kolański has applied a liquid rubber that transforms some of his sculptures into a non-reflective, charcoal-like gray black. In August 2021, Kolański received a grant to visit the Getty Research Institute, containing over 2,000 colonial postcards and primary materials. It allowed him to examine a cross-section of the visual culture of the colonial conquest in Africa. While there, Kolański came across several racist postcards depicting prepubescent African girls. While not surprising, it gave him pause, as he said in an interview I had with the artist.³⁸ On the one hand, they seem necessary to be part of the archive to avoid erasing history; on the other, depicting them would reinscribe the perverse sexual objectification. In the end, he has provisionally decided against the display of these postcards.

Archive as Methodology and as Archipelagic Thinking

I have written elsewhere about the work of other artists, such as Tina Takemoto and Jannus Samma, who explore absences in archives as a methodology.³⁹ For both these artists, the works are about their yearnings for a connection to historical figures, whose archives are incomplete or problematic. They implicitly demand we move beyond the disembodied conceptualization of the archive as presumptively “impossible,” as theorized by Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* (1995).⁴⁰ There is a similar yearning and activist impulse in Kolański’s artwork in his growing collection of archival artefacts. The key difference, of course, is that his authorship does not exactly mirror the content of his artwork. I would argue, though, that his investigation of the Madonna is an organic non-linear – indeed creolizing – unfurling of his exploration of his transnational genealogy that has resulted in the materialization of Polish identity as connected to North America (the United States and the Caribbean) and parts of Africa. Of course, these transregional entanglements are ones the contemporary Polish government might want to pretend do not exist. In contradistinction, Glissant, in his discussion of creolization, applies what he refers to as “archipelagic thinking” to the world, which is “becoming an archipelago.”⁴¹ Glissant believed creolization and the archipelago went hand in hand. The archipelago, a chain or series of islands scattered in a body of water with no clear center, of interest to him was the idea that each island of the Caribbean maintains its autonomy while still being a part of the whole. Kolasinski enacts archipelagic thinking as artistic praxis where the multiplicity of artefacts, each distinct and whole, in his *Creole Archive* simultaneously coheres into a transregional singularity.

As the archive continues to grow, Kolański has plans for it to become the source of several exhibitions. I will share one of the artist’s initial experiments in February 2020 to conclude. He projected the colorful Miami murals of Ezili onto various buildings of the manor estate that are part of the Center for Polish Sculpture, part of the park and palace complex in the small village of Orońsko. The projections point to a double absence: the invisibility of queer Ezili in Poland and the destruction of the mural in Little Haiti in Miami – a casualty of gentrification. And yet, the buildings glow with such presence and intensity in the pitch-dark winter evening of this rural area of Poland that they function more as poetic gestures with profound implications for what constitutes Polish identity.

Notes

- 1 Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); John P. Bowles, "Forum: Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (December 2001): 38–43; Adrian Margaret Smith Piper, "Whiteless," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (December 2001): 62–65; Ellen Fernandez-Sacco, "Check Your Baggage: Resisting Whiteness in Art History," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (December 2001): 58–61; Olu Oguibe, "Whiteness and 'The Canon,'" *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (December 2001): 44–47; and Maurice Berger, "Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee's Yuppie Project," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (December 2001): 54–57.
- 2 James Denison organized a panel "U.S. Art and Critical Whiteness Studies: Looking Back, Looking Forward" for the 2023 College Art Association's (CAA) annual conference that begins to address this issue.
- 3 Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.
- 4 Non-South Asian artists such as Cy Twombly, Mario Pfeiffer, Stephan Dean, and others I envelop into my writing of a transnational South Asian art histories: *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).
- 5 Harvey Gavin, "'We Will Decide Who Enters Our Countries!' Hungary and Poland REJECT EU Refugee Quotas," *Express.Co.Uk*, 15 May 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/960125/eu-news-hungary-poland-oppose-european-union-refugee-quota-Viktor-Orban-Morawiecki>.
- 6 See Shaun Walker, "'A Whole Generation Has Gone': Ukrainians Seek Better Life in Poland," *The Guardian*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/18/whole-generation-has-gone-ukrainian-seek-better-life-poland-elect-president>.
- 7 "People of Colour Fleeing Ukraine Attacked by Polish Nationalists," *The Guardian*, 2 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/02/people-of-colour-fleeing-ukraine-attacked-by-polish-nationalists>.
- 8 See R. Van Den Boogaerde Pierre, *The Madagascar Project* (Houston, TX: Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Agency (SBPRA), 2013).
- 9 Harlan Levey and Radek Szlaga, "Harlan Levey in Conversation with Radek Szlaga," in *Radek Szlaga: All the Brutes*, edited by Magdalena Komornicka (Warsaw, Poland: Fontarte, 2015), 32–33.
- 10 Szlaga's painting *Woman* (2015), which was not in the exhibition, is a profile image of a woman who could be Baartmann.
- 11 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, Evergreen Black Cat Book (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 109.
- 12 Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Radek Szlaga at Leto Gallery, Poland," *Art in America* 104, no. 2 (February 2017): 108. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/radek-szlaga/>.
- 13 Levey and Szlaga, 36.
- 14 Tomasz Basiuk, "Five Contemporary Polish Artists Engaging with Race." Art and Race in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, special issue of *Art Margins* Online, January 20, 2021, <https://artmargins.com/five-contemporary-polish-artists-engaging-with-race/>.
- 15 <https://www.miamiandbeaches.com/neighborhoods/little-haiti>
- 16 Interview with Jacek J. Kolasieński, date June 2021. Ezili is also referred to as Erzulie and Erzuli. Ezili, though, is the most common spelling in Kreyòl.
- 17 Details of history in this and the next paragraph culled from the following sources: No author, "The Black Madonna of Czestochowa: Poland's Most Revered Icon," *Polish American Journal*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.polanjournal.com/Library/APHistory/blackmadonna/blackmadonna.html>; Drusilla Menaker, "Poland's Black Madonna," *New York Times*, July 22, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/22/travel/poland-s-black-madonna.html>
- 18 Details culled from the excellent summary of Poles' presence in Haiti by Pawel Argan, "Polish Patriots Once Fought Alongside Rebellling Slaves. Where is that Solidarity Today?" *Newsweek*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/poland-nationalism-new-york-haiti-slave-rebellion-revolution-1382388>
- 19 As quoted in Pawel Argan, "Polish Patriots Once Fought Alongside Rebellling Slaves. Where is that Solidarity Today?" *Newsweek*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/poland-nationalism-new-york-haiti-slave-rebellion-revolution-1382388>

Reflecting on Whiteness in Recent Contemporary Artwork

- 20 Lwa comes from Yoruba meaning “spirit master.” Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Ezili’s Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 16.
- 21 Tinsley, 4.
- 22 Tinsley, 72.
- 23 Tinsley, 4.
- 24 Tinsley, 9.
- 25 Tinsley, 10.
- 26 Tinsley, 10–11.
- 27 Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du Duvers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 23.
- 28 Hall, 31.
- 29 I consider this more explicitly in my book *Multiple and One: Writing Queer Global Art histories* (forthcoming from Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- 30 Tinsley, 4.
- 31 See “For Opacity” in Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189–195.
- 32 Glissant, 191.
- 33 As quoted in David W. Dunlap, “Relics of the Domino Sugar Refinery, Frozen in Time and Syrup,” *New York Times*, October 23, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/24/nyregion/sticky-relics-of-the-domino-sugar-refinery.html>. *The Illustrated American* magazine, founded in 1890 and ran approximately for a decade, was a weekly periodical. In 1892, the circulation was at its peak of 40,000.
- 34 Though the film was not completed she did publish a book *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (1953).
- 35 <https://www.whitneyplantation.org/history/slavery-in-louisiana/>
- 36 Tinsley, 9.
- 37 Suzanne Preston Blier, “Vodun Art, Social History and the Slave Trade,” in *Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 1998), 323–328.
- 38 Interview with Kolasinski, June 2021.
- 39 Alpesh Kantilal Patel, “Artistic Responses to Gaps in LGBTQI Archives: From World War II Asian America to Soviet Estonia,” in *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, coedited by Beáta Hock and Anu Allas, 37–60 (London: Routledge, June 2018).
- 40 See also Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) and Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 41 Édouard Glissant. *Traité Du Toute-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 193–194. See also my article, “Queer Chinese feminist Archipelago: Shanghai, San Francisco, and Miami,” *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of transContinental Feminism*. 11:1 (December 2021): 194–212.

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