

UrbanGlass

Transparency and Opacity

Jacek J. Kolasiński and Édouard Duval-Carrié

Essay and Curation by Alpesh Kantilal Patel

On View April 12 - June 16, 2023

Historian Hayden White notes that the key difference between fiction and history is that historians insist they present the truth.¹ The works in this exhibition by two Miami, Florida-based artists, Jacek J. Kolasiński and Édouard Duval-Carrié, straddle the fine line between fiction and history and transparency and opacity as they articulate Caribbean history as pluriversal and multiple. Both Kolasiński's ongoing *Creole Archive* project (2015-present) and Duval-Carrié's plexiglass and mixed media works (often backlit) meditate on transcontinental links between North America (US and Caribbean) and Africa. Kolasiński's work also focuses on links between these continents and Europe, specifically Poland, where he was born and lived until age twenty-one.

Duval-Carrié, born in Haiti, and Kolasiński make visible often unknown or lesser-known stories connected to the Caribbean, but often by demanding we not conflate visibility with disembodied ocularity or disinterested knowledge. They do so through the often seductive and bold usage of bright colors and playing with the physics of how glass and light interact to (re)constitute knowledge as embodied, partial, and trans*. I invoke "trans" as it unsettles concepts—such as nation, region, and gender—to which it is attached and makes them metaphorically "tremble" as unknown. Per Jack Halberstam, I mobilize the asterisk mark to emphasize the capaciousness of these categories rather than thinking of them as rigid and inflexible.²

Édouard Duval-Carrié's *Mémoires Encastrées*: Effulgent and Kaleidoscopic Knowledge

Light filters through the back of Édouard Duval-Carrié's *Mémoires Encastrées* (*Memory Windows*), 2017, mixed media works embedded in resin, that are installed along one wall of the gallery. Each work comprises one large central octagonal piece of plexi surrounded by three to four-sided parallelogram-shaped ones. They intentionally reference his previous work and feature new imagery and iconography drawn from Florida history, plantation life, the Haitian Vodou pantheon, and well-known illustrations of slavery. The works reveal the interplay and slippage between memory and history. For instance, *Memory Window #4* foregrounds portraits of enslaved, or formerly enslaved, laborers, and sharecroppers from northern Florida and southern Georgia enshrined in a watery, purple haze. The central photographs show men and women looking head-on at the viewer, their gazes unrelenting and their agency as sitters evident. While the colorful back-lit works beckon the viewer, they only offer fragments of information. Indeed, the goal here is less to stitch together the individual pieces into a narrative story than to create a powerfully affective experience that illustrates that light rarely illuminates or can delude one into thinking there is a whole truth.

For the Colored Girls is a dazzling new work Duval-Carrié made especially for this exhibition and came from conversations about Ezili with Kolasiński and me. This work is a homage to Ezili Freda, known for her luxury, beauty, flirtatiousness, flamboyance, and light skin color, and often associated with masisi, a term describing a spectrum of transfemininity. Here, Duval-Carrié focuses on how Freda recalls creole mulatto prostitutes of Saint-Domingue, the object of envy of many white colonial women and

1. Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988): 1193–99.

2. Jack Halberstam, *Trans* : A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Berkeley, CA : University of California Press, 2017).

this argument, it is not just light, but how it, in tandem with glass (lenses), has consolidated art historical knowledge so that it occludes the transnational circulation of ideas. Indeed, the slide projector has been one of art history's most ubiquitous pedagogical tools. This practice began with Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945), who showed pairs of black and white dispositives via the magic lantern, the forerunner of the modern slide projector. Through this method, he differentiated German and Italian formal styles. While PowerPoint has largely replaced slide projectors in the classroom, the compare/contrast mode often remains and tends to reinforce boundaries rather than their porousness.

Kolasiński's video projection in the back of the gallery riffs off the classical approach to art historical pedagogy to show successive pairs of his aforementioned artifacts (some of which are framed and installed on the wall) that scramble any sense of national coherency: signifiers connected to Africa, North America, and Europe are intermingled. In the slide show, he shows artifacts that gesture toward the complex transregional histories unfolding from slavery. During the early 19th century, amid the Haitian revolution, many whites, and free people of color from Saint Domingue arrived with their slaves in Louisiana. Also, Kolasiński includes artifacts with images of the Fon people, linked to the Dahomey Kingdom, of present-day Benin, who were enslaved 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." Finally, Kolasiński incorporates an image of a recent protest in Poland in which the LGBTQ community has appropriated the Black Madonna. It is not clear if the protestors are aware of the queerness attached to Ezili, a creolized version of the Black Madonna, but it seems as if we have come full circle. Displayed next to this projection are Edouard Duval-Carrié's renderings of trees with visible roots through a drypoint technique on blue plexi—they are simple but profound metaphors that rootedness is born through chaotic relations.

Dr. Jacek J. Kolasiński is an associate professor of art and the founding director of the Ratcliffe Incubator of Art + Design at Florida International University (FIU). He has a PhD in Fine Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and an MFA in Visual Arts from FIU. He lives in Miami, Florida, and grew up in Kraków, Poland, where he studied history and philosophy at Jagiellonian University. His work has been supported by grants from the Getty Library and Oolite Arts, among others, and exhibited internationally. He is an honorary member of the Art Academy of Latvia.

Edouard Duval-Carrié was born in Port-au-Prince. His family emigrated to Puerto Rico while he was a child during the François Duvalier regime. Duval-Carrié studied at the Université de Montréal and McGill University in Canada before graduating with a Bachelor of Arts from Loyola College, Montréal, in 1978. He later attended the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France, from 1988 to 1989. He resided in France for many years but now lives among Miami's substantial Haitian immigrant population.

This exhibition has been made possible by the support of the UrbanGlass team, the Green Family Foundation, and The Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance.

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