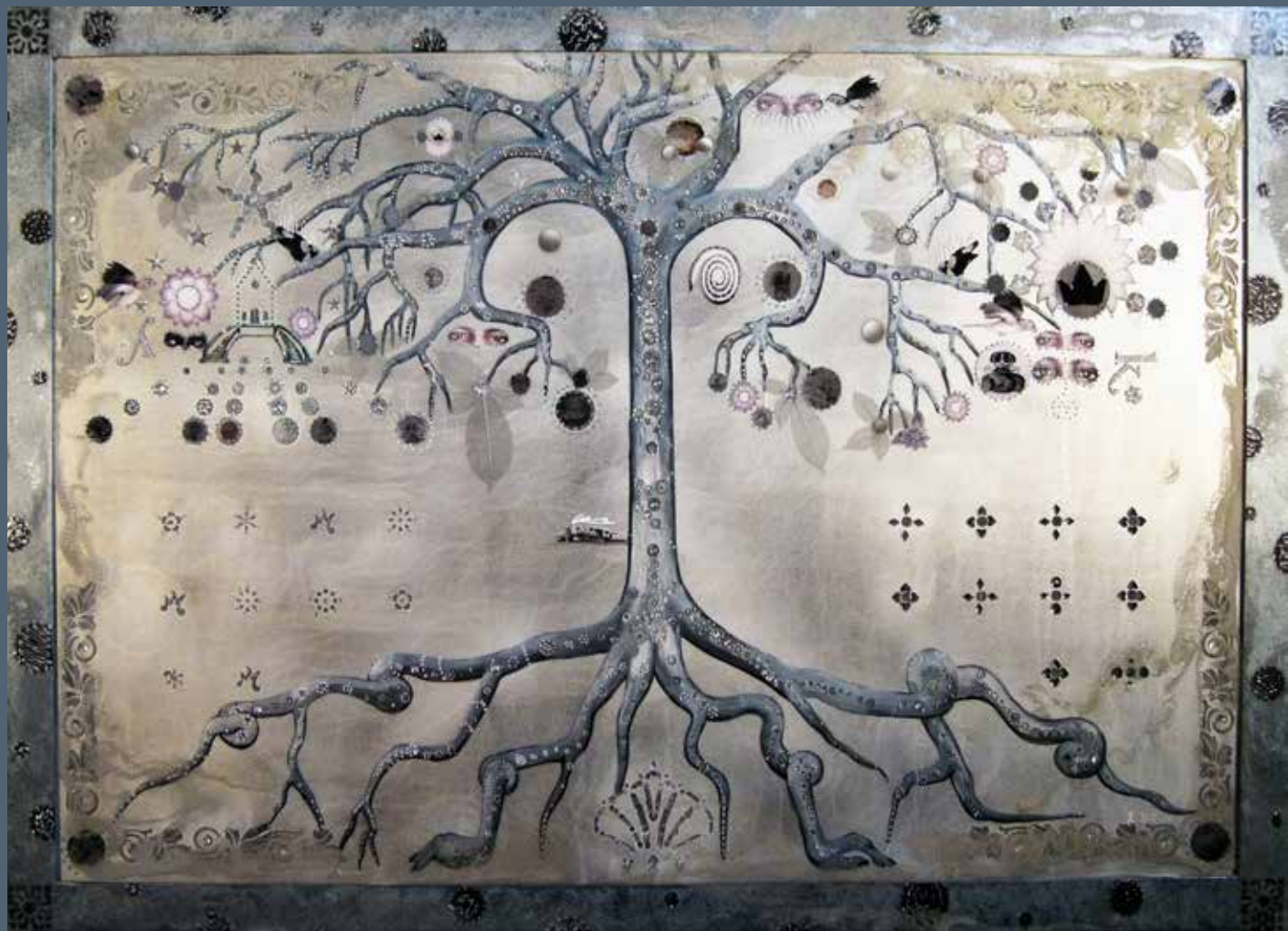


DECOLONIZING REFINEMENT

Contemporary Pursuits in the Art of Edouard Duval-Carrié



EXHIBITION CURATORS

Paul B. Niell | Michael D. Carrasco | Lesley A. Wolff

ESSAYS BY THE CURATORS &

Anthony Bogues | Martin Munro | Edward J. Sullivan

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Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts

Exhibition Organization

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◀Edouard Duval-Carrié, detail of *Sugar Conventions*, 2013, mixed media on backlit Plexiglas, 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.

Rituals of Refinement: Edouard Duval-Carrié's Historical Pursuits

Lesley A. Wolff
Michael D. Carrasco
Paul B. Niell

Colonial America may seem far removed from the contemporary fabric of daily life in Tallahassee. However, remnants of Tallahassee's colonial past persist in quiet corners of the city, tucked away behind modern avenues, academic institutions, and bodies of governance. One mile west of Florida State University's campus resides the Spanish Franciscan mission San Luis de Apalachee, built in 1633 at the location of the Apalachee capital of Anhaica. Here, Spanish missionaries compelled the Apalachee natives to produce corn for transport to feed the Spanish settlers along the Atlantic coast. To the east, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto's winter encampment (1539-40) remains an archaeological site. To the north, the neighborhood of Frenchtown traces its roots to the land grant made to Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette on July 4, 1825, a gift made to thank the Marquis for his support of the American Revolution. Farther to the east lies St. Augustine, founded by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565. The city served as the capital of Spanish Florida for two hundred years. In the eighteenth century, two miles north of St. Augustine, Fort Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose was established to receive Africans who had escaped and sought freedom from Caribbean British colonies. Indeed, since Juan Ponce de León's "discovery" of Florida in 1513, the region's governance has oscillated among the same European powers that dominated the Caribbean. Accordingly, Florida has served as a point of connection among empires, peoples, and commodities. These, among other historical complexities, speak to the interconnectivity of the territory's colonial past and its entanglement with native populations, slavery, and plantation culture. From Florida's reliance on immigrant and sometimes "illegal" agricultural laborers to the notion of Miami's status as a gateway to Latin America, the state continues to be entangled within the cultural currents of the Caribbean. As curators, we acknowledge the complexity of Florida's past, and its present, by raising questions about the heritage of this region in relation to the history and legacy of Caribbean colonial cities, institutions, and rural landscapes. In so doing, we implicate Florida in the transoceanic networks that converged, economically and materially, at the locus of the plantation system, which existed in Tallahassee as well as the former French colony of Ste. Domingue. The work of Haitian artist Edouard Duval-Carrié reveals this history in a way that reorients its focus to the people, places, and processes at the center of these colonial systems of production.

This exhibition adopts the theme of "refinement" and seeks to decolonize this notion through a juxtaposition of art and historical artifacts from the

southeastern United States with Duval-Carrié's contemporary work. Just as Duval-Carrié's work comprises the accretion of layers of meaning and material, so, too, this exhibition embeds historical objects among his works. This exhibition thus dredges up the material residues of colonialism that permeate our contemporary landscape in the guise of refinement. Refinement in the larger sense of Southern and Atlantic World history becomes not only the refinement of sugar, cotton, and other raw materials for consumption in the Western marketplace, but also the dominant order's social performances of refinement through art, architecture, manners, music, and dance.

The visual arts comprise and enact hegemonic structures of race, class, and gender that are central to the practice of social and aesthetic refinement. The Goodwood Museum and Gardens in Tallahassee preserves a plantation main house built in the 1830s and adorned with a set of ceiling murals in its ground-floor parlors. Allegories of the seasons co-mingle with those of the discovery of fire and water. The circular framing of this mural in the front parlor is dotted at symmetrical intervals by cotton motifs, historically the plantation's principal crop. This particular pyramidal cotton ornament is composed of a number of flowers entangled in an acanthus-leaved vine that wraps around a decorative spindle crowned with a gleaming white cotton boll. The ceiling overall suggests the planter's control of the agricultural cycles, the primordial valorization of his enterprise as though rooted in humankind's most essential discoveries, and the seasons that can be harnessed to produce a commodity for global world consumption. Removed from the context of their production, in this case by enslaved laborers, the value of these transnational commodities, such as cotton, becomes lost to the laborers and the use value of their products. Yet, in this space of refinement, the murals trained the gaze of cotton-clad antebellum spectators away from the inequities of the global world system, the slavery upon which the enterprise was built, and the darker side of commodities with the beauty and ornamentality of the cotton set with a matrix of classicizing motifs. In the early modern West, including its colonies abroad, art often functioned to enchant its audiences with the refinement of technique and ornamentation, thereby obscuring unequal social relations and the means of production behind a veil of coded aesthetics.¹



▲[top] Ceiling fresco, Goodwood Museum and Gardens, Tallahassee, Florida. Photo credit: Owen Enzor.

▲[center] Cotton motif, ceiling fresco detail, Goodwood Museum and Gardens, Tallahassee, Florida. Photo credit: Owen Enzor.

▲[bottom] Allegory of Spring, ceiling fresco detail, Goodwood Museum and Gardens, Tallahassee, Florida. Courtesy of Goodwood Museum and Gardens.

¹ Anthropologist Alfred Gell critiques what he calls a "cult of art," that he argues has had the effect of commanding a moral authority over Western society by means of the enchanting nature of technology. See Alfred Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," in *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, eds. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40-66.

The exhibition “Decolonizing Refinement” contributes to this nascent discourse of critical artistic investigations into the fraught and political modalities of enchantment by deploying complementary meanings of refinement. On the one hand, refinement describes the processes by which a resource becomes a product—cane to sugar, pine resin to turpentine, or cotton to textiles. On the other hand, the term refers to the systems of etiquette and taste that proscribe social behavior and valorize unequal systems of production and consumption. These complementary meanings, we suggest, locate the demand, manufacture, and consumption of commodities within the theater of the colonial world. We conceive of the colonial period, which haunts us still today, as the historical era of global world history begun in 1492 when certain political and social structures of racism and patriarchy emerged from the expansion of European empires and transoceanic commerce. These colonial structures, foundational to modern capitalism, mark a new kind of ecology, in which all things, including people, could be commodified, and their value configured by an abstract world market. This theater of globalized production and consumption, commodities, and the insatiable Western drive for “refinement,” both social and material, has become the world stage upon which modernity / coloniality promotes and propels itself.

The work of Edouard Duval-Carrié often engages and complicates the legacy of refinement in the Caribbean, particularly that of his native Haiti, both from within and without. He is an artist of the modern / colonial world—he incorporates the very products of modernity into his work, from plastics to photographs—and an artist *about* that same world—cleverly juxtaposing refined materials with images to critique the processes of modern fabrication through historical systems of oppression, stratification, and invisibility. Even Duval-Carrié’s studio exhibits this dual tendency. Tucked away in Miami’s Little Haiti Cultural Complex, his studio opens up into an impressive site. To one side, a stunning sitting area replete with an extensive library and artifacts from across the globe is carefully arranged to produce the intoxicating effect of a nineteenth-century salon. Across the threshold, the artist’s workspace espouses a materiality of excess—drawers, filled to the brim with knick-knacks and industrial materials, beads, plastic toys, cut-out shapes, lots of glitter—that transform the space, and the works produced within it, into a laboratory of and about refinement.

Duval-Carrié’s work, especially his most contemporary pursuits, brings to light the recursive patterns of colonialism and exploitation in the processes of refinement that heralded the birth of the modern / colonial world system. For the artist, the Caribbean becomes not merely a case study for these broader global dynamics, but rather the crucible from which our modern, industrial age emerges. Duval-Carrié’s oeuvre centers on his native Haiti, where colonial sugar plantations largely funded the Francophonic age of Enlightenment. He emphasizes the ties between this history of exploitative labor, the Haitian Revolution—the only successful slave revolt in the early modern Atlantic world that transformed France’s most lucrative plantation colony into a sovereign nation—and contemporary Haiti’s transatlantic consciousness.

In a departure from his earlier portraiture and paintings, his recent body of work harnesses the historical circumstances of refinement as the raw material for his own bricolage process. Like many contemporary artists, Duval-Carrié engages modernity by posing questions, for instance, about how and why imperial Western culture will continue to expand in terms of the now deeply entangled spheres of industry, landscape, food security, and migration. However, he explores such contemporary pursuits by thinking through the past. He uses the archives of human production—objects, images, landscapes—to rediscover the ways in which, to invoke his own phrasing, our modern / colonial world has been “coded” (Wolff, this volume).

Sugar Conventions, the work of art from which this exhibition and collaboration emerged, clearly demonstrates Duval-Carrié’s method of historic bricolage. This mixed-media piece, produced by the artist for the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies at Florida



◀Edouard Duval-Carrié, *Sugar Conventions*, 2013, mixed media on backlit Plexiglas, 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.



▲Agostino Brunias, *A West Indian Flower Girl and Two other Free Women of Color*, ca. 1769, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. Public domain.

State University in 2013, comprises nine gridded tiles, each of which contains an image that alludes to Caribbean society, real and imagined, historical and contemporary. Of the nine central images embedded in the tiles that make up *Sugar Conventions*, none is unique to the work. Rather, Duval-Carrié has excerpted passages from archival paintings and photographs and inscribed them into his art, layering them between pieces of Plexiglas like a specimen augmented under the microscope. In *Sugar Conventions*, and elsewhere in his work, Duval-Carrié invokes the eighteenth-century Italian painter Agostino Brunias (1730-1796), whose idyllic, romanticized scenes of the British West Indies became the means through which much of Enlightenment-era Europe encountered the Caribbean.² Duval-Carrié uses Brunias's renderings of a beautiful young flower-seller and a group of free women of color to punctuate that which is *not* portrayed, namely the brutality of enslaved labor essential to plantation culture and economy.

The ways in which Brunias veiled the horrors of enslavement did not make the realities any less gruesome for those kept under the institution's heavy hand. Sugar plantations dominated Ste. Domingue and thus garnered enormous wealth for the French Crown.³ This wealth came at a massive human cost. Enslaved laborers frequently lost life and limb in the service of sugar cultivation and refinement.

Sugarcane is a demanding crop and sugar refinement labor intensive and dangerous. The seasonal variability of the cane coupled with high commercial demand required around-the-clock labor to harvest the matured crop. The cane is volatile, prone to quick degradation, which only worsens in the more northern climates where sugar was historically cultivated along the US Gulf Coast, such as Louisiana and Florida. Laborers thus had to harvest the crop rapidly. The gathered cane immediately required crushing and juicing before rot set in to the stems. Enslaved plantation workers quickly forced the cane through a mill of wooden rollers to extract the juice—a perilous step that often resulted in the loss of fingers and hands, and at times death. Duval-

2 Duval-Carrié has frequently cited Kay Dian Kriz's *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) as a formative text in his understanding of the function of sugar in shaping Western aesthetics and his understanding of Brunias' paintings in that context.

3 Christopher Columbus first introduced sugarcane to the island of Hispaniola during his second voyage in 1493. Prior to his transatlantic travels, Columbus gained experience with sugar cultivation as an apprentice in Madeira's sugar trade, under the auspices of the Portuguese Crown, in the 1470s. See Judith A. Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 38.

Carrié gruesomely portrays this process in *L'Accident a la Guildive* (2017), an etching from a scene in Alejo Carpentier's novel, *The Kingdom of This World*.⁴ In this image, he depicts the novel's main character, an enslaved laborer named Makandal, severing his hand after an accident in the wooden rollers of the sugar mill. Those not forced to work the rollers faced other horrors. After extracting the juice by pressing or pounding the crushed cane, enslaved laborers reduced the liquid in a boiling cauldron that posed its own dangers of severe burns or death. The goal, refining raw cane from Caribbean lands into "pure" white crystals for European consumption required extremely high yields of raw material—twenty tons of cane produced just one ton of raw sugar.⁵ The high demand for refined sugar ensured that these taxing processes continued at a swift, and thus treacherous pace. It also rendered sugar plantations violent sites of both agriculture and industry.



Duval-Carrié does not wish to mask the harsh realities of plantation slavery from the viewer, but rather to explore how—to again use his own term—the “politeness” of artifice not only veils, but also engenders and enables the horrific production and consumption of refinement. In *Sugar Conventions*, he thus glazes Brunias's “saccharine” images with a coating of refined sugar crystals. Layered one over another, sugar becomes historicized and aestheticized, while Brunias's idyllic scenes are then inscribed with the urgency of contemporary industry. Duval-Carrié thus employs sweetness to subversive ends, drawing in and then enchanting the viewer, only to reveal upon closer examination how the object of desire, be it art or sugar, actually serves as a tool of destruction and violence. The artist situates the subject, the thing, as the key to unlock the disparity between artifice and existence. The physical layers of Duval-Carrié's work thus function as a conceptual framework for the fraught dynamics among visual representation, material production, and social reality.

In *Sugar Conventions*, Duval-Carrié presents the viewer with actual sugar encased under a thick layer of acrylic. By incorporating literal sugar he creates a parallel between the veritable manufacture of this commodity and the production of his own work that documents the visual culture and the historical effluvia of such products. The commodity, be it sugar or cotton, thus

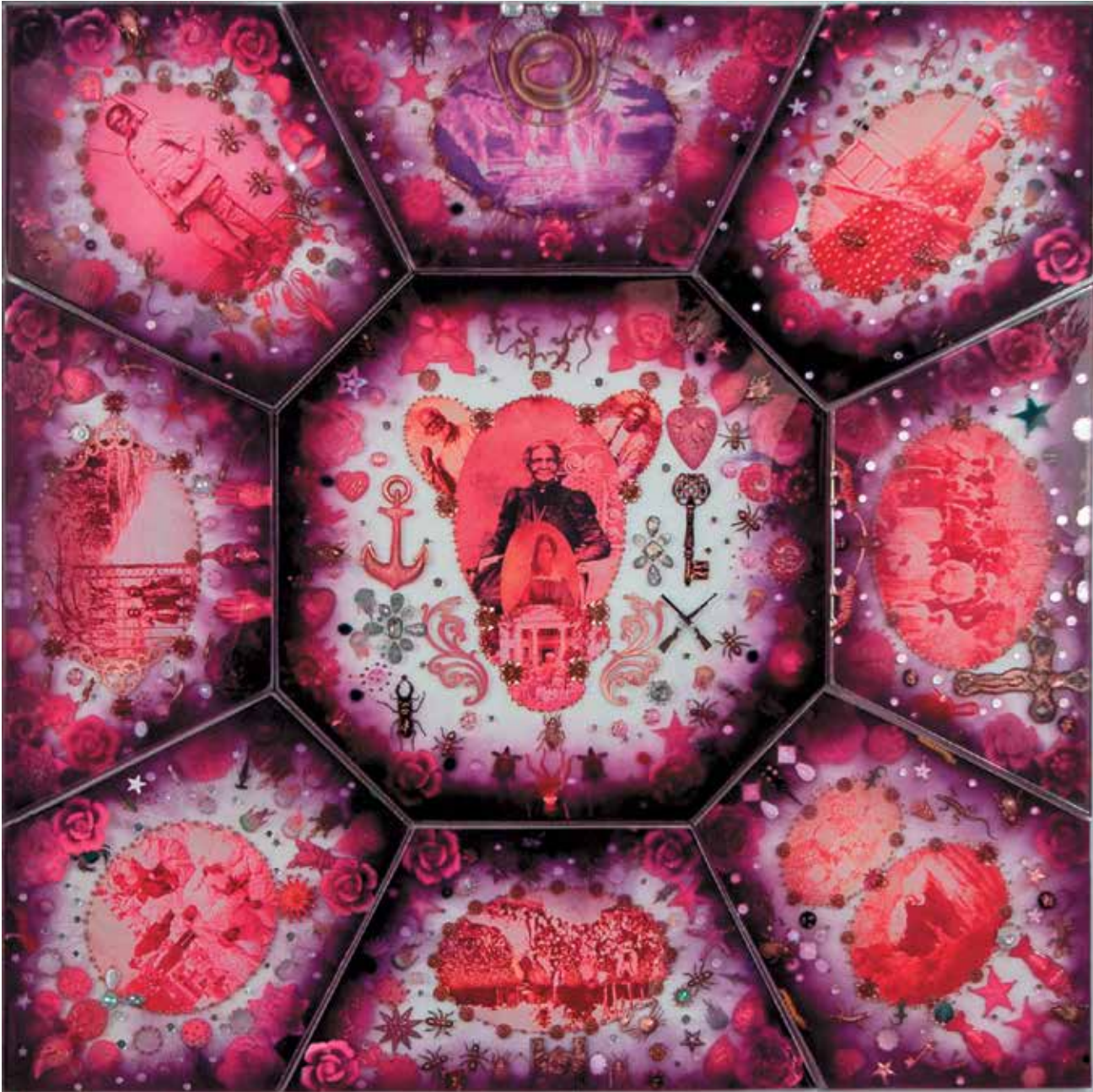


▲[top] Wooden roller “trapis” from sugar mill, 29 x 13½ inches. Courtesy of the Florida Division of Historical Resources.

▲[bottom] Edouard Duval-Carrié, detail of *L'Accident a la Guildive*, from *The Kingdom of This World* series, 2017, engraving on Plexiglas, 31 x 27 inches.

4 See Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985), 21, 49-50; see Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, “Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas,” in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 9.

5 Arthur Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 49.



accentuates the parallel between industrial fabrication and Duval-Carrié's own artistic mode of refinement. The presence of sugar and cotton ultimately bind these processes and serve as relics of the processes of their manufacture—tangible mementos of labor. Instead of the gold and gems of a religious icon, a reliquary of historical photographs, Plexiglas, and resin contain these treasured products; nevertheless they instill in the work a presence akin to sacra that ensoul a religious image.

That Duval-Carrié's works have been taken up to serve as sacred objects points to the validity of the interpretation that sees his art as analogous to sacred imagery. In Peter Sutherland's contribution to *Continental Shifts* (2007) he describes a conference that he had organized at Louisiana State University, where Duval-Carrié had "jumped up from his front-row seat, walked over to the screen and pointed at the sculptures of the pythons and crosses, shouting: 'Hey! Those are *my* sculptures! He's turned them into fetishes.'" The artist was referring to the co-option of a series of objects that he had originally designed for the Ouidah 92 Reunion. Duval-Carrié's installation of these sculptural, spiritual antennae along a half mile of Ouidah's coastline recall the rituals held on the beach in Haiti that were performed to reunite the souls of ancestors with their African origins. Reversing this process, the Ouidah installation was designed to guide ancestral spirits from their home in Haiti back to Benin, the place from whence they had been sold into slavery. However, before Duval-Carrié could stake these sculptures into the sand, Daagbo Hounon, Benin's Supreme Chief of Vodun, requested that they be relocated to the entrance of his palace. He intended to re-situate them at this threshold not as works of art, but rather as powerful, religious fetishes. Upon his return to the beach, Duval-Carrié found that his sculptures had been removed and repurposed. His work had so effectively evoked the sacred that it became ritual instrument.

Duval-Carrié often complicates the border between art and "fetish." Edward Sullivan has suggested that his early works actively sought to "re-sacramentalize" the museum through the incorporation of Vodou symbols and imaginings.⁶ As his recent production demonstrates, the artist now extends this spirituality beyond a pictorial likeness and into the very materials and processes comprising the work itself. Duval-Carrié's most recent pieces, such as *Memory Window #4* (2017), largely comprise layers of accreting materials and images as a means of invoking the sacred through the art object. Like *Sugar Conventions*, an ethereal glow surrounds the resin panels of *Memory Window*, produced by glittering substances adhered to their surface and interior illumination. These captivating layers render his works as objects of ritual at the same moment that they ask the viewer to consider the

⁶ Edward J. Sullivan, "Continental Shifts: Edouard Duval-Carrié and the Re-Invention of the New," in *Continental Shifts: The Art of Edouard Duval-Carrié*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan (Miami, FL: American Art Corporation, 2007), 22.

◀[facing page] Edouard Duval-Carrié, *Memory Window #4*, 2017, mixed media embedded in resin in artist's frame, backlit, 58 x 58 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



▲ Tombstone, strap form cross, iron, 18.84 x 32.4 inches, originally from Oakland Plantation Cemetery. Image courtesy of the Southeast Archaeological Center, US National Parks Service.

► [facing page] Edouard Duval-Carrié, *Sugar Bun and Sugar Puff*, 2017, installation view from the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, 9 x 9 feet each. Image courtesy of the artist.

ritualization and the former lives of the objects encased within them.⁷ Duval-Carrié thus imbues sacrality into materials in order to reframe, or perhaps decommodify, the precious, vital nature of these products in historical terms.

Memory Window's glow invokes the numinous through its transient radiance, but it also loudly articulates the work's prominence in the stark space of the museum gallery. The light makes the work known—visible—in the same instance that it invokes the unknown—the invisible. This spectacle of (in)visibility resonates with the photographic memorabilia layered into this “window.” The work 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. Nonetheless, the camera's lens cannot help but objectify its subjects. In this manner, the photograph perpetually refers back to the condition of enslavement and commodification of the sitter. This seems to be a fundamental paradox of refinement: it demands invisible labor to create the most visible of products. Thus, while these products are upheld as the paragon of civilized achievement, the people who labored and suffered in the service of these material processes are relegated to inhuman status, their mark on the material world unacknowledged. The photographs in *Memory Window* push back against this tendency to dehumanize and veil enslaved labor, yet the commodification and objectification of the image remains a persistent reminder of the problematic (in)visible legacy of the enslaved.

An iron cross from the slave burial site of Oakland Plantation, Louisiana, further attests to the desire to humanize the enslaved by inscribing their presence on the land and to therefore attain a sense of social agency, even in death. A beautiful cross with fleur-de-lis foliation at the end of the arms declares the name “JOSEPH” incised in bold lettering across the horizontal bar. This iron cross marked the grave of an enslaved man whose personhood and legal entitlement to land had been denied in life, but whose name and material presence proclaims an active negotiation of social selfhood, even in death. The refined cross, material evidence of an enslaved heritage and its value systems, persists, like a photographic image, as a vibrant remnant of a lived past, marking the absence of life through death.

This oscillation between presence and absence manifests in *Memory Window* through the white light emanating from the work, which renders its photographs visible along with the relentless gaze of the sitters, one of whom, at top right, even brandishes a weapon. Krista Thompson identifies dramatic lighting such as this to be a marker of presence and excessive performativity, although to spectators, Thompson notes, these performers, like the sitters in

⁷ In his seminal work on the transatlantic relationship between sugar production and modernization, Sidney Mintz suggests that sugar became “ritualized” in British society both through its incorporation into the performative nature of everyday life as well as the perceived conceptual and historical continuity between sugar and one's sense of identity or intrinsic sense of belonging. See Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 122.

the photographs, remain unseen or “invisible,” a term first coined by Ralph Ellison.⁸ Duval-Carrié materially conjures these conditions of invisibility in *Memory Window*—through the many uncanny objects enshrining the photographs, or even the sitters themselves, who defy subjugation with their gaze—to ask how the colonial veiling and displacement of enslaved bodies manifests in the aesthetics and materials we value today. This refusal of existing social and political structures—“highlighting the limits of existing structures”⁹ by literally *high-lighting* their aesthetic and material make-up—through which Duval-Carrié engages in his decolonial practice, breaks down the very mechanisms of refinement that he brings to bear on the gallery.

Duval-Carrié’s efforts to re-sanctify the museum and the processes and products of refinement again converge elegantly in the large-scale sculptural installation *Sugar Boat* (2017). The large form of a boat, painted stark white with abstracted stars shooting out from its sides, is suspended weightlessly from the ceiling. Numerous resin anemones hang from thin wires, like fireflies, around the perimeter itself sparkling with glitter. Airy and gleaming, the ship transforms the gallery into an oceanic seascape, and the viewers into *ambaglos*, reverential Vodou ancestral figures that live beneath the water and which Duval-Carrié portrays as bodies floating in vegetal space in *La vraie histoire des Ambaglos*

8 Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 39-40.

9 Ibid, 41.





[*The True History of the Underwater Spirits*] (2003). Indeed, Duval-Carrié invokes the sacred in *Sugar Boat* through both explicit and implicit renderings of Vodou symbolism. The boat itself is a manifestation of the *Iwa* [Vodou deity] Agwé, Lord of the Sea, whose likeness Duval-Carrié has earlier portrayed in *Agwé* (1994), as a humanoid form with tentacles upon his head who sits waist deep in a body of water dotted with vegetation. Agwé's attributes emanate from *Sugar Boat*—the color white, seashells, boats, and cane syrup (liquid sugar)—thus rendering the gallery a site of spiritual invocation particularly attuned to “whiteness” and sugar. The seven-sided shooting stars protruding from the boat symbolize the *Iwa* Ezili Danto, the defender and protectress often portrayed as Agwé's wife, whom Duval-Carrié has depicted alongside Agwé in *Le Dahomey ou la Descente d'Erzulie* (1994). The stars on *Sugar Boat* that call upon Ezili also signify the key to Ginen, the ancestral and mythic Vodou homeland that may only be reached in the afterlife by undersea travel.

In *Sugar Boat*, as in *Sugar Conventions*, Duval-Carrié thus foregrounds the perpetual quest for the road home as a product of displacement, both from the historical institution of slavery and from modern-day oppressions that continue to force Haitians and other Caribbean citizens to migrate from their adoptive homelands. The boat becomes the literal and figurative vehicle in this eternal search for home. Duval-Carrié draws upon the boat motif frequently, in works such as *Le Retable des Neufs Esclaves* (1989), *After Bierstadt: The Landing of Columbus* (2013), and *Le Traversée* (2016), where discontentment, the uncanny, and inbetweenness become fixed states of being. The *Sugar Boat* thus materializes in the gallery as a fictive relic of the Middle Passage, a persistent reminder of the commodification of the land and of the people who worked the land in the service of refinement; it is also a reminder that relics of labor, production, and forced migration have been suppressed if not wholly erased from the visual record, even as products of refinement, like gleaming white sugar crystals, or even Duval-Carrié's work itself, are continually valorized. Neither humans nor ships remain from these transatlantic voyages, rendering the luminous boat as much an imagined cultural absence as a spectacular museal presence.

Duval-Carrié reimagined a previous sculptural work, *Boat in Field of Anemones Waiting for the Spirits* (2006), as the foundational form for *Sugar Boat*. The self-referential underpinnings of this work—as a representational conflation of Duval-Carrié's past and present creations—further confounds the “presence” of the boat. Its glitter lends a luminosity that, like *Memory Window* and *Sugar Conventions*, proclaims its existence in the gallery while also threatening to disappear, like a shapeless, colorless ghost, into the “white

▲Edouard Duval-Carrié, *Le Traversée*, 2016, mixed media on aluminum in artist's frame, 68 x 68 inches. Lyle O. Reitzel Gallery New York—Santo Domingo.

cube.” The boat sparkles like a jewel, signifying a preciousness that may be read as the privileged value of the art object in the museum. This gleaming quality also reads to the eye as the preciousness of sugar, a mundane commodity, but with a value that nonetheless shaped the modern world. In both cases, the art object and the foodstuff, the value of the object transcends its labor input and instead becomes marked by the social performativity of refinement. By referencing commodification alongside notions of material and conceptual presence and absence, in the museum gallery no less, Duval-Carrié attempts to fold the previously hidden labor, and societal costs, of refinement back into the perceived value of its products.

In this manner, *Sugar Boat*, and all of Duval-Carrié’s contemporary pursuits, reference transformation as well as transubstantiation. The artist’s relics draw our awareness not just to what we see—sugar—but to that which remains hidden from plain sight—the persistence of the colonial into today. Therefore, it seems no coincidence that Duval-Carrié’s work so heavily invokes Vodou imagery and symbolism. The artist materially engages Joan Dayan’s suggestion that Vodou, “must be viewed as ritual reenactments of Haiti’s colonial past.”¹⁰ In short, the colonial past, by the very nature of its coloniality, finds itself embedded, materially and socially, in the modern present. The oscillation between past and present in Duval-Carrié’s work, through light, space, image, and commodities, engages a fluxus of space and time that reveals gateways into aspects of our circum-Caribbean heritage that have persisted unseen and unappreciated. The slippages of Duval-Carrié’s work, the perceived fragility of his constructions, the permanence of their impermanence, render his works as active decolonizing agents.

What began years ago as a discussion with Duval-Carrié about refinement and its relationship to Caribbean history has slowly rippled out into a pursuit of the layers that today comprise North Florida’s history and heritage. Through this pursuit, we discovered how profoundly the mechanisms of refinement—namely, transformation and commodification, of the land, of its processes and products, of its people—reside in the Forgotten Coast of North Florida. Indeed, we dwell in a region that has largely been invisible to the rest of the country, but its transformations have been real. One need only look to the “living history” enacted at Mission San Luis or the architectural ruins of Verdura Plantation that lie dormant beneath the region’s lush flora, to understand North Florida’s heritage not as a palimpsest of erasures, but rather as densely knotted and “multidirectional” socio-cultural threads.¹¹

Colonialism never fully obliterated the history, heritage, and humanity of subjugated populations; rather, colonialism has made that history, heritage, and humanity difficult to locate. As some images continue to mask socio-

10 Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), xvii.

11 Michaeline A. Crichlow, *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination: Notes on Fleeing the Plantation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.



economic inequities in today's world, other images, like those by Duval-Carrié, work to bring these imbalanced structures into view. In Duval-Carrié's *Of Cotton, Gunboats, and Petticoats* (2017), colonialism manifests as an urgent presence into which the past has been literally and figuratively inscribed [for full image see page 39]. An anthropomorphic tree wears a pleated blue dress with white puffed sleeves and a red and white necktie—together these colors signify the US, France, and Haiti. The colors appear serene and inviting—enchanted—yet this tree points downward, quietly alerting the viewer to the sinister scene below of a militarized ship she straddles between her feet while Haiti alights in flames. The tree possesses not roots dug into the earth, but rather feet firmly planted atop the ocean, which remain literally chained to the land via a stake in the ground that tautly shackles the tree. The branches seem bare and uninviting with small thorns emerging from all sides. Along these branches, small medallions perpetually bloom. Of the genus *Gossypium* (cotton), these blossoms are portrayed in various states of bloom, from the delicate flower that first blossoms to the boll, the pod from which the cotton fibers emerge, also depicted on the ceiling of Goodwood Museum's parlor, which only materializes after the flower has bloomed and wilted. This cycle of life and death seems a deceptively entrancing nod to the backbreaking labor of harvesting that the blooming cotton would soon demand. Duval-Carrié appropriates the illustrations of these blooms from historical sources, which would have been used not only to entice viewers with their beauty, but also as empirical documents to justify the fervent colonial pursuit to exploit resources and enslave humans.¹² Duval-Carrié brings these historical documents into his contemporary work, rendering the work uncanny, in a state of un-knowability that has been further amplified by the disorienting “googly eyes” used to enliven the tree's gaze.

▲Edouard Duval-Carrié, detail, *Of Cotton, Gunboats and Petticoats*, 2017, mixed media on aluminum artist's frame, 72 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist. For full image, see page 39.

¹² See Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

The imminent presence of this surface, further marked by its textured foreground, and its invocation of empire, “rootlessness,” and resources reminds us that even though official institutions of enslavement have ceased in our own nation, colonial systems of production and consumption persist and move through the global oceanic channels, as unseen and unacknowledged as they were in the past.

Over the years, in conversation and collaboration with both Duval-Carrié and local institutions, we have come to see how deeply entangled the heritage of the Forgotten Coast has always been with Duval-Carrié’s Caribbean. Less than twenty miles directly south of Tallahassee, the sleepy town of St. Marks sits at the confluence of the Wakulla and St. Marks Rivers. These pristine waters slowly feed into Apalachee Bay and ultimately into the Gulf of Mexico. Along the waterfront, an historic marker tells the story of Port Leon, a short-lived town just south of St. Marks. The town centered on a railroad terminus constructed with the expressed purpose of transporting cotton in and out of the region in the 1830s and 1840s, thus taking the product of enslaved labor far from the oppressed producers and onward to the conspicuous consumers. In 1843, a hurricane swiftly wiped the railroad terminus off the map. Today, in its stead, a marker reminds us of the “Ghost Town” that once stood in this bucolic landscape, an historical site now invisible yet persistent, which itself once wrought enslaved labor invisible yet its products persistent. We thus convene at the Museum of Fine Arts in pursuit of bringing Duval-Carrié’s vision of refinement into conversation with the materials and images—the archives of production—that comprise North Florida’s artifice and reality.

— Lesley A. Wolff, Michael D. Carrasco, and Paul B. Niell



▲ Mexican Cotton in bloom (*Gossypium hirsutum*). Image courtesy of Michael D. Carrasco.