Leah Gordon

KANAVAL

Leah Gordon: *KANAVAL*

In her exhibition *KANAVAL*, London-based artist, curator, filmmaker and writer Leah Gordon presents a series of black-and-white photographs from her long-term project of the same name, alongside her award-nominated feature-length documentary *Kanaval: A People's History of Haiti in Six Chapters.*

When she first visited Haiti in the early 90s, the country's history of revolution came to crystallise many burgeoning themes in Gordon's early work engaging with British folk traditions, punk folk and Northern Working-class culture. Featuring revellers in diverse costumes, melding spiritual and political satire with masquerade and ritual in the town's annual carnival, *Kanaval* was made over 25 years in Haiti's southern commune of Jacmel and has culminated in an extraordinary repository of images and stories.

Each year, Jacmel holds pre-Lenten Mardi Gras festivities where Haitian history is replayed through the masks, costumes, and street theatre of the carnival troupes. Fusing Vodou and ancestral memory with political satire and personal revelation, the Jacmellien masquerades replay the country's roots from pre-Colonialism, via the revolution, to the modern day. From the lives of the indigenous Taino Indians to the slaves' revolt of 1791, from the dictatorships of Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier in the 1960s to US interference by the CIA and more recent state corruption, Haiti's history is brought to life on Jacmel's streets and in Gordon's photographs.

Gordon's method has been referred to as 'performed ethnography', a term that respects her more reciprocal way of working; always engaging with the sitter through the shared language of Krèyol and collecting oral histories, the process is durational due to the use of a mechanical 60-year-old analogue camera, with subjects paid for their time. Representing an exchange as well as an encounter, the photographs allow the participants some agency over their pose and re-presentation, leaving space for history and mythology to seep through the (often overpowering) spectacle of the image.

In the artist's words, "this is people taking history into their own hands and moulding it into whatever they decide. So, within this historical retelling we find mask after mask, but rather than concealing, they are revealing, story after story, through disguise and roadside pantomime."

KANAVAL runs January 12 – February 18, 2023
Ed Cross, 19 Garrett Street, London

Leah Gordon's *KANAVAL* photographs are produced as digital photographic prints from scans of black and white medium format negatives as editions of 5 plus 2 AP.

Revelling the Past, Carnivalizing History

On Leah Gordon's 'KANAVAL: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF HAITI IN SIX CHAPTERS'

The weather felt overcast and hazy in the bay of Jacmel during Carnival in 2022, sometimes February in the Antilles is like that. Time can sift the light of Shrovetide but the sun doesn't shift sides for carnival. Rather it sears and scorches the skin of the past and unseals the memory of its revellers. Revelling the past is what Jacmellians do during 'Mardi Gras' as they prefer to call the annual festival, the French expression for Fat Tuesday. It is their way of fighting against the 'silencing [of] the past' as those who have wronged Haiti and the world have always done.[1]

Shedding the French colonial referent altogether, Trinidadians, who likewise celebrate a pre-Lenten Carnival of French creole tradition, call Carnival mas, short for masquerade, as do Guadeloupeans and Martinicans to a lesser extent. But *Kanaval*, the Haitian creole for carnival, and Mas in the Caribbean in general, is more than masquerading and merrymaking as per the European fashion, and more consanguineous to masking in the African tradition – a mode of spiritual communication, ancestral dramas and mythical fabulation – and this is particularly poignant in Jacmel.

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It is doubtful that Jacmel ever needed electrification to be the City of Lights, as it became preserved in posterity after a very brief attempt at emulating Paris in the late nineteenth century. The experiment ended up as just another post-independence mirage and micro-event in a long string of deceitful promises.[2] Maybe it is this distrust of artificial lights which prompted director Leah Gordon to recount this event in film form, and her team, led by director of photography Joel Honeywell, to prime their cameras with bespoke vintage lenses for shots oscillating between numinous pastel colours and anamorphic formatted black-and-whites interspaced with grainy archival footage. Such a spectral assemblage of light, and precise delivery of facts, enhanced by the soulful sounds of

Sons of Kemet and joyful fanfare accents of the vaksins,[3] makes of the entire feature-length documentary, ‘KANAVAL: A PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF HAITI IN SIX CHAPTERS’, an experiment in mnesic mélanges and artefactual textures of the past breathed into the present tense of memory, whilst history is thrust into a conditional mode of storytelling in which the sun is a crepuscular omen.

A

In December 2022, the American Secretary of Energy announced that a team of national scientists in a California laboratory had realised the long-chased dream of “reproducing the power of the sun” and “replicating conditions only found in the stars” through fusion ignition. Naturalist romanticism aside, in mechanist terms it meant “creating more energy from fusion reaction than the energy used to start the process.”[4] This scientific event calls for pause, for the inversion of the equation of production – usually more, rather than less energy is needed to produce a new entity – but also because of the perpetuating hubris of man for the domination of nature it reveals.

While it had become clear by the time European and American abolitionists put forth their impassioned pleas for emancipation that slave labour was uneconomical for it required far more expenditure of energy than uncoerced labour, what the Saint-Domingue enslaved accomplished in 1791 amounted to more than the sum

of the individual strength of its foot soldiers and army generals: the foundation of a new nation, if one compromised from the start by colonial capital forces and Western ideology.
If in this "general economy" to quote from George Bataille, carnival, construed as "excess energy translated into the effervescence of life" is "the accursed share" of productivism and extractivist economic models, then 'KANAVAL' shows how Jacmellians can turn the curse around with carnival, from the exhaustion of excess wealth of which they were never the prime beneficiaries to the circulation of cosmic energy on earth of which they are the unique beholders.[5] Gordon's take on long history, revealed in the documentary's subtitle, 'A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF HAITI IN SIX CHAPTERS', is an admirable demonstration of how Haiti continues to offer a counter-narrative to the West's teleology of progress – and how its *kanaval* is the primary vehicle to do so.

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Spanish genocide; French enslavement; Haitian revolution; emancipation and independence; first steps into statehood; French ransom and American ransack form the "underside costs" (Sylvia Wynter) of the modern world history that Gordon recounts in 'KANAVAL: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF HAITI IN SIX CHAPTERS'. Epic in scope, KANAVAL inverts the tropes of modern history premised upon an outlook that is no longer considered ruefully myopic or even blisteringly blind, but consciously criminal. Her KANAVAL is more than the history of Haiti by the people of Haiti through carnival masking, role-playing and mythmaking in the city of Jacmel; it is a history of the modern world as born in and of Haiti and of *kanaval* as its accursed share.

HISTORY

> If we allow the Caribbean insurgents their due, Western civilization itself dissolves into a history of the porous and unbounded space in which the insurgent acted.
> – Susan Buck-Morss,
> *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* [6]

The porous and unbounded space of which Susan Buck-Morss writes in *Universal History* (2009), her follow-up essay to the landmark *Hegel and Haiti* (2000), can be reinterpreted as the carnivalscape in and

around Jacmel. Adescar Sanil, Madame Raymonde Bellevue, Georges Marshall, Ronald Bellevue, Lauture Joseph Joissaint, both Frantzo Jeans, Dieuli Laurent, André Eugène and all Jacmellian carnival mask-makers and maskers interviewed by Gordon and given voice on and off camera, are insurgent historians. The histories they tell are not schoolbook stories. “Listen, Haiti wasn’t really discovered by Christopher Columbus” says papier-mâché mask artist Georges Marshall. It’s closer to investigative journalism crossed with speculative magic-realism. “75% of the wealth of the French colonists was extracted on the back of Haitians” reports Adescar Sanil from the *Lanse Kòd* troupe (rope throwers). Yet, they know it better than the New York Times.[7] Their knowledge is embodied. It is lived in the year-long preparation towards and the yearly (re-)enactment at carnival-time.

B

With each masquerade portrayed by a carnival troupe a slice of Haiti’s history is reembodied; its ‘historical character’ – rather than specific historical characters, save for a few villains – enacted. None of the heroes whose words form the preamble to each chapter – neither Boukman, the voodoo priest who led the 1791 gathering at *Bwa Kayman*, nor Toussaint, who led the slave revolt until 1802, or Dessalines, who continued it to independence – are portrayed in Jacmel’s carnival. Is it that these heroes are so sanctified as to eschew contemporary representation? Their shoes too big to

fill even with make-believe carnival tricks? Or is it that for all the strength of character ascribed to their unique personalities, carnival favours the telling of a collective story belonging to all? No carnival parade per se is filmed by Gordon's team – the kind that happens on a circuit predetermined by a tourist board for paying ticketholders and invited dignitaries who find seating on hastily built bleachers that procure a modicum of comfort and sense of superiority. Rather, small skirmishes of maskers are captured as they are seen fleetingly running off and surging into the waves of history for a day.

And surge they do! The *Lanse Kòd* rush down a dirt road outside what Trinidadians would call their camp[8], bedaubed in a soot-like, night-black oily substance.[9] In the Haitian telling, the colour black recalls the mantle of night worn by insurgent slaves on their way to *Bwa Kayman*.[10] It is the colour of the maroon. In "Chapter Two: The Black Revolution", the story of the *Bwa Kayman* runaways is told as the foundation for the subsequent episodes of Haiti's history: Toussaint Louverture's[11] slave insurgency turned revolution and Jean-Jacques Dessalines'[12] nation-building project cut short. As the *Lanse Kòd* taunt the film's cameramen in a great display of diasporic reckoning – the film's DP and his team are of African descent – so Dessalines' and Rochambeau's[13] men confront each other in archival film excerpts spliced between the freshly-shot contemporary scenes in a studied example of filmic intertextuality. In "Chapter 5: The Price of Freedom," the *Pay Bannann*[14] rush past the camera. Fewer in number, the taunt here seems to be with the children that chase them. But one imagines the cameramen kneeling on the ground, close and intimate, aiming for the legs to amplify the forward motion of the masqueraders.

CARNIVAL

> I wondered if we could not speak, concerning Haiti, of a *carnivalization of history*. It began very early, from the colonial era, as a tendency to put masks on realities. It started with geography: Haiti, the native name was changed to Española, Hispaniola; then it was baptised Santo Domingo. It was the same with Guadeloupe and Martinique. After the countries, the people themselves were disguised. It was decided that the aborigines of the islands, the Arawaks, the Karibs, the Siboneys, the Taïnos were all generically Indians. Christopher Columbus was mistaken; he was looking for India. The members of the

> different ethnic groups of Africa were then disguised as blacks and Negroes of the fabulous colonial Mardi Gras! [...] And today, the circle is complete with the election of a character from Carnival to the presidency of Haiti [...] We are in the midst of democratic Mardi Gras!.
> – René Depestre,
> *Dans les décombres du carnaval* [15]

Speaking as singer Michel Martelly had just been named President of Haiti in what many international observers perceived as an American-contrived farce[16], exiled Jacmel-born writer René Depestre likewise commented on Sweet Micky's coup as a "democratic Mardi Gras." But his use of the carnival metaphor to assess Haiti's political present ran deep in its historical past. To him, carnival began with Christopher Columbus' Indies mirage and with the colonisers' later exotic fantasies of "Indians" and "Negroes". Since Columbus, the course of history was turned upside down and reality ran topsy turvy in the Americas in a "fabulous colonial Mardi Gras." Although English subtitles for 'KANAVAL' systematically translate Mardi Gras as carnival, *kanaval* mask-makers and masqueraders use the word Mardi Gras in *Krèyol*, echoing the analysis of their iconic Jacmel born writer.

C

At a time when Haiti's history is more *danse macabre* than Mardi Gras with the capital Port-au-Prince prey to senseless gang violence,

the sight of the *Ti Militè* faction, a group of young bandits dressed in black, cradling rifles with fixated gazes, is chilling. Unlike other groups in KANAVAL, they don't roam the streets or run amok. Shot in a still frame, unmoving and unmoved, they stand like sentinels of a vigilante history in reaction to one foreign interference after another, one more martyr at a time. As the commentary running through this section of the film informs its audience, Charlemagne Péralte[17] and the Cacos Rebels rose to meet the US military invasion in the first quarter of the twentieth century – that is, a little over a century ago.

For each hero, Haiti's history has a villain, all good fodder for Jacmel's Mardi Gras. Charles Oscar Étienne, a contemporary of Péralte, was Port-au-Prince's Police Chief remembered for massacring over one-hundred-fifty political prisoners at the Port-au-Prince penitentiary in 1915. Forty years later he was revived as a Mardi Gras character during the era of Duvalier *père*, Papa Doc. In an unfolding that is repeated throughout the film – from storytelling by the Mardi Gras group leader or participants, to mask-making and masking – Lauture Joseph, son of the creator of the *Chaloska* mask, brings out the story of its creation in a conversation with his uncle, *oncle* Rigueur. Is it because Étienne was likely disfigured when his body was dragged through the streets of Port-au-Prince after being promptly killed in reprisal, that his mask is so hideously grotesque? Or was the macabre obscenity of his act only materialisable as a monstrous figure? Seemingly borrowing from the sinister register of minstrels and Tonton Macoutes[18] , archival footage of which is spliced throughout the sequence, *Chaloska*'s black face is enhanced with bloody-red lips out of which protrude cow teeth to render a misshapen and ominous smile, ready to terrorise, this time for fun.

"Sometimes I think without Carnival people would go mad" says André Eugène. Though it is easy enough to imagine – more so for having participated in Caribbean carnivals – the psychological transference of trauma into the exultation of make-believe, (like *Ti Militè* and *Chaloska*, other groups bring to life the collective experience of an uninterrupted history of systemic colonial violence), such cathartic masquerades cannot help but strike a sombre note. Such is the case for Yahweh in Chapter One and *Zonbi* in Chapter Three. If Yahweh is portrayed as a "black beast" in the words of Lauture Joseph – with bull's horns on the head and animal skin on the back to protect from the blows inflicted by fellow masqueraders, enacting both the colonial brutes and the brutalised enslaved,

Zonbi is likewise entirely covered but with a white sheet, forming an army of ghosts, of undead souls, zombies indeed.

D

Felt through the stigma of slavery and colonisation in its historic and contemporary forms with the figures of Yahweh and *Zonbi*, rather than the self-destructive and alienating violence of *Chaloska*, the carnivalization of life seems necessary, salutary even, calling for a more nuanced and perhaps more benevolent judgement than Depestre's.

HAITI

> I see no future only the past. Haiti is my sole speculative.
> – Leah Gordon

Sedate is the eye of this movie's storm, slow its motion, still its narrative. The setting is a forest, the sound the cha-cha's dancing seeds and a man's chant. In straw hat with red lace on top and a red, long-sleeved shirt, he points his cha-cha, likewise red, onto a monumental iron relic, then to himself – to his torso, to his head. The camera has swung towards the iron relic and strives to focus on a medallion cast midway onto it. It's a fleeting motion but a central moment in the film. The metallic ruin is a remnant of a beam engine and the forest the former Hannibal Price Sugar Plantation

overgrown by vegetation. The medallion reads “J.S. Lindsay & Co Haigh / Haigh Iron Works / Near Liverpool, 1818.” The medallion, stamped by James, son of Alexander, former Governor of Jamaica at the time of the Second Maroon War (1795-96), is a testament to the circulation of capital that converted Caribbean products into British wealth and back again; to the industrial revolution of which this iron steam engine was one of the vehicles, in turn powering mechanised labour on a post-independence Haitian sugar plantation.

E

“Chapter Three: The Birth of a Black Nation,” of which this scene is an excerpt, brings Gordon’s lifelong oeuvre and life story into focus. British, Gordon was born a year short of the 1960s in Ellesmere Port, a port city south of Liverpool where the River Mersey is joined by the Ellesmere and Manchester Ship Canals. Growing up with the knowledge of the failure of the Manchester Ship Canal, an ambitious Industrial Revolution project, and located exactly half-way between England’s two centres of capital based on the Slave Trade (Liverpool) and the Industrial Revolution (Manchester), may have set Gordon’s mind on a critical course early on with a later-acquired inquisitive political imaginary. While many are aware of Gordon as the co-instigator, with artist and partner André Eugène, of the artist collaborative Atis Rezistans, and of the Ghetto Biennial which culminated with the Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennial project at

documenta 15 in Kassel, it is her lesser-known artistically-explored personal investment in, and intimate relationship to, Haiti which is more pertinent to understanding KANAVAL's aforementioned historical character.

If Gordon was a historian, her school would be that of present-day global intersectional historians who weave together the all-engulfing streams of great historical events with the minute leftovers of material culture and the oft-obfuscating personal motives that engender both. Recall the attention paid to the Liverpool-made beam engine in the ruins of a former Caribbean sugar plantation – a direct (if passing) reference to the artist's own historical and personal foundation in the broader Cheshire/Lancashire region, now renamed Merseyside. In her project *Wayòm Nan Mond sa-a* (The Kingdom of this World, 2019), a call from the re-enslaved builders of Roi Christophe's Citadelle (1820) in Morne du Bonnet-de-l'Évêque is echoed with a response from Blaenavon's miners, likewise chained to infernal rhythms driven by profit, establishing a contradistinctive relationship between the enslaved of Caribbean sugar plantations or post-independence despotic regimes, and the British working class still-birthed by the Industrial Revolution and the after effects of the Enclosure Acts (Haigh Ironworks from KANAVAL is a nineteenth century contemporary to Blaenavon Ironworks in *Wayòm Nan Mond Sa-a*.)

F

In her Caste Portraits, reprising the racist typology of Martinican-born Saint-Domingue administrator Moreau de Saint-Méry, Gordon placed her partner André Eugène and herself at opposite ends of the spectrum – he "Black", she "White", with seven other shades in between. But no white person can be seen in Gordon's *kanaval* photographs or the film, KANAVAL. There must have been a few beside Gordon, if not on the shoot, then certainly on the streets – the occasional tourist, or journalist. While Gordon's presence as an artist is inscribed cinematographically in the film's sequential structure, historical outlook, and aesthetic choices, building on decades of experience and practice with photographing the Jacmel Carnival,[19] her historical consciousness as a person of white European ancestry resides in that vanishing shot of the Liverpool-made beam engine, in the acknowledgement of the wretchedness of it all.

F

How then can Haiti be Gordon's sole speculative? She whom I have previously referred to as an honorary Haitian artist[20] will no doubt further the task of freeing Haiti's speculative future enshrined in its foundational texts, chief among which Jean-Jacques Dessalines' Haitian Declaration of Independence of 1 January 1804, whose sole remaining copy is vaulted in Britain's National Archives in Kew, London, and restoring Toussaint's body itself to Haiti, which is likewise kept captive in the Fort de Joux where he succumbed to a fateful end, leaving Haiti's future unfulfilled. *Kanaval*'s insurgents, led by Gordon, will storm these Bastilles.

Claire Tancons

Claire Tancons is a curator, writer, and researcher who has been an active participant in the practice and discourse of globalization in the arts as a curator of several international biennials of contemporary art from Gwangju Biennale 08 (2008) to Sharjah Biennial 14 (2019) at the same time as a proponent of a situated curatorial practice from an African diasporic (Caribbean) historical consciousness with the Emily Hall Tremaine exhibition award-winning project *En Mas': Carnival and Contemporary Art of the Caribbean* (2014), Creative Capital / Andy Warhol Foundation book grant recipient *Roadworks: Processional Performance in the New Millennium* and her current Ford Foundation-supported research and exhibition project around notions of artistic heteronomy in the French Creole Americas and Amazonia from her new Paris base.

IMAGE CAPTIONS

A Shot of the Bay of Jacmel.
Still extract from KANAVAL film DOP Joel Honeywell
B Lanse Kod (Ropethrowers), Jacmel mardigras troupe, Jacmel, Haiti.
Still extract from KANAVAL film DOP Joel Honeywell
C Ti Milite (Little Military), Mardigras troupe, Jacmel, Haiti.
Still extract from KANAVAL film DOP Joel Honeywell
D Zonbi performance, Jacmel mardigras troupe, Jacmel, Haiti.
Still extract from KANAVAL film DOP Joel Honeywell
E Beam engine manufactured near Liverpool on former Price plantation, Jacmel.
Still extract from CASTE | CAST film DOP/Dir. Leah Gordon
F Vagabondaj Mawon: Sitadel (2019) from Kingdom of this World.
Photograph by Leah Gordon

1 Revelling the past is a counter-take on and a response to Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1995 as much as it is an echo of one of KANAVAL's introductory announcements: "to denounce what hurts us, we do it through Carnival."
2 A fire brought Jacmel's late nineteenth century "electrification" experiment to a halt after just eight months in circumstances that are still debated by historians. See Myrtha Gilbert: " Haiti Mirage Électrique. Le cas de Jacmel au 19ème siècle " posted on AlterPresse on 8 May 2021. https://www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article26999
3 Single-note trumpets made from a variety of materials, from bamboo and metal to plastic drain piping, used in Haitian Rara music.
4 See: Kenneth Chang with Henry Fountain and Zach Montague, "Scientists Achieve Nuclear Fusion Breakthrough With Blast of 192 Lasers," New York Times online, December 13, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/13/science/nuclear-fusion-energy-breakthrough.html
5 Georges Bataille, The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy, Volume One, Consumption (New York: Zone Books), 1988, p.10. See also Bataille's reflection on slavery as the absence of light, pp56-57
6 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), p. 201
7 In 2022, the New York Times ran five articles on Haiti in English, Kreyol and French focusing on the debt and loan imposed by France and later enforced by the United States, as reparation for the economic loss incurred by the planters following emancipation from slavery and independence from the French –and, ultimately from the French state itself.
8 A *lakou* in Haitian creole.
9 Many versions of this mask exist throughout the Caribbean. To speak of Carnivals of French Creole tradition alone, the greasy black substance of the Haitian *Lanse Kòd* calls to mind the Trinidad Carnival *Jab Molasses* (Molasses Devil) of the Trinidad Carnival or the *Mas a goudwon* (Bitume Mask) or *Neg Gwo Siwo* (literally "Big Syrup" or Molasses Negro) of the Guadeloupean Carnival. In the French Antillean version, it is the color of the molasses into which slaves would fall on the plantation, one of the numerous work accidents that could take place. The whip is reminiscent of the *mas a fwet* (whip mask) which likewise opens the procession but is not necessarily associated with Black.
10 *Bwa Kayman* (Bois Caïman – Alligator Woods) was a clearing in a swampy forest in Northern Haiti and the site of the first major meeting of enslaved blacks on August 23rd 1791, during which the first major slave insurrection of the Haitian Revolution was planned.
11 François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture was a Haitian general and the most prominent leader of the Haitian Revolution. On June 7th, 1802, he was captured and deported to France where he died on April 7th 1803, imprisoned in the Fort de Joux, La Cluse-et-Mijoux.
12 Jean-Jacques Dessalines was the leader of the Haitian Revolution after Louverture, and the first ruler of an independent Haiti under the 1805 constitution. Under Dessalines, Haiti became the first country in the Americas to permanently abolish slavery.
13 Dessalines decisively defeated the French, led by General Rochambeau, at the battle of Vertières on 18th November 1803 which brought about Haitian independence.
14 The Martinican *Marian la po fig.*
15 René Depestre, "Dans les décombres du Carnaval", interview by Rémi Guittet in *Cultures et Conflits*, No. 84, Gouverner les frontières (Winter 2011), L'Harmattan, pp. 134-5. The quote, and the below extract, are my translations from the French. Emphasis is in the French original. This extract is enlightening about Depestre's view of the European roots of Haiti's carnivalesque spirit: "Guittet: The Carnival began with the expedition of Christopher Columbus? Depestre: That's it and it's no coincidence: carnival culture was the main dominant and popular culture in the Middle Ages. It has played a big role in the European imagination of all countries. Before Columbus embarked on his ocean adventure on the ships of colonisation. Thus our countries have inherited this carnivalesque spirit." https://www.jstor.org/stable/23703756
16 New York Times article on the Clinton's culpability in Haiti. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/15/us/politics/hillary-clinton-haiti.html
17 Charlemagne Masséna Péralte was a Haitian nationalist leader who opposed the United States' occupation of Haiti in 1915. He was eventually captured and killed in an ambush in 1919.
18 Papa Doc Duvalier's notorious private paramilitary force used to control the nation through various crimes considered to be violations of human rights.
19 Gordon's photography from 1995 to 2021 was recently edited in the book *Kanaval* (Here Press, 2021)
20 Claire Tancons, "Shaping *The Kingdom of this World* in the Mother of all Lands: Visual Sovereignty in Haïti under Epochal Ungovernance" in *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*, 2021. https://www.kotwexhibition.com/essay-claire-tancons

Jwif Eran

There's this vagabond, an old cobbler with nowhere to go, who ends up in Brussels in a bar where the bourgeoisie drink. He's very tall, almost a giant, wearing an apron – the mark of a worker. He's got this bushy white hair and a big beard. None of the other drinkers have ever seen such a long beard. They don't know he's Jewish, but they can see he's a foreigner. They greet him, ask him to join them. He agrees to have a drink with them, but no more than one. He tells them, 'I have a terrible fate. I never cease to wander.' They ask him his age. He replies that he is 1,800 years old. He tells them that he has travelled all over the world. Everywhere he goes, he gets caught up in the middle of huge battles, and he's always the only survivor. And throughout all of this he only ever has five cents in his pocket. They ask him his name and he replies, 'Isaac La Cudem, born in Jerusalem.' He was twelve years old when Jesus was born, and he was forty-five when Jesus died. When Jesus was heading up to Calvary, tired of carrying the cross, He stopped in front of the house where Isaac lived. Jesus asked if He could stop and rest for a little minute. But Isaac refused Jesus hospitality, and pushed Him away. Then Jesus told him, 'You will wander endlessly for over one thousand years. Your torment will end only on the day of the Last Judgment.'

Back when I was a young kid, for some reason I was always attracted to this character. I was scared of it too. As the years went by I noticed the performances were becoming less and less interesting, so we decided to do it to give it back to Carnival. There's always the potential for characters in Carnival to disappear if nobody keeps them alive. It was in 1995 that I noticed that the Jwif Eran tradition was disappearing. This theme has belonged to Carnival for a very long time. So I got together with some friends to create a text to help people understand it all. My father helped, but it wasn't him who told me about it, but somebody older – André Despinos, a Jewish guy. He's not involved in our performance, but when I wanted to revive the tradition I went to him to get a full version of the story. He was my teacher. The movements are very important, and the way you carry the cross. Jwif Eran carries a stick, rather like a bishop's staff, to represent someone who is always on the road. He wears a bishop's hat too. Often he goes around kicking the audience – he's so used to being alone that he gets claustrophobic when there are so many people looking at him.

The traditional Jwif Eran performance always depicted a trial. Originally the main guys were lawyers in the middle of judgment – there was one defending Jwif Eran's case. We stepped away from that a bit, did something a bit different. We wrote it down like a play. Young people would write stories, short comedies based on Molière, or more often just made up. We'd put jokes in. We had a table and chairs and the actors sat around, representing the bourgeoisie, wearing

two-piece suits hats, just sitting there, drinking and cracking jokes: ‘Wow, what an incredible suit you’ve got on today.’ All that is geared to make the audience laugh.

Then they ask Jwif Eran about himself, and he tells his story. I played the part of Jwif Eran myself. Every year I wore different colours. I was either in yellow and black, or blue and white, or red and white. One Carnival, I performed three days, so I had different outfits. One had a painted calyx on the back. And I wore a mask with a very long beard – the hair was made of wool. The outfit is very high leather boots, satin trousers and a frock. There’s a symbol on the back, but it doesn’t really mean anything. It’s just to make it look more beautiful and shiny. It’s quite a militaristic look, he looks a bit like security. That’s why the people at the bar in Brussels go up to him, to see what he’s up to, because he looks so tall and fierce. Of course, you have to be very tall. It’s more impressive that way. *Fritz Lubin (2002)*

01 *Jwif Eran | Jij (Wandering Jew | The Judge)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

02 *Jwif Eran* | *Jij e Mèt Vagabon (Wandering Jew* | *Judge and Master Naughty)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
03 *Jwif Eran* | *Gran Manjè (Wandering Jew* | *Fat Cats)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
04 *Jwif Eran* | *De Gran Manjè (Wandering Jew* | *Two Fat Cats)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
05 *Jwif Eran (Wandering Jew)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

06 *Jwif Eran* | *Gwoup Avoka (Wandering Jew* | *Group of Lawyers)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Zèl Maturin

There have been always Zèl Maturin in Jacmel Carnival, ever since a man called Mathurin Rousse came from abroad with the wings – that's why they're called the 'Wings of Mathurin'. We didn't invent the story, it came from the old people. It's good against evil. The first scene has people with suits, ties, masks and Bibles all kneeling and praying. In the second scene Sen Michèl Arkanj comes down from heaven to give them protection – with him are other angels in pink satin dresses, and a little angel all in blue and white. Then a long procession of Zèl Maturin arrive to steal the angels away, but Sen Michèl kills them with his mighty sword. Then the strongest devil, the red one – myself– arrives. He fights much harder, but at last after a long struggle he's lying dead with Sen Michèl's foot on his head. But then along comes the black devil, bigger than the others and wearing chains – his mystic powers so strong that he must be restrained. He carries a skull and presents it to the four points of the compass, and then strikes the red devil three times, reviving him. And all the other devils come back to life too. The black devil, you see, is a Vodou devil – the other devils are mere Christian devils. His powers are greater. Every year we buy fabric for new disguises – the satin wears out after being washed for a year. We make masks out of this papier-mâché, and decorate them. For the wings I buy planks, saw them up, plane them down. Nail them together, wire them up. Glue on cardboard and paper, add hinges and handles. Then paint them, and attach the tails. It's the handles that allow you to make them move. It doesn't take long to learn how to do it – within two rehearsals the trainee's got it. Obviously, the more experience you have, the better. This year, the new guy might miss something – next year he'll be good at it. And lately, there are more girls involved – we just have to be careful where we put the straps for the wings, so we don't squash their breasts. I've been doing it forty-eight years now. I was a kid then, and now I'm in charge. I put the devil in the face of God. You don't play the part if you don't like the part. I'm not exactly a Bible person – I'm a Vodou priest. I'm a welder, I have a cockfighting place, I have a Rara band. I have many skills.

Ronald Bellevue (2002/2020)

07 *Zèl Maturin III (Wings of Maturin III)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

08 *Zèl Maturin I (Wings of Maturin I)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

09 *Zèl Maturin (The Wings of Mathurin)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
11 *Zèl Maturin II (Wings of Maturin II)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

10 *Zèl Maturin/ Tèt Mo (The Wings of Mathurin/ Death Masks)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
12 *Zèl Maturin | Ronald Bellevue (The Wings of Mathurin)*, 2002, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

13 *Zèl Maturin IV (Wings of Maturin IV)*, 2019 , 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Lansè Kòd

At Carnival, people like to be scared. We are the scariest. The Zèl Maturin are supposed to be scary, but they're more scared of us – they worry that they'll dirty their fancy satin disguises if they touch us. Our disguises are much cheaper to make than many others– no materials, no papier-mâché, just a charcoal-and-syrup mixture. We are making a statement about slavery and being freed from slavery – it's a celebration of our independence in 1804. The ropes we carry are the ropes that were used to bind us. We know that slaves never wore horns. But this is about the slave revolt, and we wear the horns to give us more power and to look even more scary. We're always sullen and menacing. And we never smile. When we take to the streets we stop at the first crossroads and at the blast of my whistle we all start doing press-ups. This is to show that even though the slaves suffer, they're still very strong. When I was child they were always my favourite troupe. But I wanted to do it on a much larger scale. All my friends from the gym, Nabot Power, that I have here in my yard wanted to join. So we have one hundred guys, all fit and strong.
Salnave Raphael a.k.a. Nabot Power (2002)

14 *Lansè Kòd I (Rope Throwers I)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

15 *De Lansè Kòd (Two Rope Throwers)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

16 *Twa Lansè Kòd (Three Rope Throwers)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
18 *Lansè Kòd (Rope Throwers)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

17 *Lansè Kòd II (The Rope Throwers II)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
19 *Jenn Lansè Kòd (Young Rope Throwers)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

20 *Lanse Kòd | Kouvre Fe (Rope-Throwers | Curfew)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

21 *Lansè Kòd | Gason Bó Lanmé-a (Rope Throwers | Boy by the Sea)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Lamayòt

This Mardi Gras is usually performed by an individual, sometimes to make more impact by a group of three or four, dressed in unique costumes and masks designed to attract attention. They walk along the streets carrying a box – sometimes this may be a huge box on a donkey's back, sometimes a box resembling a coffin carried by six men, and sometimes a small shiny metal box, a decorated box, or a plain shabby cardboard box.

There is a special song: 'Si ou bezwen konnen sak nan bwat la, peye mwen montre' ('If you want to see what's in the box, you must pay me to show you'). The expectation, especially amongst children, often outweighs the final payoff, but everyone is waiting to see how imaginative and audacious the masker will prove to be. People usually pay 5 or 10 gourdes to see. Once a group of eager people have gathered, someone collects the money in a little hat and then everyone awaits the moment of revelation.

Sometimes it may be a snake, an old dead rat, a bird, a skull, or even pubic-haired dolls having sex! Other times there may just be an old piece of junk, or a dirty doll's head – in that case the crowd may get angry and chase Lamayòt away.
Andre Eugene & Jean-Claude Saintilus (2021)

22 *Lamayòt | Nèg ak Kwa (Lamayotte | Men with Cross)*, 1996,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

23 *Lamayòt | Figi Chen (Lamayotte | Dog Face)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
24 *Lamayòt | ET (Lamayotte | ET)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
25 *De Lamayòt | Chapo ak Flè (Two Lamayotte | Hat with Flowers)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
26 *Lamayòt | Chapo ak Flè (Lamayotte | Hat with Flowers)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Pay Banann

When I was a kid I used to run behind all the madigra troupes. I felt that something was missing, so in 1979 I got together with four friends, and we decided to add a little something new to the long list of celebrated troupes. And we came up with Pay Banann. The disguise is essentially just these huge plantain leaves that cover us from head to toe. We go down to the plantain gardens by the river to get the leaves, cut them down with a machete. They never want the plantain leaves to touch them – the leaves are very rough, and people think they're dirty. So they always try to get away from us. But once the Pay Banann stop you, you can't move until you give us a little money. While we're running around town we sing a little song: Nou pa gen alimèt, mete dife ('We haven't got a match, set us on fire'). And the people answer, Mwen gen alimèt ('I've got a match'), and they reach into their pockets and give us a little something, and we continue on our way. It gets so hot under the leaves that we can only be in the streets for a maximum of an hour and a half – then we have to stop. We can't just take all the leaves off at once – we'd get pneumonia, going so quickly from hot to cool. So we make our way to the seashore, where there's a refreshing breeze. We get a little wind in our leaves first, before very slowly removing them, one after the other. When my friend plays Jwif Eran he goes home after a long day still wearing the big beard, and lies down on the bed for a while, still in costume, with a wet towel on his forehead. He drinks a cup of ginger tea, and it's only then that he takes the beard and the disguise off. That's how careful we all must be.
Frantzo Jean (2009/2020)

27 *Pay Banannn (Plantain Leaves)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Bann A Pye

28 *Manm Bann a Pye (Member of a Footband)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Zonbi

Zombies are real. I could be dead and buried, and then an evil-doing oungan, a Vodou priest, could come along and steal my soul, bring me back to life, and make me work for him. So this madigra depicts the reality of zombie life. Zonbi's dressed all in white, the oungan in red and black. He puts lit pieces of pinewood in his mouth. It's something out of the ordinary – you can imagine how hot it is. Then the oungan drives Zonbi along with a whip. We've got a table covered with a white sheet, and on it we put a glass, upside down, with a coin underneath it. Zonbi puts his head on the glass, and the money disappears. Then the oungan whips Zonbi to make him make the coin reappear. All this without moving the glass! We have people to carry the table for us, but Zonbi doesn't carry anything – he's being whipped all along the way. Before we go out in the streets I address the spirits, clap my hands, and shake the table. We can't go out without doing that.

Maxito Charles (2020)

29 *Zonbi (Zombie)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

30 *Manm Zonbi Mardigra (Members of a Zonbi Group)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

31 *Zonbi (Zombie)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Papa Sida

I created the Papa Sida madigra because some people seem to think that AIDS is a political lie. I do it so that people can understand it's not a lie – it's reality. When we perform I want people to see that I was a young man who enjoyed life, but now here I am lying on the hospital trolley with a bag of serum going into my arm, my knees covered with AIDS shit. My face is white like death. Papa Sida going out in the streets helps people to see that AIDS is not a lie from the politicians, but the truth. I see loads of young people dying of AIDS, and I want to get a message to the youngsters of this town that before they have sex they have to put on a Durex. Everybody thinks they can be playboys, but hell, if you don't take precautions you'll still end up rotting in the cemetery.
Lendor James (2009)

32 *Papa Sida I (Father AIDS I)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

33 *Papa Sida II (Father AIDS II)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Chaloska

34 *Chaloska I (Charles Oscar I)*, 1998, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

In 1912, Chief Charles Oscar Étienne was the military commandant in charge of the police in Jacmel. He was tall and strong with big feet, big teeth. Everyone was afraid of him. At that time there was political instability in Port au-Prince. President Sam had just been assassinated, and Charles Oscar took his chance to take five hundred prisoners from the local jail. He killed them all. There was so much blood it made a river of death. The people were so angry that they rose up and tore the police chief to pieces in the street and burnt him up. He was killed in the same violent way that he'd treated the people. This story has always been very striking to me, and in 1962 I decided to create the character of Chaloska for Carnival. I designed the military uniform and made the big false teeth with bull's teeth bought from the market. When I created Chaloska I also wanted to create some other characters to go along with him, and I came up with Mèt Richa and Doktè Kalipso. Mèt Richa is a rich lawyer with a big bag full of money and a big fat stomach. He walks with the Chaloska troupe buying justice and bribing the judges. He represents the impunity and corruption that hides behind Chaloska, and he is the real chief of the city. Doktè Kalipso is an old hunchbacked doctor in a suit with a stick in his hand. He works for Chaloska and checks on the health of the prisoners, always reporting that they're healthy when they're dying.

These characters are still here in Haitian society, so it's good to parade them in the streets. It's a message to all future Oscars that they will end up this way. The troupe goes to different places in town, threatening the people. The boss Chaloska always dies in the end, and the others call for mercy because they're cowards. But then another Chaloska straightaway replaces him. This is to show the infinite replication of Chaloskas, which continues to produce the same system. There will be Chaloskas until the end of the world. They began at the beginning, and will not end until the end.
Eugène Lamour aka Boss Cota (2002)

It is a pleasure for me, a young man who's taken over my father's leadership after his death, to talk about Chaloska. Chaloska is from history. Many young people who didn't know Charles Oscar Étienne's story know it through this madigra. My father created it when he was a young man, in the Duvalier period, using Chaloska to represent the evil things the Tontons Macoutes were doing. We don't use the same disguises every year. The first thing we do is, we buy cardboard, shoe glue, paint, starch, and look for paper cement to make hats. We stick the hats together with shoe glue. Then there are those little bits of shiny paper inside cigarette packets – we use them to make the hats more beautiful, and then we paint and varnish them. As for the teeth, we buy cows' teeth from the abattoir. The beef butchers always keep the teeth, because they know they will sell them during Madigra. Carnival is a time of enjoyment – it's a colourful moment. We do it to maintain our culture, and to earn money. Hear me, this is Chaloska, there is no other. We are unique. Chaloska is a tradition, and you cannot change it. You cannot modernise it. If you modernise it, you're not doing Chaloska any more, you're doing your own thing. If Chaloska wears another colour, it's not Chaloska. It's a madigra, but it's not Chaloska. It will always stay the same. That's how it has to be.
Lauture Joseph Joissaint (2020)

35 *Chaloska | Sa Pirèd II (Charles Oscar | That's Toughest II)*, 1998, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

36 *Chaloska | Sa Pirèd I (Charles Oscar | That's Toughest I)*, 1998, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

37 *Chaloska (Charles Oscar)*, 2008, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
39 *Chaloska II (Charles Oscar II)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

38 *Chaloska I (Charles Oscar I)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
40 *De Chaloska (Two Charles Oscar)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Bounda Pa Bounda

When I was a kid I went to Port-au-Prince to find work. It was there that I did a famous Lamayòt for Carnival, a little puppet in a cardboard box. A few years later I moved to the Artibonite to work in the rice fields. There I came up with another madigra, a drag Kouzin Zaka, the Vodou spirit of agriculture – I wore a long black and purple dress and carried a makout, a straw satchel, and I had two drummers with me. Then I had to move to the Dominican Republic to work on the sugarcane plantations. It was there that I had my first revelation. I saw myself in a long red dress, and I saw a little chap, very high up in the trees, picking leaves and putting them into a basket. But in all my dreams I did not know who he was. I returned at last to the mountains above Jacmel where I was born. It was then that I realised that the little chap was Gran Bwa, the spirit of the forest, who dwells invisible in the trees. When you need him you call him and he tells you the secrets of the leaves. I dreamt I was at a big crossroads, spinning around, with a big arse, and a basket on my head. In another dream I saw myself standing holding the sides of my arse, singing: Bounda pa bounda w ap taye m jès o, bounda mwen trò piti, w ap taye m jès o ('Cheek by arse you're giving me a bad vibe, my arse's too small, you're giving me a bad vibe'). When I woke up, I asked a guy who interpreted dreams about it. Was I going to win the lottery? Could be, he said. I played it, but alas my numbers didn't come up. After three days I had the same dream again. And I saw myself touring Jacmel. There was a lady who was selling used clothes from abroad, and I saw a long red dress, and something told me to buy it. And when Carnival arrived, I put it on, put on a wig, mascara too, and out I went, spinning around with a basket full of leaves and flowers on my head. Everyone loved it. I had no music then, it was just me, on my own. Later on, I had a dancer following me, then another, and then two drummers and a maraca player. So the madigra troupe became a spiritually engaged band. We are all Vodou believers – we were born into it and we want to keep it going. When we go out at Carnival we carry a basket of leaves so if we meet an oungan or a manbo, a Vodou priest or priestess, they can buy the healing plants from us. The leaves are used for teas or baths, to heal people or to ward off evil spirits. We are the women bringing the leaves of the forest from Gran Bwa. When I die Bounda pa Bounda will come to an end, unless another member is chosen by the spirits. It will be difficult for someone to replace me – I'm used to covering a long distance, spinning, without touching the basket on my head. I don't think there's anyone else who could do it. I only take the basket off my head when my disciples are out of breath or thirsty. And I tell them, make yourselves comfortable, drink, if you have something to eat. Because once I load it back up I will not stop – a loaded donkey never stops.

Dieuli Laurent (2002/2020)

41 *Bounda pa Bounda (Cheek by Arse)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

42 *Bounda pa Bounda (Cheek by Arse)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Nèg Maron

43 *Nèg Maron (Run-away Slave)*, 2001, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Esklav Yo

44 *Esklav Yo (The Enslaved)*, 2001, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Madanm Lasirèn

Madanm Lasirèn is a Vodou spirit who lives under the sea and does mystical work there. When I walk the streets I sing her song: Mwen Lasirèn, mwen rele anmwe, lè mwen mache nannwit, male rive m ('I am Lasirèn, I cry out, when I work mystically by night, misfortune may befall me'). Because she's a fish she has to disguise herself as a woman to be at Madigra. A mask and hat cover her fish's head, and the dress she wears covers her fish's tail. The chain she wears is a sacred chain, a fetish called Manbo Byen Venu ('Vodou Priestess Welcome'). She also wears gloves, and carries an umbrella, and a baby, her child, who is called Marie Rose. Each year I change the disguise and fashion a new baby. In order to get inspiration I go to the place where the big beasts live, and they instruct me how to do Madigra. I dream of Lasirèn all the time. I love and honour her. That is why I chose her – because my grandmother, father and mother all served the spirits. I've been doing her now for eighteen years. Before that I did another madigra called Patoko. This was a group of men who were masked as women, in nice dresses and high-heeled shoes, and we did a marriage between men and woman on the street. After that we had a troupe called Kanna – we wore blue trousers, white t-shirts, new sandals and scarfs around our waists, and carried brooms with which we swept the streets of Jacmel. I have always found a way of doing Madigra.
André Ferner (2009)

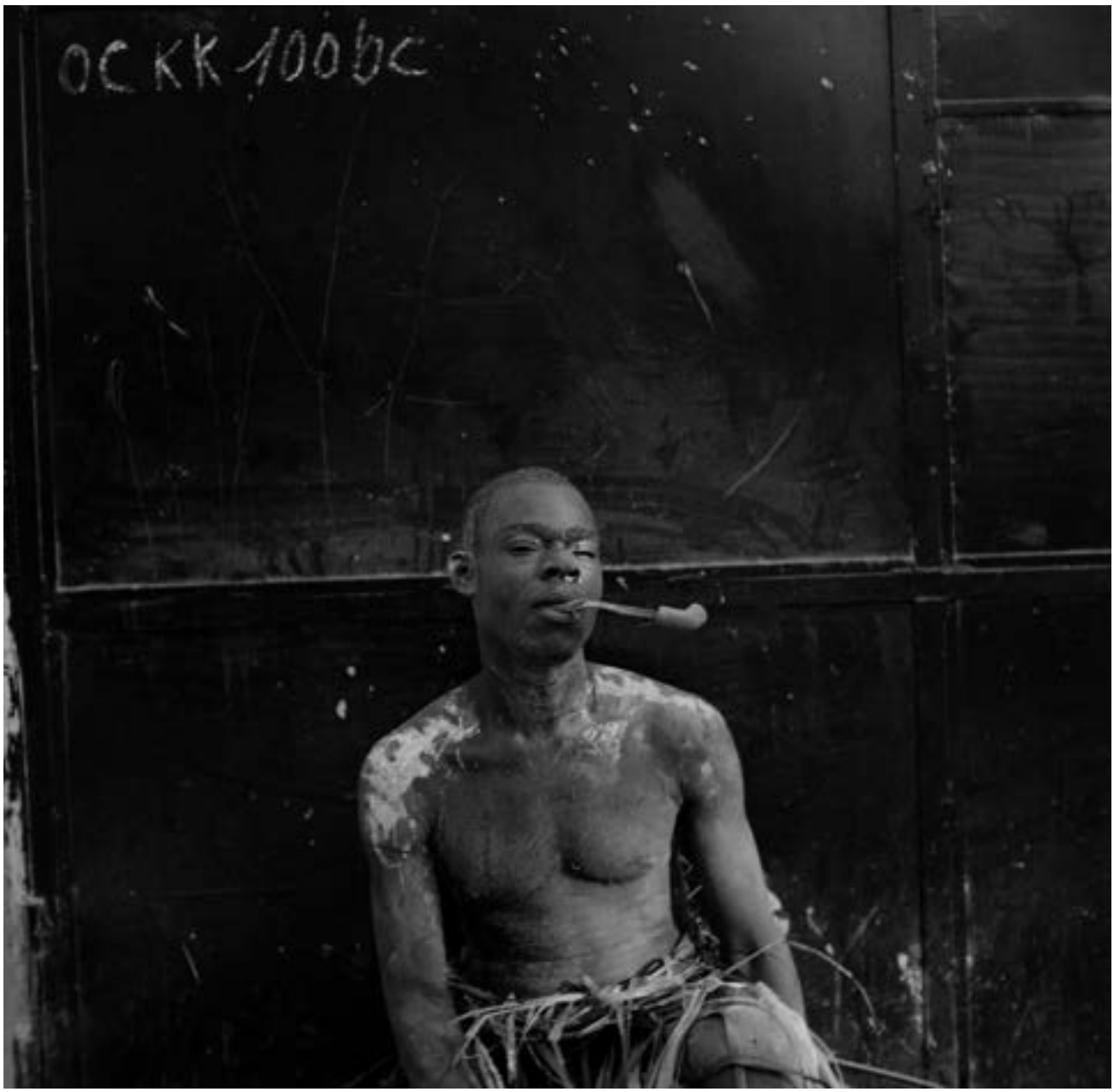
45 *Madanm Lasirén (Madame Mermaid)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Pa Wowo

Pa Wowo has a pipe in his mouth – in the past all the peasants smoked pipes. He wears a skirt of leaves. The skirt is a symbol, the skirt means everything – Pa Wowo has no family, he has nothing, no one to help him, not even his own clothes to wear. So he represents someone who has nothing, no one, nowhere to stay. No money. People understand my message, which is that if you have something, you must help those who have nothing. Pa Wowo has his own scenes, just like in the theatre. So many ancient madigra have been lost. I took this one over when the person who used to do it died. That was fifteen years ago. I'm not sure it will continue after I'm gone, but while I'm able I'll always fight to do Pa Wowo, to make sure that Carnival has a festive ambiance, a good power, to make sure that Jacmel shows its good face to the world.

Edmond Paul (2009)

46 *Pa Wowo (The Way of Wowo)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm



47 *Pa Wowo (The Way of Wowo)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

48 *Pa Wowo (The Way of Wowo)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Bann Djab

Many people don't understand the devil. They think the devil kills people. Untrue. If you don't bother the devil, he won't eat you. You have to respect everything that exists in this world. Even a tree that your father's planted – if you cut it down you also destroy the spirits, the children of the land. You don't know who's in the tree. It's the mystical forces that keep the country alive. Our independence comes from the spirits. Our culture is Vodou and the drum. Bann Djab comes from a mystical power. It's a secret society. It was the man called Charles who created it, but it was an old band they wrote about in books. When Charles died in 1988 I took over. This is how we mask. Red and black dresses, the devil's devotion, all covered with paillettes – big sequins – to create flashes of light, to see when the devil's dancing. The paillettes are the band's image, the band's signal – a mirror that captures the image of the band. Whoever passes by sees themselves in this mirror. And the horns are a guide, to show you the devil's real. The big horn is Wa Djab ('Devil King'), the one who leads Bann Djab – without him, the band cannot walk. He carries an axe, not to hit people, but to show that the devil is manifesting. And Wa Kalòt ('Slap King'), is the one with all the mirrors. I want to make Bann Djab better – I don't want it to be looked down upon. But I lack the funds to do it the way I want to do it – to do something beautiful you need money. These days we use the same disguises every year. And kids for the band – if I had the money I would use adults instead. Each time you underpay the people working with you, you minimise your culture. And if you minimise your culture, it'll fade away.

Frantzso Jean (2019/2020)

49 *Bann Djab (Devil's Band)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Lang Long

The tongue is a knife that cuts both ways. You must look up and look down, because something you don't see can always poke you in the eye. This is what I have written on my collection of tongues: Pa yo pi sal yo mèt di sa yo vle dèyè lòm ('Those who are dirtier can say what they want behind a man's back'); Men lang moun Jakmel kap drive ('Here are the tongues of the people of Jacmel who are idle'); Lang moun Jakmel fè toro li fè gazèl ('The tongues of the people of Jacmel can be bulls or heifers').

I started this Mardi Gras in 1983 to point out that what people say to your face is different to what they say behind your back. We have twelve people in the troupe, young and old, but no women. This is because women always want to dance on in the street longer than I do. When I've had enough I want to go home and rest! Every year the disguise is the same. I wear a tongue hanging around my neck and I paint myself six different colours. The colours are purely because I love their beauty – we change them every year. I wear a grass skirt that moves when I dance, and I put on a wig so that the paint doesn't dirty my hair. If you pass by and see my red eyes don't let it worry you.

Words are not dirty themselves but the way they're used can be bad. In Haiti you can do something good for a person, but that same person will speak badly about you. This is the Haitian system I think. I hate this badmouthing, and I would like it to change – I would likesociety to change. But I know that really this system will never change – too many people act like Judases here and speak bad behind your back every time. It's sad. And it's the same every time I vote in the elections – nothing ever really changes.
Racine Pierre (2009)

50 *Lang Long (Long Tongue)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

51 *Lang Long (Long Tongue)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Nèg ak Koulèv

52 Nèg ak Koulèv (Man with Snake), 2008, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Atibruno

53 *Atibruno (Atibruno)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

54 *Atibruno (Atibruno)*, 2017, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

55 *Gason Atibruno (Atibruno Boy)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Endyen

What I really like about the Indians is their fierce character. They don't have to speak. All they have to do is stand there, silent. They are fierce, they are wild. They walk barefoot. They're cool characters. They don't need to speak to make people respect them. If something happens, if they see danger coming, they just grab their bows and arrows and – pppppring! Without a word! They're very cool guys, very imposing-looking. It all started really in 1985 when I was very young – I was in school and I read a storybook about Christopher Columbus, how he visited this land and met with the inhabitants, who were Indians. I was always so impressed by the Indians, how they lived, how hardworking they were, sawing wood, making fires. I always picture them as a very brave and courageous people. Actually, I feel like an Indian – I really feel like I have Taíno Indian blood in me. This Indian thing, it's a love story for me – it's real ancestral love. I'm the designer. I make all the bits of the disguise myself. I make the little Indian skirt. On my left, I have a machete, and on my right a big painted arrow in silver and red. I do little characteristic moves – I walk slowly, then I do a little jump to the left, and then to the right. I learned them at some classes I took in Indian dance at the Lycée Pinchinat. Nobody can tell where they come from. Some people will tell you that their great-grandparents were mixed race – part Indian. In the past it wasn't us who lived here, it was them – the Ciboney, a Taíno tribe. You can see their writing on the walls of our caves. After 1492 they died in their thousands, doing hard labour. So the colonisers went to Benin, to Guinea, to get black people to replace them. We come from Africa. We were changed by this civilisation. The Indians were gentle – they were calm, under whatever mistreatment. But we have a different temperament. We said no, we rebelled.

Marc André Michel (2002)

56 *Endyen (Indian)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Ti Militè

57 *Ti Militè (Little Military)*, 2017, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Geralda

58 *Geralda*, 2017, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Flambeau (Flanbo)

We make papier-mâché animals. Pink flamingos, pigeons, cows, alligators, tigers and lions – animals that exist in Haiti, and animals that don't. We make all these animal masks and we go onto the street wearing them. There are three sets of characters – the animals, the hunters and the cowboys. First the birds appear, and they start hiding on the street corners. Then come the hunters, dressed like American military men, who shoot the birds, which fall to the floor, dead. A big group of tigers comes along to eat the birds, and the hunters shoot the tigers too. Then come more animals, including the cows, the crocodiles and the rhinos. So the hunters kill them as well. Once all the animals are dead, four cowboys arrive, and one of them is Zorro. They're all on horseback, but Zorro who's all in black is the strongest. They arrive along with six of the fiercest of the Zèl Maturin. One of them arrives with his young son – Lucifer of the street hand in hand with a little Lucifer. The cowboys fight with the devils and finally Zorro is the last man standing. The big father Lucifer in black is the last one to die, because he is the strongest and most resistant. Then all the Zèl Maturin gather together for the last part of the play, the burial of Lucifer. As the pastors are singing the burial rites, a final new character appears, an even more powerful devil, all in black but wearing many chains around his body. This Lucifer is definitely the fiercest of them all, sometimes with six horns, four eyes, three snakes coming out of his nose, and animal's feet. He has enormous supernatural powers and is called Super Djab la, 'The Super Devil'. He begins making mystical prayers and mystical actions to raise the first Lucifer from the dead. At last this strong powerful creature resuscitates the first Lucifer, who gets up, and at this all the Zèl Maturin rejoice, jumping around and flapping their hard wings with happiness. When they're finished, all the cast and characters line up, from birds to animals, hunters to cowboys, and then along with the Zèl Maturin process to their next location, and start the performance again. And before Carnival, you never sleep, always dreaming of bringing pleasure, innovation and creation.
Fanel Saint-Helere & Frantz Denoujou (2002)

59 *Flanbo Tig (Flambeau Tigers)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

60 *Flanbo Krokodil (Flambeau Crocodile)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

61 *Flanbo (Flambeau)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Petwo Karibe

62 *Petwo Karibe II (PetroCaribe II)*, 2019, 50 × 50 cm

63 *Petwo Karibe I (PetroCaribe I)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Sen Michèl Arkanj

The Sen Michèl Arkanj madigra is divided into two. One half is on the side of God, and the other on the side of Satan. So on one side you have the pastors, the angels and Sen Michèl Arkanj, and on the other you have the Zèl Maturin, the devils. Sen Michèl is an angel of protection and he has enough power and force to wrest back the pastors from the hands of the devils. When the devils persist in running behind the pastors Sen Michèl must do battle with them. He has a sword in his hand and he uses it to kill them – he has the power to kill all the devils. This is a special tale for Madigra, so although Sen Michèl thinks he has finished killing all the devils, he's wrong. There's always one devil that hangs back and hides and doesn't come face to face with Sen Michèl. That's because he knows Sen Michèl's power is stronger than that of any devil. But when Sen Michèl Arkanj turns his back, the last devil resuscitates all the other dead devils by pouring a libation of water on them. He's able to do this when Sen Michèl isn't looking. But this is the only the Jacmel Madigra version – in the real story Sen Michèl Arkanj kills the devils for all eternity. Playing Sen Michèl Arkanj would not be my first choice. I used to be a Zèl Maturin, and I preferred that role. But the guy who played Sen Michèl got really fat, so they chose me to take his place. When you met me last Sunday you photographed me standing still, but next Sunday when you see me in the street we will get to play hard and make all the movements. I can tell you the story, but you have to see the real theatre in the street.

Jony Aubin (2009)

64 *Sen Michel Arkanj (St Michael Archangel)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Individual Performers

65 *San tit (Untitled)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

66 *San tit (Untitled)*, 2008, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
68 *Bèt (Beast)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

67 *Ti Tig (Tiger Cub)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
69 *Moun maske (Masked Person)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

70 *Nèg pote Wob (Man in Dress)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

71 *Nèg ak Poupe (Man with Doll)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

72 *Nèg ak Kolon (Man with Colonialists)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

73 *Nèg pote Wob fè Fas Kache: Deye (Man Wearing a Dress Hiding his Face: Back)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

74 *Nèg pote Wob fè Fas Kache: Devan (Man Wearing a Dress Hiding his Face: Front)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

75 *Predikatè (Preacher)*, 2008, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

76 *Lanmò (Death)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

77 *Reklam pou Otel (Advert for Hotel)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Jwif Eran (pp.22–25)

01 *Jwif Eran | Jij (Wandering Jew | The Judge)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
02 *Jwif Eran | Jij e Mèt Vagabon (Wandering Jew | Judge and Master Naughty)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
03 *Jwif Eran | Gran Manjè (Wandering Jew | Fat Cats)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
04 *Jwif Eran | De Gran Manjè (Wandering Jew | Two Fat Cats)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
05 *Jwif Eran (Wandering Jew)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
06 *Jwif Eran | Gwoup Avoka (Wandering Jew | Group of Lawyers)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Zèl Maturin (pp.26–29)

07 *Zèl Maturin III (Wings of Maturin III)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
08 *Zèl Maturin I (Wings of Maturin I)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
09 *Zèl Maturin (The Wings of Mathurin)*, 1995, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
10 *Zèl Maturin/ Tèt Mo (The Wings of Mathurin/ Death Masks)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
11 *Zèl Maturin II (Wings of Maturin II)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
12 *Zèl Maturin (The Wings of Mathurin)*, 2002, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
13 *Zèl Maturin IV (Wings of Maturin IV)*, 2019 , 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Lansè Kòd (pp.30–33)

14 *Lansè Kòd I (Rope Throwers I)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
15 *De Lansè Kòd (Two Rope Throwers)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
16 *Twa Lansè Kòd (Three Rope Throwers)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
17 *Lansè Kòd II (The Rope Throwers II)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
18 *Lansè Kòd (Rope Throwers)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
19 *Jenn Lansè Kòd (Young Rope Throwers)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
20 *Lanse Kòd | Kouvre Fe (Rope-Throwers | Curfew)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
21 *Lansè Kòd | Gason Bó Lanmé-a (Rope Throwers | Boy by the Sea)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Lamayòt (pp.34–35)

22 *Lamayòt | Nèg ak Kwa (Lamayotte | Men with Cross)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
23 *Lamayòt | Figi Chen (Lamayotte | Dog Face)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
24 *Lamayòt | ET (Lamayotte | ET)*, 2004, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
25 *De Lamayòt | Chapo ak Flè (Two Lamayotte | Hat with Flowers)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
26 *Lamayòt | Chapo ak Flè (Lamayotte | Hat with Flowers)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Pay Banann (pp.36–37)

27 *Pay Banannn (Plantain Leaves)*, 1996, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Bann A Pye (p.38)

28 *Manm Bann a Pye (Member of a Footband)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Zonbi (pp.39–40)

29 *Zonbi (Zombie)*, 2009, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
30 *Manm Zonbi Mardigra (Members of a Zonbi Group)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
31 *Zonbi (Zombie)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Papa Sida (p.41)

32 *Papa Sida I (Father AIDS I)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and50 × 50 cm
33 *Papa Sida II (Father AIDS II)*, 1997, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Chaloska (pp.42–45)

34 *Chaloska I (Charles Oscar I)*, 1998, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
35 *Chaloska | Sa Pirèd II (Charles Oscar | That's Toughest II)*, 1998, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
36 *Chaloska | Sa Pirèd I (Charles Oscar | That's Toughest I)*, 1998, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
37 *Chaloska (Charles Oscar)*, 2008, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
38 *Chaloska I (Charles Oscar I)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
39 *Chaloska II (Charles Oscar II)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
40 *De Chaloska (Two Charles Oscar)*, 2019, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Bounda Pa Bounda (pp.46–48)

41 *Bounda pa Bounda (Cheek by Arse)*, 2000, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
42 *Bounda pa Bounda (Cheek by Arse)*, 2003, 100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Nèg Maron (p.49)
43 *Nèg Maron (Run-away Slave)*, 2001,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Esklav Yo (p.50)
44 *Esklav Yo (The Enslaved)*, 2001,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Madanm Lasirèn (p.51)
45 *Madanm Lasirén (Madame Mermaid)*, 2003,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Pa Wowo (pp.52–53)
46 *Pa Wowo (The Way of Wowo)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
47 *Pa Wowo (The Way of Wowo)*, 2009,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
48 *Pa Wowo (The Way of Wowo)*, 2004,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Bann Djab (pp.54–55)
49 *Bann Djab (Devil's Band)*, 2004,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Lang Long (pp.56–57)
50 *Lang Long (Long Tongue)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
51 *Lang Long (Long Tongue)*, 2004,
100 × 100 cm and
50 × 50 cm

Nèg ak Koulèv (p.58)
52 *Nèg ak Koulèv (Man with Snake)*, 2008,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Atibruno (pp.59–60)
53 *Atibruno (Atibruno)*, 2009,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
54 *Atibruno (Atibruno)*, 2017,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
55 *Gason Atibruno (Atibruno Boy)*, 2009, 1
00 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Endyen (pp.61–62)
56 *Endyen (Indian)*, 1996,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Ti Militè (p.63)
57 *Ti Militè (Little Military)*, 2017,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Geralda (p.64)
58 *Geralda*, 2017,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Flambeau (Flanbo) (pp.65–67)
59 *Flanbo Tig (Flambeau Tigers)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
60 *Flanbo Krokodil (Flambeau Crocodile)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
61 *Flanbo (Flambeau)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Petwo Karibe (pp.68–69)
62 *Petwo Karibe II (PetroCaribe II)*, 2019,
50 × 50 cm
63 *Petwo Karibe I (PetroCaribe I)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Sen Michel Arkanj (p.70–71)
64 *Sen Michel Arkanj (St Michael Archangel)*, 1995,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm

Individual Performers (pp.72–77)
65 *San tit (Untitled)*, 2000,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
66 *San tit (Untitled)*, 2008,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
67 *Ti Tig (Tiger Cub)*, 2019,
100 × 100 cm and 50 × 50 cm
68 *Bèt (Beast)*, 2019,
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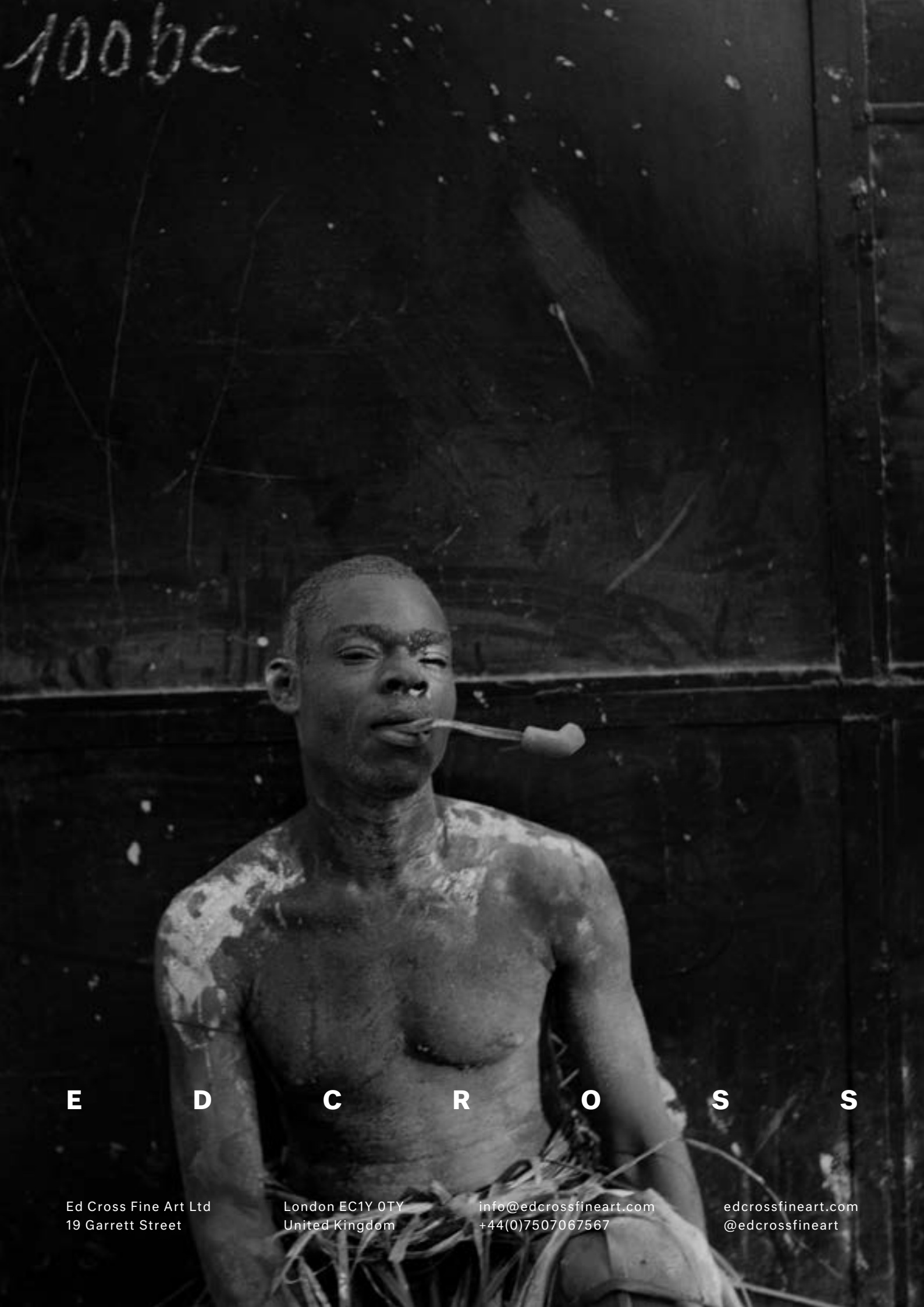
Leah Gordon (born Ellesmere Port, UK, 1959) is an artist, curator, and writer. Her work explores the intervolved and intersectional histories of the Caribbean plantation system, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Enclosure Acts and the creation of the British working-class. In the 1980s she wrote lyrics, sang, and played for a feminist folk punk band. Gordon's film and photographic work has been exhibited internationally including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; the Dak'art Biennale; the National Portrait Gallery, UK and the Norton Museum of Art, Florida. She is the co-director of the Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; was a curator for the Haitian Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale; was the co-curator of 'Kafou: Haiti, History & Art' at Nottingham Contemporary, UK; and was the co-curator of 'PÒTOPRENS: The Urban Artists of Port-au-Prince' at Pioneer Works, NYC in 2018 and MOCA, Miami in 2019. In 2022, her award-nominated feature-length documentary *Kanaval: A People's History of Haiti in Six Chapters* was broadcast in selected cinemas and on BBC 4's Arena. In 2022, Gordon also exhibited in and curated the Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale exhibition at St Kunigundis Church at documenta fifteen, Kassel; her work showed at MOCA North, Miami; Power Plant Gallery, Duke University, NC, USA, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany.



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