





# Say It Jeannette Ehlers Loud!

**Striking Reverberations.  
Beating Back the Unfinished  
History of the Colonial Aesthetic  
with Jeannette Ehlers' *Whip it Good*  
Mathias Danbolt**

**Striving for Self-Education,  
Consciousness and Knowledge.  
A Dialogue with Jeannette Ehlers  
Alanna Lockward**

**Against Oblivion  
Rolando Vázquez**

*Crack!*

The camera pans across a dim room filled with white plaster casts of antique reliefs and statues. With the sound of a cracking whip, the title of the video hits the screen: *Whip It Good*. Cut to the middle of the room where a woman carefully smears a large black leather whip with charred coal from a bowl on the floor. She is dressed in a white skirt and top, her face and body painted with white patterns on her dark skin. Whip in hand, she gets up and walks toward a large white canvas that stands upright on the floor to the height of a body. She strikes the canvas with full force. The whip leaves a large black streak on the white surface. She returns to the bowl of coal and smears the whip before giving the canvas another blow. She increases the pace of the whipping. To the escalating rhythm of the cracking whip, the filmic image starts to fracture. The image cuts back and forth between footage of the woman whipping and the white plaster cast statues surrounding the scene: close-up images of a smashed white face, a white cracked arm, a white foot with a whip beside it appear in rapid succession in between images of the canvas, the woman, and the scene of the flogging. By now, the white canvas is crisscrossed with black stripes. The woman is panting audibly. Black dreadlocks have fallen out of her white headscarf, and her white body paint is smudged and mired with black traces of coal. After having given the canvas a final blow, she throws the lash on the floor and walks out of the frame.

*Crack!*

The Danish-Caribbean artist Jeannette Ehlers first presented her five-minute video performance *Whip It Good* at her solo show *SAY IT LOUD!* at Nikolaj Kunsthal—Copenhagen Contemporary Art Centre in Denmark in the spring of 2014.<sup>1</sup> The exhibition was the most extensive presentation to date of Ehlers's long-term artistic examination of Denmark's colonial history and involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The citation of James Brown's famous funk song 'Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud' (1968) in the title of the exhibition indicates a desire to break the quietude surrounding the effects of Denmark's history as a colonial power: from the seventeenth century onwards, this history included Denmark's possession of slave forts on the Gold Coast of Africa and of colonial territories in India, the Caribbean and the North Atlantic. But the reference to Brown's song also foregrounds the important role that black pride and specifically black womanhood plays in Ehlers's work. Born and raised in Denmark with a black Caribbean father and a white Danish mother, Ehlers often draws upon her genealogical bonds, which cross relations of power between the colonizer and the colonized,

in her video and photography-based practice. In this way her work attends to the historical haunting of what the theorist of 'decoloniality,' Walter D. Mignolo, has termed 'the darker side of Western modernity.'<sup>2</sup> Ehlers's work is closely connected to what has been termed the 'decolonial turn' in art and theory, describing the dialogical encounters between artists, thinkers and citizen-intellectuals in South America, the Caribbean, and diasporic communities in the US, Europe and beyond, who share a 'horizon of thinking and being' founded on analyses of 'coloniality as a fundamental problem in the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and of decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished.'<sup>3</sup> As a complementary project to postcolonial discourses that emerged in response to British colonialism and in the critiques of Orientalism, decolonial thinking dwells in different geo-historical territories across the Americas, with a genealogy that includes indigenous and anti-imperial resistance from the sixteenth century onwards that parallels the narratives of the modern imperial/colonial expansion.<sup>4</sup>

The interconnection between modernity and coloniality is also centre stage in the performance video *Whip It Good*, where Ehlers subjects a white canvas to one of the most customary and iconic forms of punishment during chattel slavery. While *Whip It Good* can be seen to give a beating to Danish colonial history, the enactment of retribution also puts pressure on the entanglement between histories of art and histories of colonialism. This entanglement is underscored by Ehlers's staging of a scenario where the execution of art takes the form of punishment, and where the execution of punishment takes the form of an artwork. Different transactions are in other words being played out on the white canvas, which comes to function as a 'contact zone,' to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's term, where the past and the present, aesthetics and colonialism, history and memory smack into each other.<sup>5</sup>

*Crack!*

The video performance Ehlers presented on a monitor in *SAY IT LOUD!* was just one manifestation of the project *Whip It Good*. The piece was first developed and presented as a live performance at Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin in 2013 during the transdisciplinary art event *BE.BOP: Black Europe Body Politics*, organized by the Dominican curator and decolonial theorist Alanna Lockward.<sup>6</sup> Dressed in similar garments and with white body paint as in the video performance, Ehlers performed the act of whipping a white canvas in the art gallery surrounded by crowds of people. After having given the canvas a proper round of blows, Ehlers stepped aside and invited

members of the public to pick up the whip and continue where she left off.<sup>7</sup> This participatory element has also featured in the live iterations of *Whip It Good* that Ehlers has performed in the US, the UK, the Netherlands, as well as at the opening of her exhibition in Copenhagen where the video performance was on show.

Ehlers's repeated performances of *Whip It Good* indicate the ritual character of the enactment—a ritual in which Ehlers invites the public to take part. But this invitation complicates the sense and sensation of the act, as it puts pressure on questions of entitlement and embodiment pertaining to the act of whipping. The flogging of the white canvas conjures different effects and affects depending on the body swinging the whip, the composition of the audience, and the place where it unfolds. The significance of the gesture cannot but change when being performed in a gallery by, for instance, a white man like me rather than by a black woman like Ehlers, as both the gesture of whipping and the white canvas are so heavily charged by their historical connotations and their links to aestheticized, sexualized, gendered, and racialized scenes of subjection.

I have not yet been present during Ehlers's live performances of *Whip It Good*, and therefore not been able to witness or participate in whipping the canvas. Instead, this essay could be seen as an attempt to respond to Ehlers's invitation to pick up the whip, using black letters on white paper rather than cowhide on canvas to contribute to what I see as the project's passionate rage against the entangled and unfinished histories of modern art and colonialism. But writing is different from whipping. While Ehlers's enactment is far from inarticulate, it does not operate within the registers of the pedagogical—like this text does—and provides no clear message or 'history lesson for the white Dane without any knowledge of the Danish history of slavery', as Signe Emilie Tveskov has noted in reference to the work.<sup>8</sup> Refraining from taking on the task of teaching the uninformed majority about its implications in histories of oppression, Ehlers's hard-hitting enactment leaves it up to us to reflect upon our own position in the entangled histories of art and colonialism.<sup>9</sup> If my embodied specificity is less obviously on the line when whipping the page with words rather than a canvas in public, this does not mean that questions of embodiment are irrelevant to my encounter with this project. Not only has the act of watching the video performance its own embodied effects, but my written response to *Whip It Good* is also informed by my situated knowledge as a gay, white art historian, based in Denmark (to mention only some of the uncertain terms that mark my position), originally schooled in the whitewashed tradition of Eurocentric art history that I read *Whip It Good* as working against.

In the following I seek to think with and alongside Ehlers's project to examine its engagement with what we could call the

unfinished histories of colonial-aesthetic injustice. This approach is informed by decolonial theory and in particular the important argument that Mignolo, drawing on the work of Aníbal Quijano and Gloria Anzaldúa, makes for 'de-linking' from the 'colonial matrix of power'—a matrix sustained by the rhetoric of modernity (development, growth, progression), which in turn is inseparable from the logic of coloniality, understood as 'the transhistorical expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times.'<sup>10</sup> Decolonial analyses of the ways in which the logic of coloniality have been dependent on the 'construction, transformation, and sustenance' of racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative structures of knowledge and the senses often work within or in close proximity to queer feminist thinking.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the greater part of (white) queer feminist research in the Anglosphere seldom engages with decolonial thinking. By tuning into Ehlers's lashings and their reverberations as the whip hits the canvas, I hope that this essay can function as a contact zone where discourses of decoloniality and queer feminism come in contact with each other. More specifically, through my reading of *Whip It Good*, I seek to make a case for the importance of bringing the project of 'decolonial aesthetics' to the front of queer feminist art history.<sup>12</sup> Describing a set of interventionist practices that confront the role that modern aesthetics have played in the configuration of the colonial 'geopolitics of sensing, knowing and believing,' enactments of 'decolonial aesthetics' gesture beyond hegemonic 'worlds of sense' in ways that, I argue, could join forces with the queer feminist desire of sensing and seeing differently.<sup>13</sup>

### *Crack!*

What is the 'it' being whipped in *Whip It Good*? A white canvas? A blank page? A clean slate? An unexplored territory? A forgotten record? A white canvas is hardly ever only a white canvas. It attracts metaphorical and figurative readings. In the switch point between the literal and the metaphorical, the white canvas in *Whip It Good* functions as a screen of projections where different images, imaginaries, affects, and histories play out in the enactment of whipping. If the white canvas invites different readings, the framing of the act in the performance video of *Whip It Good* encourages certain interpretive orientations. The five-minute video does not present itself as a straightforward documentation of a performance, as it is clearly made with and for a camera. But the camera is not the only spectator to the scene. The jump cuts between the white plaster-cast statues and the woman whipping, position the statues as participants of sorts in the act, participants that are not only witnesses, as they also figure as the imaginary targets of the retribution. To give a better sense of the stakes in this metonymical slide between the white canvas and the white statues, a closer look at the space where the enactment takes place is necessary.

For viewers familiar with the art institutions of Copenhagen, the location of Ehlers's video performance of *Whip It Good* is easily recognizable: the West Indian Warehouse, constructed in 1780–81 to accommodate the valuable goods brought in from the Danish colonies in the Caribbean—St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas—primarily sugar, rum, cotton, and tobacco. Decades after Denmark sold its Caribbean colonies to the United States in 1917, this colonial warehouse was taken over by the National Gallery of Denmark, which installed the Royal Cast Collection in the building in 1984: a collection of over 2000 plaster casts of seminal sculptures in the history of European art from the Greek antiquity until the late Renaissance.

The plaster cast statues appearing in *Whip It Good* are well known from the art historical canon of antique Greece: from the classical image of female beauty in the form of the Late Hellenistic Aphrodite, or 'Venus de Milo' (c. 100 BC) to a section of the Pergamon Alter frieze (c. 164–156 BC), depicting the furious Goddess of Vengeance. While artists traditionally have brought their white canvases to the collection in order to draw and copy these canonical examples in the history of European art, the artist-protagonist in Ehlers's video performance has another agenda. She is not here to learn history by copying it, she is here to give it a beating. Appearing as a reconfigured black Goddess of Vengeance, she strikes back at the persistent myth of Greece as the cradle of Western art and modernity—a myth that has fuelled the co-constituted discourse of modernity/coloniality. The heroic idealization of Greece also explains why the cast collection includes so many copies of seminal works from antique Greece in the first place. The collection was established in 1895 according to the aesthetic ideals formulated by Johann Joachim Winckelmann in *History of Art in Antiquity* (1764); ideals that instituted a paradigm shift in situating antique Greece rather than the Roman Empire as the proper origin of European aesthetic and political ideals. According to Winckelmann, the white statues from the Greek antique expressed the highest ideals of beauty—a form of beauty that clearly separated the serenity of Greek art from the colourful and 'primitive' cultures of Egyptian and North African counterparts.<sup>14</sup> That the Greek sculptures were originally colourfully painted—a fact long lost on Winckelmann, but known for centuries—has until recently been wilfully overlooked, thus promoting the idea of 'white' beauty as foundational to the aesthetic image of European art and culture.<sup>15</sup>

Ehlers's enactment, in short, unfolds in the midst of a collection devised as a pedagogical training ground for the cultivation of white, enlightened subjects able to distinguish between the modern and the primitive, the beautiful and the ugly, the valuable and the valueless—qualities central to the ideological formation of the modern individual, the artist, and art itself.<sup>16</sup> These supportive relations between the history of art, aesthetic education and the history of colonial domination are

anachronistically brought to the fore in the installation of the collection in the West Indian Warehouse; an installation that stands as a reminder of the ways in which the 'notion of art as an inherently superior mode of human production [was] [...] invented just at the moment when Europeans, confronting other kinds of culture, need[ed] to reinforce their superiority as a people,' as Amelia Jones has argued.<sup>17</sup>

In an article about the history of the Royal Cast Collection, art historian Henrik Holm remarks that the collection's presence in the West Indian Warehouse emphasizes that the collection's *ethos* is founded on 'the superiority of the white man.'<sup>18</sup> But, he continues, the collection's presence today in this peripheral building with limited opening hours and few visitors also signals the final demise of this Winckelmann-inspired 'whites only' approach to art history.<sup>19</sup> The collection not only 'misfires' in its performative attempt to reproduce a narrative of Western superiority, it also shows that this 'grand narrative about white, Western man's superiority and journey through world history towards ever greater freedom, knowledge, and control of their surroundings can no longer be told, for the collection's own story contradicts that narrative.'<sup>20</sup>

Holm's discussion of the white supremacist and colonialist ethos of the Royal Cast Collection gives us quite a few pointers as to why Ehlers might have wanted to enact *Whip It Good* in these surroundings. But his argument about the collection and its ideology's 'expiry date' simultaneously prompts question of the timing of Ehlers's act of retribution: If the grand narrative of white superiority is indeed dead and buried, as Holm seems to suggest, is the 'it' being whipped in *Whip It Good* merely an old corpse? A colonial-racist narrative that is no longer operative, except as a history we can look back upon, with safe distance from the present?

### *Crack!*

Who decides the beginning and ending of a history? How do we determine when something is over and thus no longer informing the shape of the present? I hear reverberations of chronopolitical questions like these in the sound of the whip hitting the white canvas in Ehlers's performance video. The insistent beating of the white canvas can be heard as a refutation of the claims that the narrative of white supremacist aesthetics no longer holds any traction on the present. This is not to say that Holm is mistaken in pointing out the important changes that have taken place within and beyond the discipline of art history since Winckelmann. To deny the ruptures that have been made in the ideological frameworks that have supported white supremacist Eurocentric narratives would undermine the world-changing accomplishments by generations of, among others, decolonial, anti-racist, feminist, and queer activists, politicians, scholars, and artists. But historical, political and cultural upheavals do not necessarily mean that we can relegate

questions of white supremacy to the past, driven by the desire for clean slates central to the rhetoric of beyonding that informs our so-called post-historical, post-race, post-identity, post-feminist times. Ehlers's beating of the white canvas might in short be seen as a reminder of the importance of being cautious in relation to claims of clean breaks and blank slates.

The metaphorical connection between blank slates, new beginnings, and wilful forgetting is central to the colonial imaginary. Think only of Christopher Columbus, who named the islands in the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean, which he claimed to have 'discovered' in 1493, after Saint Ursula and the 1100 virgins—a gendered and sexualized image of innocence and novelty that could only appear as such through the genocide of the peoples inhabiting the territory before his 'discovery.' The image of the innocence of the clean slate also remains central to Denmark's relationship to its history of colonizing three of these 'Virgin Islands'. While Denmark's history as a colonial power has not been completely wiped out, the cleansing has taken the form of selective remembrance and political disconnections.<sup>21</sup> The fact that Denmark divested itself of its tropical colonies and left them in the hands of larger colonial powers at an early date in comparison to other European states has aided what anthropologist Karen Fog Olwig calls a process of 'deglobalization' that secured the persistent 'obliviousness to the international critique of colonialism' in Denmark.<sup>22</sup> Instead the memory of colonialism has 'lived on in patriotic narratives [...] that [have] helped boost a national image of former grandeur.'<sup>23</sup> Debates about national accountability and remorse have thus never taken hold in Denmark, and the history of the 'Danish West Indies'—as the territories are still called in public debates—remains informed by romanticized narratives of the Danes as the 'good' colonialists in contrast to the British, Spanish, Dutch, and French. With little public interest in and knowledge about the long-term effects of Danish exploitation of its colonial territories long after the divestment, the 'Danish West Indies' remains figured within the realm of 'an imagined world.'<sup>24</sup>

Still, in recent years there has been an increasing critical interest in the study of Danish and Nordic colonialism from researchers across different disciplines,<sup>25</sup> and a number of artists and curators, including Ehlers, Pia Arke, Nanna Debois Buhl, Patricia Kaersenhout, La Vaughn Belle, Tamar Guimarães, and Kuratorisk Aktion have produced important exhibitions and visual art and performance projects that mine presences and absences in current conceptualizations of Danish colonialism.<sup>26</sup> Art historians have remained remarkably absent from these discussions, and no thorough studies exist that examine the role that colonialism has played—economically, politically, culturally—in the formation of Danish art and modern culture.<sup>27</sup>

Danish politics has also not been visibly affected by the recent studies that examine the

effects of Danish colonialism today, as suggested by the Danish government's response to the official summons in the fall of 2013 from the Caribbean CARICOM Reparations Commission, which seeks to 'establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of reparations by the former colonial European countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community, for native genocide, the transatlantic slave trade and a racialized system of chattel slavery.'<sup>28</sup> In a parliamentary debate on the issue, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed that although the government acknowledged this 'black and dark chapter in world history', as he audaciously described it, and that it wanted to support projects that ensure that the history of slavery would not be forgotten, the government would not apologize for past misdoings: 'What we can, must, and will do, is to focus on the present and the future.'<sup>29</sup>

### *Crack!*

What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me? Should I call it history? If so, what should history mean to someone like me? Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound and each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again and again, over and over, or is it a moment that began in 1492 and has come to no end yet?<sup>30</sup>

Who decides the beginning or ending of a history? In the essay 'In History,' the Antiguan author Jamaica Kincaid reflects upon her position in a history of colonialism that was never her own, but which conditions her existence: a history of modernity where freedom for some was dependent on the systematic subjugation of others; a history that some celebrate as an event from bygone times, while others experience it as a 'moment that began in 1492 and has come to no end yet.'<sup>31</sup> By re-describing the history of colonialism as an *ongoing moment*, Kincaid problematizes the historiographical logic of the 'separation principle' central to historical thinking, which safely distinguishes the past from the present, the living from the dead, the here from the there.<sup>32</sup> Kincaid's attention to living 'in history' gives texture to the violence of historicizing gestures that prematurely relegate ongoing problems to the dustbin of history, and works as a reminder of the importance of not presupposing that we always know what times we are dealing with when engaging with unfinished histories of injustice. The fact that *times out of joint* have been highlighted as a central feature of our present 'coloniality of power', as decolonial thinkers describe the transhistorical continuation of colonial exploitation after formal decolonization, only underscores this point.<sup>33</sup>

The understanding of 1492 as an ongoing moment invites a return to the question of the timing of Ehlers's enactment of retribution in *Whip It Good*. It can be tempting to read Ehlers's whipping as a response to the Danish government's claim that the only thing they 'can, must and will do' in relation to its colonial

history is to clean the slate and look towards the future, rather than burdening the country with an awareness of an unchangeable past. Still, *Whip It Good* does not operate within the field of political rhetoric of demands and redress. Instead, it stages a scenario that presents the act of retribution as a *problem*, a problem that involves questions of labour and intelligibility. Each time *Whip It Good* is performed, the canvas is white. Each time, Ehlers whips black marks onto the white surface. The iterative nature of the performance emphasizes the hard work of repetition, or rather *insistence*, as Gertrude Stein would phrase it, in the enactment.<sup>34</sup> This is an act that gives emphasis to the hard work of insisting that there *are* indeed problems to deal with—that the colonial past is not *passé*. But by refraining from formulating a demand and thereby restricting the question of responsibility for an unfinished history to politicians or other public institutions, *Whip It Good* calls those of us engaging with the piece to make out the contours of the problem space. Whether the retribution in *Whip It Good* appears legible or illegible, or comes across as *timely* or *untimely*, says in short less about the piece in itself than it does about the one asking the question and making the judgments.

#### *Crack!*

The loud cracks of the whip hitting the canvas in the video performance *Whip It Good* are uncomfortable to listen to. They whip up the sound of slavery. Although there are no bodies at the receiving end of the whip and only a 'mute' canvas, the video evokes the soundscape known from written accounts such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass—An American Slave* (1845). In the opening chapter of Douglass's narrative he writes about the recurrent experience of 'been awakened at the dawn of day' by the 'heart-rending shrieks' of his Aunt Hester being whipped by the Master.<sup>35</sup> Being a witness to this 'horrible exhibition' marks what he describes as 'the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery.'<sup>36</sup> Douglass's description of the 'terrible spectacle' of the beating of Aunt Hester underscores the *creative* force in the act of whipping—a force that 'births' Douglass into a new subjectivity void of subjecthood.<sup>37</sup> The whip gives him a 'corporal identity' as a slave that excludes him from citizenry; the bodily inscription makes him a subject who equals an object.<sup>38</sup> But the writing on the flesh is not only constitutive of the slave's experience, it also constitutes the white Master as Master. As a literalization of the Hegelian 'master/slave' dialectic, the black body becomes a canvas upon which the white Master can carry out and confirm his sense of self.<sup>39</sup>

Douglass's positioning of the 'terrible spectacle' of whipping as a primal scene has become foundational to narratives of slavery, including those of the visual realm. '[S]lavery on film has continually deployed the spectacular image for maximum visual impact and

emotional response,' Morgan Quaintance writes in an article on Steve McQueen's 2013 Oscar-winning adaptation of Solomon Northup's narrative *12 Years a Slave* (1853) in the context of cinematic histories of enslavement.<sup>40</sup> The privileging of the naturalistic performances of brutality in the depiction of slavery has its risks, as it often restrains the understanding of enslavement to an image of 'man's impassioned, evil and delirious inhumanity to man, rather than a rational form of torture devised by supposedly enlightened minds.'<sup>41</sup> Quaintance's concern echoes Saidiya Hartman's criticism of the routinized reproduction of the spectacle of whipping in her seminal book *Scenes of Subjection*. Hartman begins her study that seeks to 'illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploiting the shocking spectacle' through a paradoxical invocation of Douglass's description of the beating of Aunt Hester—a description she refuses to reproduce 'in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body.'<sup>42</sup> Not wanting to contribute to the 'spectacular character of black suffering,' Hartman instead puts pressure on the ethics of empathy: 'Only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and terrible.'<sup>43</sup>

While Ehlers's enactment of retribution in *Whip It Good* enters into the troublesome field of the spectacularity of slavery, the performance steers clear of the realist tradition that informs the harrowing displays of suffering in films such as *12 Years a Slave*. Here the disfigured black body is replaced by a white canvas, and in the place of the white Master stands a strong black woman with a whip. But despite these decisive replacements and displacements, *Whip It Good* cannot avoid calling forth the spectacular suffering it refuses to reproduce. Images of dismembered bodies ghost the scene. In this way, *Whip It Good* sits in a similar paradox to the one Hartman entertains in her refusal to bring the beating of Aunt Hester into the space of representation: 'the inevitability of such reproduction even in the denial of it,' as Fred Moten explains.<sup>44</sup> But the displacements at play in Hartman's and Ehlers's works are still remarkably effectual, and give space for mining the reproduction of repression itself—from the repression of the primal scene of subjection at play in narratives such as Douglass's, to forms of national and political suppression in the case of Danish colonialism. The blankness of the canvas in *Whip It Good* figures in other words as a signpost of the unavoidable problems of identification and representation that condition engagements with a history of violence that is both spectacular and repressed, reproduced and disappearing. The white canvas foregrounds the limits of the



representational economy of visibility of a realist aesthetics by raising the problem of what T.J. Demos (borrowing from Jacques Derrida) has called 'spectropoetics': 'an aesthetics of the negation of appearance, or the appearance of negation.'<sup>45</sup> If the beating of the white canvas in *Whip It Good* evokes the painful sound of slavery known from filmic realism, the insistent silence that follows after the whip has hit the white canvas (re) produces a different spectropoetical soundscape—one that reverberates with absence, repression, loss, and disappearance.

#### *Crack!*

The white canvas does not remain white over the course of the video performance in *Whip It Good*. The black streaks whipped onto the canvas not only read as a literalization of the ways in which black bodies have been used as a material support for the creative perversities of white Masters, evidenced by abolitionist photographs such as *The Scourged Back* (1863),<sup>46</sup> The enactment also makes a direct connection between the mastery of slaves and the mastery of painting. This conflation of colonial and aesthetic dominance and control read as a forceful amplification of the arguments made by art historians including Donald Preziosi, Catherine Sousloff, Grant Kester, and Amelia Jones on the role that art has played in 'the ideological formation of the modern individual, in turn crucial to the rise of colonialism, capitalism, and industrialism.'<sup>47</sup>

*Whip It Good's* striking manifestation of the creativity in violence and violence of creativity also put pressure on the genre of 'action painting' and its relation to the idea of the unique and expressive individual. As such, *Whip It Good* can be seen to enter into dialogue with the important feminist critiques of the idealization of heroic and violent expressive masculinity—emblemized in Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock's virile painting performance. Ehlers's gesture of painting with a whip also dovetails with feminist works such as Niki de Saint Phalle's series of *Tirs* or 'shooting paintings' from the early 1960s. Here, Saint Phalle shot or invited the audience members to shoot at her canvases built up by layers of white plaster supporting polythene bags of colourful paint that burst and 'bled' when hit by the bullets. While the connections between the forceful anger pouring out of a Saint Phalle work like *La Mort du Patriarce* (1962/72) and the swinging whip in *Whip It Good* are unmistakable, there are also noticeable differences, as the latter project unfolds its feminist critique within a decolonial framework that stresses the racialized underpinnings of the violent figure of masculine creativity. And, while Ehlers, like Saint Phalle, has started to exhibit the canvases after the act, the whipping is not only a means to an end in *Whip It Good*. The act is imbued with a transformative potential as the colonial violence gets turned against the violence of colonial aesthetics: by giving the colonial aesthetics a good whip, one might also whip up something good, or at least

something different or better than what the current hegemonic 'world of sense,' as María Lugones calls it, has to offer.<sup>48</sup>

#### *Crack!*

The whipping up of other sensibilities invites a return to the ritualistic dimension of *Whip It Good*; a dimension accentuated not only by the insistent repetition and reiterations of the enactment, but also by the white body paint covering Ehlers's skin, painted in a pattern that reference the white kaolin clay body paint used by voodoo worshippers in East Africa in rituals connecting the living to the spirits. This spirited and spiritual aspect of *Whip It Good* indicate that feminist art and decolonial theory are but some of the conversation partners in this project. Ancestral knowledge is another.

Voodoo performance has been a recurrent feature in Ehlers's work prior to *Whip It Good*. The four-minute video *Black Magic at the White House* (2009)—situated in the official residence of Denmark's Prime Minister, the eighteenth-century white mansion Marienborg—centers on the dancing silhouette of a female figure who almost blends in with the walls due to the digital manipulation of the image. To an intense track of beating drums, the figure performs a Haitian voodoo dance in the pristine halls and rooms while creating a large white vevé on the floor. The vevé is recognizable as the symbol for the spirit Papa Legba, who in Haitian voodoo serves as the intermediary who opens and closes the doorway between spirits and mortals. The ritual invocation of a spirit facilitating communication and connections seems particularly apt in the rooms of Marienborg, one of the many aesthetic monuments from the Danish 'Golden Age,' built by men who earned their wealth from the slave and sugar trade. The voodoo ritual to Papa Legba not only summons the spirits of black ancestors whose forced labour enabled buildings like Marienborg to exist; it also connects with an old performance tradition whose spiritual sensibilities have played a central role in the struggle against colonial power from the Haitian revolution onwards;<sup>49</sup> a performance tradition that for a long time was and still is regarded as 'naïve' or 'primitive' by the aesthetic standards of Western liberal secularism.

If the summoning of the ancestral is less pronounced in *Whip It Good* than in *Black Magic at the White House*, this should not make us overlook the spirited rebelliousness that reverberates in its operation in the switch point between critique and reparation, retribution and renewal, wounding and healing. In beating back against the unfinished history of colonial aesthetics, and by whipping up a decolonial 'aesthesis of outrage' that reaches back to the ancestral as well as toward new 'geopolitics of sensing, knowing and believing,' *Whip It Good* demonstrates the importance of forging connections in the borderlands of decolonial critique and feminist que(e)ries, where the rhythms of anger keep us on our toes.<sup>50</sup>

*Crack!*

A structure of hope runs through the enactment of anger in *Whip It Good*; a hope that, by dis/figuring the framework of colonial aesthetics that has defined and organized the sensible and legible, one might gain the whip hand in drawing the contours of 'alternative domains of intelligibility—or "worlds of sense"—within what we commonly understand as reality.<sup>51</sup> The anger driving *Whip It Good* is in short not one that begs for respect or 'uptake' within the prevailing colonial-aesthetic political rationality that dismisses critiques, which reach beyond a narrow understanding of the present.<sup>52</sup> This is a spirited aesthesis of outrage, which might not make sense to those who orient themselves after modern/colonial ideas of art (or) history that remain structured around binary conceptions of past/present, presence/absence, or art/non-art. *Whip It Good*'s decolonial aesthesis

is one of borderland perceptions, one where the creative resistance to the effects of modern/colonial aesthetics suggests the need for new cartographies of sensing and knowing beyond the strictures of racist, sexist, and heteronormative organizations of the sensible. The encouragement to pick up the whip and continue the beating that Ehlers invites in the performances of *Whip It Good* highlights potential for connections and contacts across differences and positions. The effects of such transactions between bodies-in-difference of both theoretical and fleshy kind are hard to predict, for this decolonial aesthesis gestures toward new 'beginning[s] of knowledge,' to borrow Audre Lorde's words, not by cleaning the slate, but by paying attention to the crisscross of marks that weave the past and the present into each other in ways that are yet to be figured.<sup>53</sup>

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3 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—An Introduction,' *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1:2 (2011), 2.

4 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xxv; Mignolo, 'Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,' *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 16–18.

5 Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone,' *Profession* 91 (1991), 33–40.

6 Alanna Lockward, 'BE.BOP: Black Europe Body Politics 2012-14,' n.d.: [alannalockward.wordpress.com/be-bop-2012-2014](http://alannalockward.wordpress.com/be-bop-2012-2014) (accessed 20 August 2014).

7 See Alanna Lockward, 'Decolonizing the (White) Gaze: Who is Whipping?' in *Spiritual Revolutions & 'The Scramble for Africa': BE.BOP 2014. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS*, ed. Alanna Lockward and Jeannette Ehlers (Berlin: Art Labor Archives, 2014), 10.

8 Signe Emilie Tveskov, 'Say It Loud!', *Friktion: Magasin for Køn, Krop & Kultur*, July 28, 2014: [friktionmagasin.dk/?p=1223](http://friktionmagasin.dk/?p=1223) (accessed September 1 2014). My translation from Danish.

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13 Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, 'Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings,' *Social Text: Periscope* ('Decolonial AestheSis'), July 15, 2013: [socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-wounds-decolonial-healings](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-wounds-decolonial-healings) (accessed 1 August 2014). I borrow the term 'world of sense' from María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 20.

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*Blue-Eyed: Whiteness, Swedishness, and Visual Culture* (Gothenburg: Gothenburg Museum of Art Publication Series, 2014), 59–99; Clyde Taylor, *The Mask of Art: Breaking the Aesthetic Contract—Film and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 38–52.

16 Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification in the Visual Arts* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 20.

17 Ibid.

18 Henrik Holm, 'Plaster Bodies as Performance: The Royal Collection of Casts Viewed from a Performative Perspective,' *SMK Art Journal 2010–2011* (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2012), 110.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 115.

21 Astrid Nonbo Andersen, *Islands of Regret: Restitution, Connected Memories and the Politics of History in Denmark and the US Virgin Islands*, PhD dissertation (Aarhus: University of Aarhus, 2014).

22 Karen Fog Olwig, 'Narrating Deglobalization: Danish Perceptions of a Lost Empire,' *Global Networks* 3:3 (2003), 208.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 218. Olwig borrows the term 'imagined world' from Arjun Appadurai.

25 Recent anthologies include Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin, eds., *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity* (New York: Springer, 2013); Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen, eds., *Whiteness and Post-colonialism in the Nordic Region* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012); Suvi Keskinen et al. eds., *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

26 See for instance the exhibition 'Overdragelse,' curated by La Vaughn Belle and Jacob Fabricius at Overgaden—Institut for Samtidskunst August 30–October 26, 2006; and the traveling project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, curated by Kuratorisk Aktion, held across the Nordic territories, March 24–November 25, 2006.

27 Danish colonialism in the Global South is hardly ever mentioned in the history of Danish art. Notable exceptions include Louise Wolthers's work on photo albums from the Danish colonies in the Caribbean in *Blik og begivenhed—en diskussion af fotografiets historiske potentialer med nedslag i krig, koloni og kommerzialisme 1860–1920*, PhD

dissertation (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2008), and Nicholas Mirzoeff's discussion of the Danish-born painter Camille Pissarro's work from St. Thomas in *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 155–165. More art historical research has been undertaken in relation to the effects of Danish colonialization of Greenland, especially pertaining the pioneering work of the feminist decolonial artist Pia Arke. See, *TUPILAKOSAURUS: An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke's Artistic Work and Research*, ed. Kuratorisk Aktion (Copenhagen: Kuratorisk Aktion, 2012).

28 Quoted from 'CARICOM Reparations Commission Press Statement,' December 10, 2013: [caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press\\_releases\\_2013/pres285\\_13.jsp](http://caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press_releases_2013/pres285_13.jsp) (accessed June 20, 2014).

29 Nick Hækkerup, quoted in Parliament on 13 November 2013: '§ 20-spørgsmål S 429 Om de tidligere Dansk Vestindiske Øer,' in *Folketinget*: [ft.dk/samling/20131/spoergsmaal/S429/index.htm](http://ft.dk/samling/20131/spoergsmaal/S429/index.htm) (accessed August 1, 2014). My translation from Danish.

30 Jamaica Kincaid, 'In History,' *Callaloo* 20:1 (1997), 1.

31 Ibid., 7.

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33 Morāna, Dussel, and Jáuregui, 'Colonialism and Its Replicants,' 2.

34 Gertrude Stein, 'Portraits and Repetition,' *Lectures in America* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 167.

35 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass—An American Slave. Written by Himself* [1845] (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 19.

36 Ibid.

37 Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

38 Cassandra Jackson, *Violence, Visual Culture, and the Black Male Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 22.

39 For a discussion of Hegelian 'master/slave' dialectic in relation to colonialism and feminism, see Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 35.

40 Morgan Quaintance, 'Histories of Violence,' *Frieze* 162 (April 2014), 94.

41 Ibid., 96.

42 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

43 Ibid., 3, 4.

44 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 4.

45 T.J. Demos, *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 13.

46 For a discussion of the history and circulation of *The Scourged Back*, see Margaret Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty, and the Rise of Humanitarianism* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 201–207.

47 Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 20.

48 Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 20.

49 Alanna Lockward, 'Black Europe Body Politics: Towards an Afropean Decolonial Aesthetics,' *Social Text: Periscope* ('Decolonial AestheSis'), 15 July 2013: [socialtext-dev.cdrcs.columbia.edu/periscope\\_article/black-europe-body-politics-towards-an-afropean-decolonial-aesthetics](http://socialtext-dev.cdrcs.columbia.edu/periscope_article/black-europe-body-politics-towards-an-afropean-decolonial-aesthetics) (accessed June 20, 2014).

50 Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, 'The Decolonial AestheSis Dossier,' *Social Text: Periscope* ('Decolonial AestheSis'), 15 July 2013: [socialtext-dev.cdrcs.columbia.edu/periscope\\_article/the-decolonial-aestheSis-dossier](http://socialtext-dev.cdrcs.columbia.edu/periscope_article/the-decolonial-aestheSis-dossier) (accessed 20 June 2014). I borrow the term 'aesthetics of outrage' from Robbie Shilliam, 'BE.BOP 2012: Black Europe Body Politics,' *Social Text: Periscope* ('Decolonial AestheSis'); 15 July 2013: [socialtext-dev.cdrcs.columbia.edu/periscope\\_article/be-bop-2012-black-europe-body-politics](http://socialtext-dev.cdrcs.columbia.edu/periscope_article/be-bop-2012-black-europe-body-politics) (accessed 1 September 2014).

51 Paula M.L. Moya, 'Who We Are and From Where We Speak,' *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1:2 (2011), 86.

52 Jen McWeeny, 'Liberating Anger, Embodying Knowledge: A Comparative Study of María Lugones and Zen Master Hakuin,' *Hypatia* 25:2 (2010), 305.

53 Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,' in Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 130.

Alanna Lockward

Since 2012, when the first transdisciplinary decolonial event on Black citizenship in Europe BE.BOP. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS took place in Berlin at the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, I have been making a special emphasis on enabling the invited artists to speak about their work on their own terms. Knowledge is understood as a collective creation, a collective healing process. Parallel to this, BE.BOP has engaged European audiences in intricate detail with the outrage generated by Black/African diaspora peoples<sup>1</sup> when confronting a racist world order structured along the lines of coloniality. We have examined through a myriad of narratives, for example, the racializing legacies of the Enlightenment or how European Aesthetics became “universal”. A significant proportion of the invited artists are from the Caribbean diaspora and, as the rest of those invited, work mainly with moving image and performance. We have also de-linked ourselves from modernity’s hierarchical modus operandi by means of sharing the space on the same level. During our discussions, artists, scholars and activists have the same amount of time available to present their ideas, projects and works.

My curatorial preference for performance art and film stems from an understanding of art practice as inseparable from the circumstances where it is gestated. Caribbean diaspora poet, scholar and feminist, Audre Lorde, considered by many as the founding mother of Black Consciousness in Germany and, furthermore, in Europe, reminds us:

“Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women. [...]. The actual requirements to produce the visual arts also help determine, along class lines, whose art is whose.”<sup>2</sup>

Artists working with performance are utterly aware of how the hegemonic art system values their practice as essentially non-commercial, automatically categorizing them as less worthy of attention. Their persistence is a testimony of the intrinsic need we share as humans to communicate directly with our bodies; a narration imperative materializes in their practice against all odds. There are too many untold stories to be shared and the safe space of performance, in direct contact with the audience, provides the ideal habitat for these much needed dialogues. This ethical imperative is particularly remarkable in the case of Black diaspora artists in Europe who, in addition to this a priori devaluation, must face the corresponding labeling of their work as “foreign” or “non-European”; categories that are ingrained in the foundational racism of the Enlightenment and its invention of modern aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

Aníbal Quijano established that the term “decolonization” goes beyond the Cold War’s understanding of the term as the removal of colonial and imperial powers

1 “Afropean decolonial aesthetics assumes the Caribbean diaspora as organically implied in Black and/or African diaspora in Europe. There is a vast global bibliography on diaspora studies and, particularly in Europe, situation-specific re-semanticizations of the term are mushrooming all over the place. For the sake of clarity, I will quote the definition of Agustín Lao Montes of the African Diaspora since it feels closer to my own experience as a member of the Caribbean Diaspora:

‘If the world-historical field that we now call the African diaspora, as a condition of dispersal and as a process of displacement, is founded on forms of violence and terror that are central to modernity, it also signifies a cosmopolitan project of articulating the diverse histories of African peoples while creating translocal intellectual/cultural currents and political movements.’ (Agustín Lao Montes, 2007: Hilos Descoloniales. Trans-localizando los espacios de la Diáspora Africana. Tabula Rasa. Bogotá Colombia, No. 7: 47–79, July–December 2007.)

Alanna Lockward (2013). Black Europe Body Politics: Towards an Afropean Decolonial Aesthetics. In: Mignolo, Walter and Vázquez, Rolando (Eds). The Decolonial AestheSis Dossier. Social Text Periscope, July 2013.

[http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/black-europe-body-politics-towards-an-afropean-decolonial-aesthetics/#sthash.YX7XTXV7.dpuf](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/black-europe-body-politics-towards-an-afropean-decolonial-aesthetics/#sthash.YX7XTXV7.dpuf)

2 Audre Lorde (1984). Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference. In: Sister Outsider, Los Angeles: Freedom, P. 114–123. Here P. 116.

3 Given that European philosophy has been prolific in the politics of confusion, namely the interchangeable usage of terms such as modernism, modernization and modernity to designate similar but different phenomena, I will start by clarifying how the terms “modernity”, “coloniality” and “decoloniality” are being applied today by those who first discussed it in the Americas, based on the seminal essay by Aníbal Quijano “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad”, published in different versions between 1989 and 1992 and reproduced in the volume *Aníbal Quijano. Textos Fundacionales*, compiled by Zulma Palermo and Pablo Quintero.

in favor of an independent nation-state, he aims at a more radical endeavor: to completely dismantle the entire knowledge system that justifies and supports this modern/colonial state and its control on the economy and on subjectivities. In other words, the differentiation between the terms “colonialism” and “coloniality” became a marker, an epistemic bullet aimed at stating loud and clear that colonialism continues after formal decolonization; this mutation is called “coloniality”.

Considering modernity as inseparable from coloniality, Walter Dignolo (2008) exposed how the rhetoric of modernity was always inseparable from the exploitation and eventual extermination of entire populations, the markers of European colonization. “Progress” and promises of “bringing civilization” were the masquerade of an economic enterprise based on murderous colonial systems. There are no formulas for unmasking modernity/coloniality; each context demands its own strategies. In my case, my interest as a Caribbean Diaspora writer based in Berlin has been to expose Europe’s colonial amnesia specifically with regards to the Berlin-Africa Conference (1884–1885) and the Herero-Nama Genocide (1904–1907), in my scholarly work and curatorial projects. The relationship between citizenship and coloniality with regards to Black presence in Europe is a key pre-occupation in these undertakings. “We are here because you were there” is a self-explanatory dictum on this matter.

The unmasking of modernity/coloniality becomes decoloniality when it goes beyond exposing those truths to de-link from them, to create spaces where narratives are shared and legacies become re-enacted from a decolonial perspective. As Rolando Vázquez explains:

“Unlike contemporary art that is ensnared in the search for the newest abstraction, Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis seeks to bring to the fore those other forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that have been subsumed under the long history of this Western-centered world, of the modern/colonial order. In my view, decolonial artists are not seeking innovation and abstraction for the sake of it, they are not seeking the recognition of the contemporary art world; rather, they are bringing to light through

their practices, through their bodies and communities the histories that have been denied, the forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that have been disdained or erased”.

In addition to this decolonial perspective, the choice of bringing together artists from the Caribbean Diaspora in Europe is a result of my own frustration with the lack of knowledge, particularly within the Black Community itself, on the Caribbean as a stronghold of Black liberation narratives globally. Freedom fighter Malcolm X is vigorously conclusive on how Caribbean liberation narratives are clearly detectable beyond the region, in the African continent itself:

“[M]ost people in the Caribbean area are still proud that they are Black, proud of the African blood and their heritage, and I think this type of pride was instilled in my mother, and she instilled it in us too, to the degree that she could. [...] In fact she was an active member of the Marcus Garvey movement. [...] It was Marcus Garvey’s philosophy of Pan-Africanism that initiated the entire freedom movement, which brought about the independence of African nations and had it not been for Marcus Garvey and the foundation laid by him, you would find no independent nations in the Caribbean today. [...] All the freedom movements that are taking place in America were initiated by the work and teachings of Marcus Garvey.”<sup>4</sup>

A Vodoun ceremony held in the forest of Bwa Kayiman, the site where the first major enslaved insurrection of the Haitian Revolution was planned, heralded the beginning of the end of Europe’s savage capitalist enterprise in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

According to Laurent Dubois, we are all descendants of the Haitian Revolution and therefore accountable to its ancestry<sup>5</sup>. Jeannette Ehlers has followed this ethical imperative in her digitally manipulated video art, photographs and performances consistently. In *Black Magic at the White House* (2009), for instance, she performs a Vodoun dance reminiscent of the foundational narrative of the Haitian Revolution. The video is staged in a landmark house of Copenhagen, built, as countless similar

4 Noel Leo Erskine, ‘What Method for the Oppressed?’ pp. 235-254 in: Lewis V. Baldwin and Paul R. Dekar, “In an Inescapable Network of Mutuality”: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Globalization of an Ethical Ideal, Wipf and Stock, 2013, p. 251.

5 “The impact of the Haitian Revolution was enormous. As a unique example of successful Black revolution, it became a crucial part of the political, philosophical and cultural currents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By creating a society in which all people, of all colors, were granted freedom and citizenship, the Haitian Revolution transformed the world. It was a central part of the destruction of slavery in the Americas and therefore a crucial moment in the history of democracy, one that laid the foundation for the continuing struggles for human rights everywhere.” Laurent Dubois (2005). *Avengers of the New World: A History of the Haitian Revolution*. Boston: Belknap Press. Pp. 6–7.

continental architectural highlights, with profits from the transatlantic enslavement trade. The silencing of Danish brutal and corrupt history is defiantly challenged by the ubiquitous and phantasmagorical appearance of the artist whose presence is alternatively erased and/or exaggerated. Today this building, Marienborg, is the official summer residency of the Danish Prime Minister, but no mention of this history is visible in school texts or elsewhere.

Sound is as crucial in *Black Magic At The White House* as in the rest of Ehlers' video-art work. The drumming in crescendo is a powerful reminder of the vibrations that brought the maroon leaders and dissident *white* freemasons together in *Bwa Kayiman* and heralded the biggest blow ever received by modernity/coloniality to this day. *Black Bullets* (2012), the first component of Ehlers' video triptych, was shot in b/w at Henri Christophe's phenomenal Citadelle Laferrière, the biggest fortress in the Americas and could be considered in my opinion as the biggest monument to marronage, since it was built following the notion of a safe space, one of the basic premises of the radical lifestyle of escaped slaves, known as maroons. The fact that in *Black Bullets* the monument itself is rendered invisible, speaks volumes about Ehlers' phenomenal skills as a storyteller. We see a line of school students slowly marching along the horizon suspended in a sea of ever connected clouds. They drown at the end of the horizon and reappear again on the left of the screen. Accompanied by a discretely hypnotic soundtrack, sober and lapidary, this interpretation of the continuities of resistance is poetically embedded in what Jamaican writer, sociologist and activist, Erna Brodber has described as the "Continent of Black Consciousness":

"That so many persons at so many different times and in so many different areas felt spontaneously moved towards this behaviour is what gives Pan-Africanism its essence. This feeling, common to so many, described a Continent of Black Consciousness which included Africa and the geographical areas to which Africans were dispersed from the early days of New World's slavery to legendary Marcus Garvey's time".<sup>6</sup>

*Off The Pig*, the second component of Ehlers' video triptych, reproduces the voice of Angela Davis describing how resistance to enslavement has been an intrinsic part of its history from day one. The hymn of the Black Panther Party is chanted while images of one of Port-au-Prince's best known neighbourhoods, Cité Soleil, are projected. The third element, *The March*, is positioned

in the middle of the installation and resembles a rhizome, but is in fact a multitude of blood vessels permanently growing in all directions.

In one of her latest pieces, Jeannette Ehlers finally performed in front of an audience and acted as she had previously done in such works as the above mentioned *Black Magic At The White House*, as well as in *Three Steps Of Story* (2009). Instead of dancing, as she did in some of her previous pieces, in first ever live performance *Whip It Good* (2013), she challenged the audience with a deceptively simple action: whipping. A human-size white canvas hung from the ceiling of Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, a post-migrant theatre space in Berlin, which she flogged with in-crescendo intensity for fifteen minutes. She then stopped and invited the audience to repeat the action. One by one, people stood up to follow her appeal. The white canvas was by then stained with charcoal, which the artist rubbed on the whip each time. During the Q & A session that followed, painful and puzzling issues arose: Why do we as Black people feel so uncomfortable when a *white* man or woman is holding the whip? Why do we as Black oppressed people feel so guilty about showing our anger in public? How long should we keep talking about the aftermath of African enslavement? Who can claim the legitimacy of holding the whip? Who has the responsibility of holding the whip? Who is the 'authentic' Black and African Diasporic subject?

*Whip it Good's* re-enactment of the Colonial Wound has been already presented on the African continent, in the US and England and continues to mesmerize the audience with its powerful narrative on what Agustín Lao Montes defines as "the world historical field of the African Diaspora", while raising many similar questions.

In the following dialogue, Jeannette Ehlers is as precise as in her visual narratives, the political economy of meaning is optimized at its full capacity. We can listen to the merciless whipping and at the same time the determination to tell the story as it is, challenging centuries of lies, denial and colonial amnesia. This is indeed a powerful testimony of how the legacy of those inspirational Caribbean figures of Black Consciousness in Europe and beyond, is growing in strength and legitimacy.

*What is your interpretation of the Colonial Wound? What role does healing play in your artistic practice?*

My interpretation of the Colonial Wound is the condition in which racism, oppression and inequality are an undeniable part of

6 Erna Brodber (2003). *The Continent of Black Consciousness: On the History of the African Diaspora from Slavery to the Present Day*. London: New Beacon Books. Brodber. Pp. 102–103.

modern society's power structures caused by the European colonial project. But also how these structures are often hidden and denied by the oppressor. My work revolves around these issues and my intention is to learn about and bring focus into areas that deal with these types of questions. One can call it healing. Striving for self-education, consciousness and knowledge is my drive and hopefully my work brings into light and challenges coloniality in a poetic and artistic way. I might be a voice for those who cannot speak up for themselves, and my work resonates with many within the Diaspora as well as reaches out to a universal audience, and hopefully makes a difference.

*In your own words, what is Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis?*

Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis embraces images that stand in opposition to/discuss/challenge the colonial narrative.

*How was your first encounter with the "Continent of Black Consciousness" in the art world, and in art education?*

I was aware and familiar with a few different Black artists, mostly African American. I felt both very related to their work and agenda but also a bit distanced because of my European background. Even though I always sympathized with and was interested in Black culture, growing up in an all-white and quite ignorant Danish society, gave me a completely different experience than for example the African American experience. A Black community hasn't shaped me all the way and not to talk about the art world, as I know it here in Denmark, I always had the feeling it was a no-go to work with stuff that has anything to do with "Africa". So apart from my travels to Trinidad as a teenager and adult, my first crucial encounter with the Continent of Black Consciousness on a high theoretical level was with BE.BOP 2012. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS. It was a turning point in my personal as well as my artistic life. I want to go as far as to say it was an epiphany. A complete feeling of belonging and at the same time I felt alienated because of my lack of knowledge at that time about the European Black Diaspora.

*Is the experience of learning and practicing performance art in Europe as a Black artist different from the US or the Caribbean?*

*What is your connection to different networks of Black Diaspora artists? Could you comment briefly on how you perceive the nuances between each context?*

Again, I think there must be a difference due to the various cultural backgrounds and influences. My experience with Black Diaspora artists is mostly transnational, since there are only a few Diaspora artists in Denmark. This tends to create a complete lack of Danish diasporic discourse as opposed to the rooted discourse found

in both the Caribbean, the US and the UK, among more. Even though the diasporic strategies, perspectives and expressions seem to be quite different from continent to continent and again from artist to artist, it is my experience that in the end everything adds up and connects in the urge for making visible what has been (and keeps being) neglected, denied and untold.

*How relevant is it to give these nuances a national inflection such as a "German" or "Dutch" Black Diaspora? How would you prefer to frame it? As European Black Diaspora? As Afropean decoloniality? As Black Diaspora in Europe? Or would you rather frame it as Black Diaspora and Europe? Please explain your choice. Also, please feel free to add your own suggestions.*

At times, I think the nuances could be relevant in order to distinguish the different backgrounds i.e. different cultural experiences, but I prefer the European Black Diaspora or Afropean Decoloniality. In my eyes they represent unity, which in the end is what this is all about.

*There is a long history of performances of Blackness in Europe in the framework of coloniality: how do you approach this legacy in your work? Do you see a common thread with other practitioners in Europe in this regard?*

To be honest I don't know of many performances dealing with Blackness in Europe but when I think of the few I know of, including my own, it is often related to catharsis and to the notion of being ripped apart symbolically as well as literally.

*How do you see the role of art institutions, which I refer to as the "art plantations of modernity", as catalysts for decolonizing aesthetics? How have you been able to decolonize your own relationship with them? Are these strategies equally as effective in Europe as in other parts of the world?*

Like society in general, most art institutions are not ready for decolonization and I think especially in Europe the lack of self-reflection is massive. I still struggle with decolonizing my relationship with them. My strategy so far has been to criticize and make my point via the art institutions and related spaces and spheres.

*How would you define solidarity among people of color (POC) in Europe today?*

*What are the urgencies? What has been achieved so far and what has been the role played by performance art in these strategies of re-existence?*

I think solidarity among POC in Europe is there for sure, but still needs to be far more articulated. As opposed to The Caribbean and The United States, the Black European consciousness lack unity and I think more conferences and (relevant) performance pieces will play a very important role to get there.

Darkness. I used to love darkness.  
'The Invisible Empire' (2010)

Decolonial art flourishes under the sign of the return. A return that is not conservative but radical. It signals the re-emergence of worlds, histories, bodies, faces, voices that have been erased. Modernity, the project of Western civilization, established its dominion over the visible, over the sensible, over our notion of the real through the erasure, the oblivion of other worlds. Its identity has been erected on the negation of other peoples' histories. The pretention of modernity to be a world-historical reality is inextricably bound to the negation of its alterity. There is no modernity without coloniality.

The West, by affirming itself as modernity, has claimed the center of geography and the now of history. Concurrently, the 'other' has been placed outside the space of the visible, outside the face of the 'human' and outside the present, somewhere in the past. Coloniality names this pervasive movement of erasure. It names the dehumanization, exploitation, dispossession, disdain that is co-constitutive of modernity and that governs its relation to alterity. Coloniality relegates to oblivion the life and the suffering of all those who have been dehumanized.

Jeannette Ehlers is an exemplary decolonial artist, precisely because her work challenges the oblivion imposed by the project of modernity. She is not blinded by the neon-lights, the blue-screens of contemporaneity. She is not selfishly seeking to belong in the now of modernity. She is challenging the order of the visible. She is piercing the white canvas of modernity, to bring to view what has been negated, to decry and confront coloniality.

In 'Black Magic at the White House' (2009), Ehlers gives us the clue to her decolonial doing. She dances in invisibility to bring to view how the dominant order, the White House, has been built on invisibilizing the other: on the denial of colonialism and oppression. The *veve* on the ground enables her to bridge the gap between the dominant order of visibility and the silent reality of what has



been made invisible. Ehlers erases herself to allow for the neglected histories to emerge. She erases herself to denounce erasure, to occupy and disobey the white space.

In 'Whip It Good' (2014), it is the African body paint that gives her the ancestral connection to the forgotten histories, that gives her the strength to challenge the white canvas, the white order of the visible and bring to view the wounds, the colonial wounds that have been denied and forgotten. A decolonial healing is enabled in the manifestation of the silenced wounds.

In 'The Invisible Empire' (2010), she gives voice to the untold and unheard stories of human trafficking, of the ongoing coloniality, the legacy of enslavement that continues to mark the lives of the most vulnerable people hidden under the veil of civilization. The forgotten lives of the modern/colonial order are here given a voice, a space of appearance. And it is in the workings of memory that the violence of oblivion is being challenged. Ehlers hands us a memory that is not individualized like the memory of psychiatry or the memory of a brain. She brings us a collective memory, a memory that mourns and sings at one and the same time, a memory that is neither female nor male, that is both child and elder. In the realms of memory, dichotomies are broken down. What matters is the voice, the listening, the surrendering of one's presence and certainties to recognize the multiplicity of times, the faces that call on us, that tell us that we are all related, that we should not confine our consciousness to the amnesic present of the white space.

What might look like a dissonance between the image and the voice, between the body that sings and the testimonies of kidnapping, of rape, of destroyed childhoods, is the art of invocation, of transcending the order of presence and opening oneself to the boundless experience of salvaging the forgotten pasts. In the dissonance, the consistence of the modern order, the certainties of the order of presence are being fractured, pierced, whipped. The mnemonic order of relationality breaks down the dichotomies, the hierarchies of classification that structure the modern/colonial order and its parameters of certainty and domination.

It is through the dissonance between the image and the voice, the gender of the speaker and the gender of the story, the remembrance and the now of appearance, that the decolonial movement of re-emergence comes to its full force, in its radical multiplicity, bypassing the mechanisms of classification and erasure. The white surface of representation is shredded under the relational temporality of the vernacular, under the tradition of the *griot*, the poet and storyteller, the custodian of our communal and ancestral memories.

The decolonial, the return, walks the path of the vernacular. It calls on us to listen to the forgotten histories. It is in this vein that Jeannette Ehlers confronts again and again the white space of erasure. The erasure of what has been denied visibility, of what has been unrecognizable for modernity. The white surface of the now is burst open, as a fracture, as dissonance. We hear the thunder of the whip slashing the monumental history of empire.

‘Waves’ (2009)

Stand here, there, in front of the endless Atlantic  
 behold the hiatus of the Middle Passage,  
 listen, the waves of then and now,  
 reverberations of the dark hull,  
 the reduction of life,  
 the flaying of enslavement, the abyss.  
 The impossibility to remember.  
 The impossibility to forget.  
 Timeless sea.

Jeannette Ehlers’ work deals with the borders of the modern/colonial order, the borders that demarcate the visible, the sensible, the intelligible. She trespasses the limen between the arrogant empty time of white space and oblivion. She summons the deep memories of the oppressed, the dehumanized, the forgotten people, of those who have been made dispensable, often reduced to ‘animality’, in order to erect the edifice of modernity, of Western civilization.

It is in her workings of relational temporalities, in her dancing with fragile and dissonant memories that she manages to exceed the parameters of the ‘contemporary’. She does not try to affirm herself in the empty present of the now. Ehlers shows us that the strength of decolonial aesthetics is precisely in that it disobeys modern chronology and its cult of novelty, that it disassociates itself from the normativity of the present as being primarily Western and as anticipating futurity. Decolonial aesthetics does not seek contemporaneity; instead it enacts a relational temporality. It distances itself from the cult of novelty of chronological empty time. It finds its way in the radical return of plurality, in a wide and deep time.

Ehlers pierces the veil of appearances, the order of oblivion, with a poetics of memory. By challenging the structure of the visible, she challenges the coloniality that constitutes the modern order, the forces and mechanisms that have made the lives of the oppressed dispensable, invisible and forgotten.

Say It

Jeannette  
Ehlers

Loud!



# Say It Loud!

Jeannette  
Ehlers



**Atlantic (Endless Row)  
Three Steps Of Story  
Speed Up That Day  
Atlantic (Gate of No Return)  
Black Magic At The White House  
Waves  
The Invisible Empire  
Bustin' My Knots  
Off The Pig  
The March  
Black Bullets  
The Image Of Me  
Dannebroget  
Whip It Good  
How Do You Talk About Threehundred  
Years in Four Minutes  
Because the Spirits. A Conversation**



C-print, 2009  
Filmed at Busua Beach, Ghana



# Atlantic (Endless Row)











## Three Steps Of Story



# Speed Up That Day







## **Atlantic (Gate Of No Return)**















# Black Magic At The White House

Video, 3:45 min, 2009  
(About Marienborg)  
Music: *Fanamfe* by Francis Kofi Aziat



The Prime Minister's Office  
 Christiansborg  
 Prins Jørgens Gård 11  
 1218 Copenhagen K  
 Att: Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen

Copenhagen, 10 June 2009

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO FILM AT MARIENBORG

Dear Mr. Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen

I am writing to you with a particular request that I sincerely hope you can help me with. I am currently working on the preparations for the art project ATLANTIC, which will be presented at a solo exhibition in Århus Kunstbygning. In this regard I am hereby asking you for admission to make video recordings in the dining room, the fireplace room, the great conference room and the garden of Marienborg. I will bring a technical assistant with me, who will help with the recordings and expect them to take about 3-4 hours. If you can accommodate my request, I would ask you and the matron to join me in a facilitation meeting.

My name is Jeannette Ehlers, I am a video artist and a 2006 graduate from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. My area of speciality is digitally processed films, which I exhibit regularly both here in Denmark and abroad. (For more information please check [kunst.dk/kunstner/jeannette\\_ehlers](http://kunst.dk/kunstner/jeannette_ehlers))

The ATLANTIC exhibition is based on stories of triangular trade (ca. 1670-1848), which in many ways can be considered a repressed, but relevant part of the history of Denmark.

I myself was born and raised in Denmark by my Danish mother and West Indian father. Due to my background I wish to reflect on how my personal history takes its place in world history. I wish to raise questions about identity, mentality, humanity, brutality as well as globalism.

I often stage myself in my works and have travelled to Ghana and the Danish West Indies, where I have made recordings of the ruins of the old Danish fort Prinzenstein, and from the hall of mirrors in the Government House on St. Croix. In the latter, I dance the waltz in the same place where Peter von Scholten provoked citizenship by inviting the then "free Negroes" to join in the festivities.

Marienborg has a strong connection to the triangular trade as the house was built as a summer residence for Olfert Fisher in 1744. He sailed as a commander on the triangular routes and made fortunes on the slave trade in this capacity. Later, he sold the residence to the merchant Peter Windt, who had also amassed a fortune on the slave and sugar trade. He had even brought slaves back home to his residence in Denmark. Several merchants of the time have owned Marienborg and left their mark on it. The place has therefore earned a central place in the history of Denmark's role in the triangular trade. And to this day, still plays a significant role in Denmark as the Prime Minister's official residence, which makes the property very important to my project.

The artistic purpose of my request for access to the aforementioned areas at Marienborg is to record myself performing various African inspired dancing scenes that will be digitally processed afterwards.

The age we live in is an interesting one with unprecedented changes and transformations. One can perhaps speak of the beginning of a new era, or a new worldview emerging, after the election of Obama as America's 44th president. By combining the dance scenes from Ghana and St. Croix with the scenes recorded at Marienborg, I can hopefully connect and mix the past with the present in a humorous, yet serious and thought-provoking way; by presenting seriousness with humour and history with current affairs.

I regard this project as an important comment on our society as it may shed light on a forgotten piece of Danish history. Hopefully the project will give the audience a culturally informative and surprising art experience. Therefore, I very much hope that you, Prime Minister, will grant my request.

Kind regards,  
 Jeannette Ehlers, video artist

Nørrebrogade 74, 4.tv  
 2200 Copenhagen N

Statsministeriet  
Christiansborg  
Prins Jørgens Gård 11  
1218 København K  
Att: Statsminister Lars Løkke Rasmussen

København d. 10/6-09

### **ANMODNING OM TILLADELSE TIL AT FILME PÅ MARIENBORG**

Kære Hr. Statsminister Lars Løkke Rasmussen

Jeg henvender mig til dig i et særligt ærinde som jeg inderligt håber at du kan hjælpe mig med. I forbindelse med udarbejdelsen af kunstprojektet ATLANTIC, der skal vises på en større separatudstilling i Århus Kunstbygning, november 2009, anmoder jeg venligst om adgang til at lave videooptagelser i Spisestuen, Pejsestuen, Det Store Mødelokale og i haven på Marienborg. Jeg forventer optagelserne afviklet indenfor ca. 3-4 timer og jeg medbringer en teknisk assistent. Hvis det er muligt, ønsker jeg et tilrettelægningsmøde med oldfruen forud for.

Mit navn er Jeannette Ehlers og jeg er videokunstner uddannet fra Det Kgl. Danske Kunstakademi 2006. Mit speciale er digitalt bearbejdede film, som jeg udstiller jævnligt i både ind- og udland. (for mere info se venligst [kunst.dk/kunstner/jeannette\\_ehlers](http://kunst.dk/kunstner/jeannette_ehlers)) Udstillingen ATLANTIC tager udgangspunkt i historierne om trekantshandlen (ca. 1670 - 1848) som på mange måder kan siges at være et fortrængt, men relevant stykke Danmarkshistorie.

Selv er jeg født og opvokset i Danmark af en dansk mor og en vestindisk far, og med den baggrund, søger jeg at reflektere min personlige historie i verdenshistorien. Således ønsker jeg at rejse spørgsmål omkring bl.a. identitet, mentalitet, humanitet, brutalitet såvel som globalitet.

Jeg iscenesætter ofte mig selv i mine værker og har rejst i Ghana og Dansk Vestindien, hvor jeg bl.a. har lavet optagelser fra ruinerne af det gamle danske fort Prinzenstein, samt fra spejlsalen i Guvernementshuset på St. Croix. I sidstnævnte danser jeg vals på det sted, hvor Peter Von Scholten provokerede borgerskabet ved at invitere daværende "frie negere" med til selskab.

Marienborg har en stærk forbindelse til trekantshandlen, idet det blev bygget som sommerresidens til Olfert Fischer i 1744. Han sejlede som kommandørkaptajn på ruten og tjente formuer på slavehandlen. Senere solgte han det til købmanden Peter Windt, der ligeledes havde skabt sig stor rigdom på slave- og sukkerhandel og tilmed bragte slaver med til sit hjem i Danmark. Flere andre af periodens handelsmænd har ejet og sat deres præg på Marienborg. Stedet har derfor en central plads i historien om Danmarks rolle i trekantshandlen. Tilsvarende spiller det en væsentlig rolle i dagens Danmark i sin position som statsministerens officielle residens. Derfor er ejendommen af meget stor betydning for mit projekt.

Mit kunstneriske formål med at anvende de fornævnte områder på Marienborg er, at filme mig selv i forskellige afrikansk inspirerede dansescener, som sidenhen skal bearbejdes digitalt.

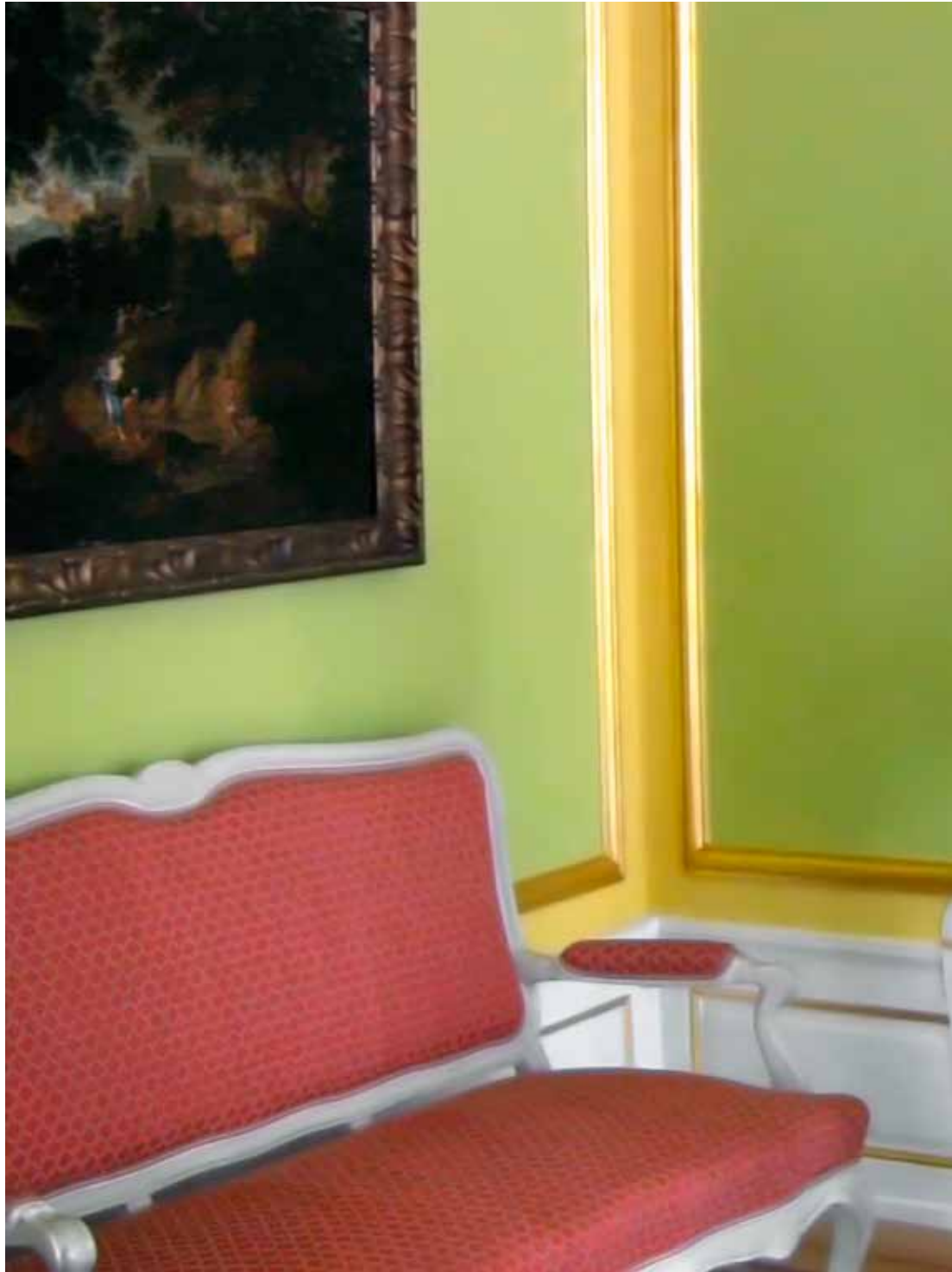
Vi lever i en interessant tid med nybrud og forandring og man kan måske nok tale om begyndelsen på en ny verdensorden efter indsættelsen af Obama som USA's 44. præsident. Med dansescenerne fra Ghana og St. Croix kombineret med scener fra Marienborg kan jeg på humoristisk dog alvorlig og forhåbentlig tankevækkende vis, få blandet og forbundet fortid med nutid; alvor med humor og historie med aktualitet.

Jeg betragter projektet som en vigtig samfundskommentar, da det kan kaste lys over en glemt bid af Danmarkshistorien og forhåbentligt give publikum en kulturelt oplysende og overraskende kunstoplevelse. Derfor håber jeg meget på at Statsministeren vil imødekomme min forespørgsel.

Med venlig hilsen,

Jeannette Ehlers, videokunstner.

Nørrebrogade 74,4.tv  
2200 København N

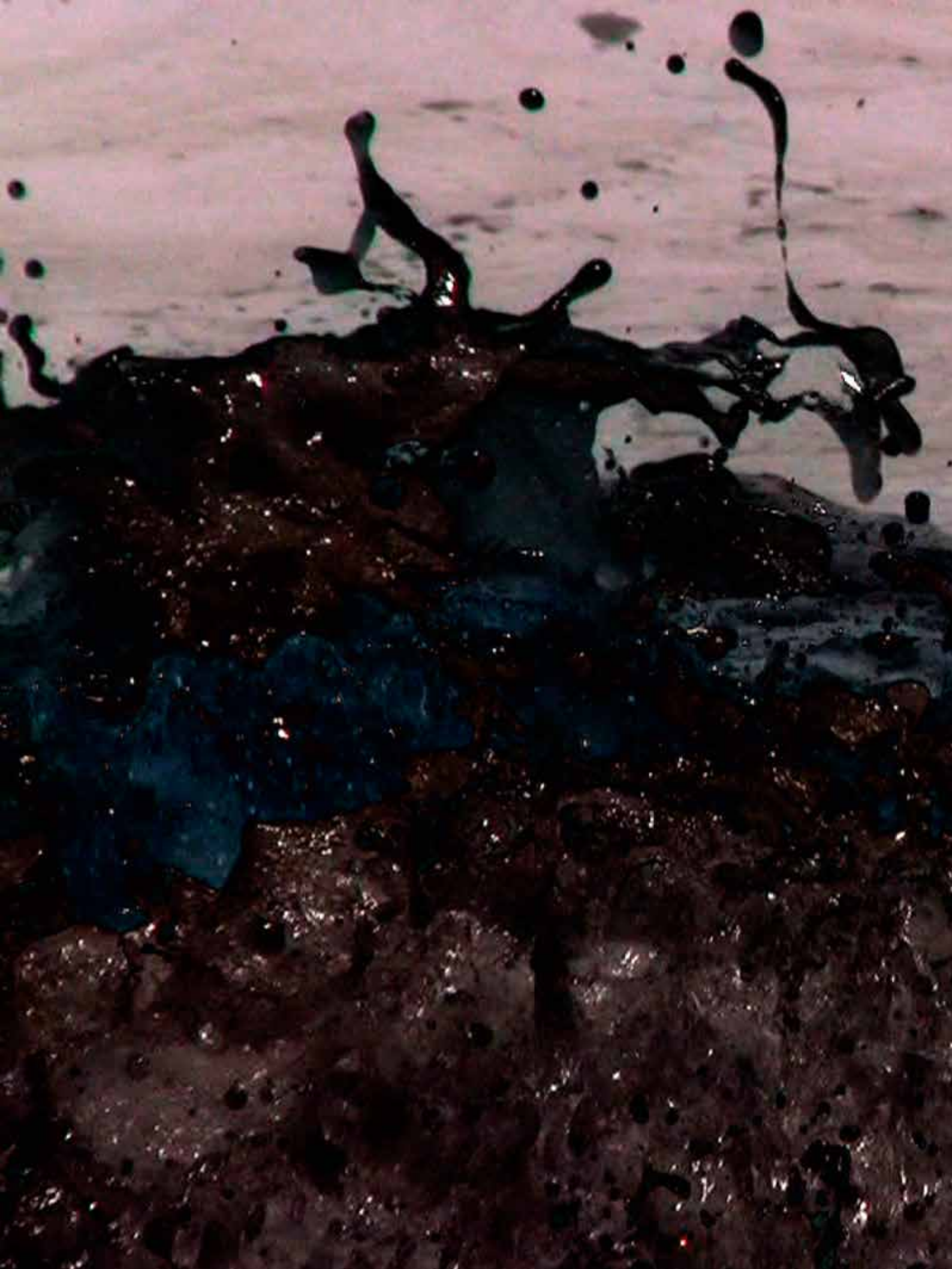




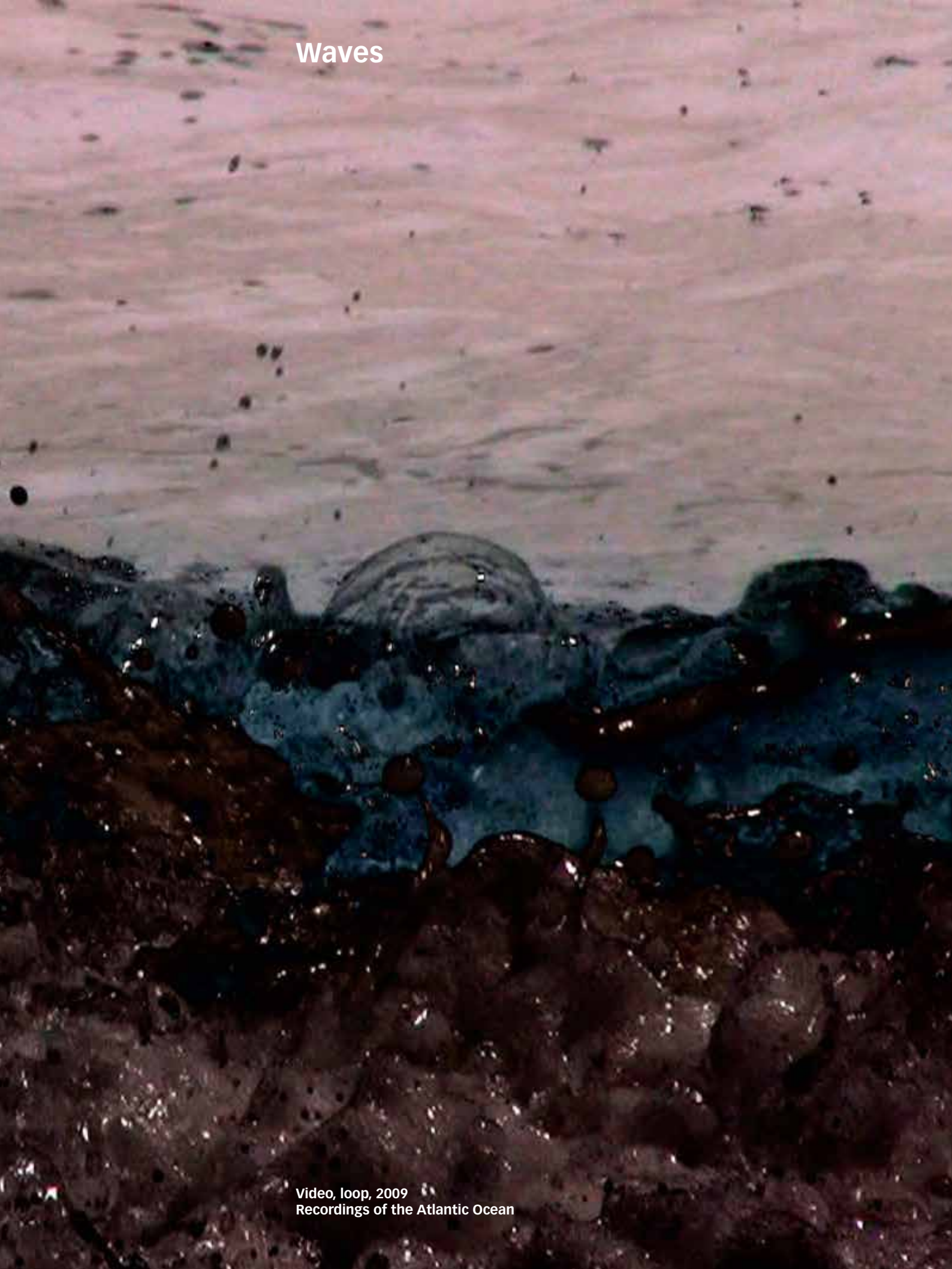








# Waves

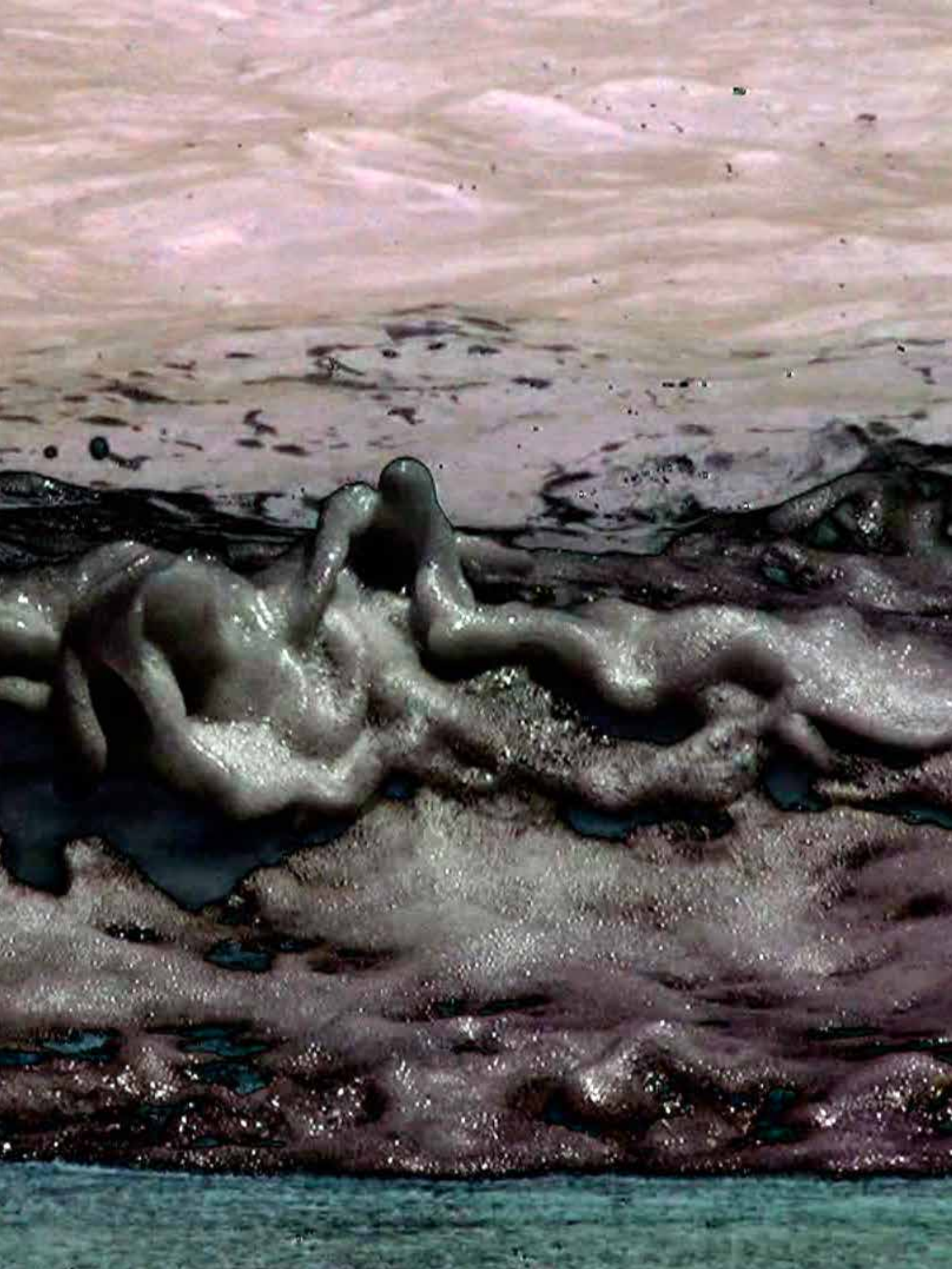


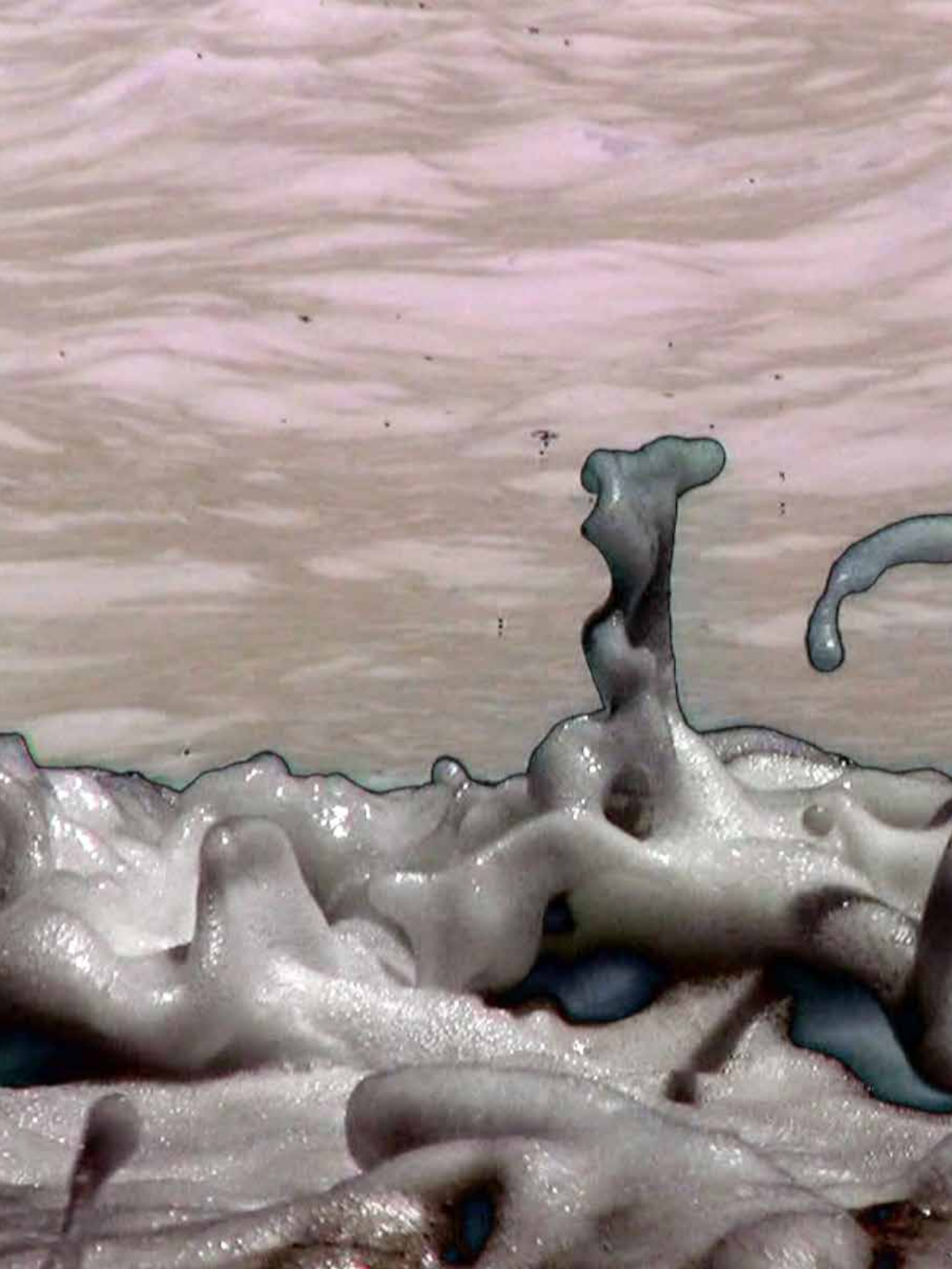
Video, loop, 2009  
Recordings of the Atlantic Ocean

















Video, 20:02 min, 2009  
Narrator and singer: Roy Clement Pollard





I was pretty good at this  
and I did my best.



I crawled under the blanket and pretended I was asleep.



I just couldn't remember them.



She threatened me with ju ju forces  
and beatings when I refused.







But they still wanted what they came for.

**Darkness**

In used to love darkness.

As a child back in the village darkness was the time and place for dreams and imagination.

And sleeping—a nice deep sleep

When waking up I'd go to my mother or father.

I'd help my father with the little garden.

And I'd help my mother cooking.

I'm not sure where I come from.  
But I think I'm from Uganda.

I do not remember the faces of my parents. I have an older brother. But I do not know whether he is dead or alive.

I think we stayed out on the savannah. There was a river not far from where we lived.

It was not really a house, it was more like a small clay hut.

My father and mother had two cows, a few goats, some chicken, and my father planted some vegetables.

I do not think we were very poor, because we had everything we needed to survive.

My brother and I did not go to school, although there was a school nearby. Most of the time we helped our parents.

I remember we played a lot of games, and that we always sang together.

I can still remember some of the songs.

**BREAK-Roy begins to sing!**

I was probably I have been eight or nine.

The men came at night

They were shooting up in the air, and a few men came into the hut and pulled my parents outside. They beat my father until he was bleeding, and some other men pulled my mother behind the hut.

The last thing I can remember is that they cut my father's throat and the blood pumped out from his neck and the men laughed loudly.

I never saw my mother again, but I can still hear her screaming. It still sits there.

What happened after, I cannot remember. I have tried many years but it is completely gone.

**BREAK**

My brother and I now lived in the bush. It was a kind of camp, and the men were soldiers. There were also other children. The men had weapons and they drank alcohol and used drugs.

The camp moved often. I have no idea of where we were and for how long we stayed at each place.

After a while they began to teach me how to clean weapons. We learned to dismantle, clean and put them back together again. I was pretty good at this and I did my best. Because I was good, many wanted me to clean their weapons. It gave little status being good at something. And I 'd be left alone as long as I worked.

At one point my brother was moved out of the camp. One day he was just gone. I've missed him ever since.

When I think of it, it's like white mist over my thoughts.

**BREAK**

I got my first menstruation. I think I must have been about thirteen or fourteen years of age. I was also starting to get breasts, and I know that some of the boys began to notice me. But I did not know what menstruation was. So when it happened, there was one of the older girls who made trouble at the camp and she beat me because I had soaked through my clothes one night.

After that everyone knew that I was now grown up. During a party at the camp, the soldiers would loudly talk about who should "pick the flower". I did not know what it meant, but I understood it was me they were talking about.

One night the soldiers had been drinking again. They had been out on a trip, and apparently it went well.

I was lying close to the entrance in our tent this evening. At one point, I could hear one of the soldiers calling out my name. I crawled under the blanket and pretended I was asleep. But I heard him calling on me again. One of the other girls in the tent pushed me. "Wake up, they call on you!" I was very frightened, but dared not do otherwise.

When I came to the soldiers, one of the soldiers shouted: Alice! Come over here! I did as he said. He stood up, walked around me and looked at me. He asked: How old are you, girl?

I replied that I was probably thirteen or fourteen.

I dared not look at him, but could smell that he sweated awfully. He pinched me hard on my breasts and slapped me on my bum. I began to cry.

He slapped me in my face and I fell down. Then he kicked me in the stomach.

Get up! He screamed.

Can you see my tent over there? The one with the blue carpet? Go over there and wait for me. I quickly ran over to the tent and sat down outside.

The soldiers drank again, and shouted loud.

I waited and hoped that he would be so drunk that he completely forgot about me.

But he didn't.

He asked a friend if he wanted to join him and together they came towards the tent where I was waiting.

This fellow came over and grabbed my hair with a fierce movement while he pulled me up. I was pushed backwards into the tent and they told me to take my clothes off. It did not go fast enough. I was beaten with a flat hand so I fell again.

One held my hands while the other raped me. I screamed and was again brutally beaten.

Their rough hands were everywhere over my body and I was about to throw up several times. They laughed to each other while they raped me.

**BREAK**

At one point, some of us young girls were led into the big city.

I had never been in a car before and I had never seen such a large city. It was all very strange. The smell, the noise. And for the first time I saw white people.

**BREAK**

I was sold to some men who picked me up and took me to a house where I was given a room.

When I came into the room, they started to beat me up. They tore all my clothes off and I was raped by all three of them. One of them hit me with a belt. And he hit hard.

After they had finished they left the room and locked the door. It continued like this for over a month. Beatings and rape, almost no food and water. I was their property. They even burnt a mark on my body.

**BREAK**

In the house there was a woman called "Mama". She was quite nice as long as us girls did what we were told.

I was forced to sell my body to men, but didn't get to see any of the money. Mama took all of them.

At some point, I had to wash myself, wear a dress and they took photos of me. I did as I was told, and after they had taken pictures, I was locked up again.

In my sleep I dreamed about my time as a child. But I always woke up when looking at my parents' faces. I just couldn't remember them.

**BREAK**

Mama said I was going to Europe. She told me that there were plenty of well-paid jobs over there. For example as a housekeeper or hairdresser. She had very good contacts over there.

There were three of us. We were told that when we come to Europe we should work and pay the money back it had cost her to produce documents and buy tickets for us. Then after a few years our debts would be paid off and we could be able to take care of ourselves. She also explained that it was a lifetime chance and that we should be grateful.

Before leaving we had to swear that we would not break the contract. A ju ju priest came, and cut off some of my hair and nails, which he used in a ritual. If I broke the contract he would send evil spirits after me.

That night I dreamed about Europe, about working and getting a better life. I just could not wait to go.

**BREAK**

Outside the airport, a man and woman waited for me. The woman explained that she and her husband would follow me to Italy. Everything would be okay.

**BREAK**

I lived with an African woman in Italy. She had taken my fake passport and documents. You don't need that here, she said.

Days passed and I was not offered any of the jobs I had been promised. When I asked for it, the woman said to me that it was hard to find that kind of work at the moment.

She also explained that I would soon pay her board and lodging. She had arranged a second job for me and I had to start the day after.

You've done it before, she said.

She threatened me with ju ju forces and beatings when I refused.

The day after I was sent to go to the streets in a city they called Turin.

I was on the edge of tears. I didn't know where I was. I did not understand the language and I was having sex with a lot of white men who often were very violent.

It was terrible and I felt very very lonely. But I could not do anything.

One day, after several years of hard work in Italy, Mama told me, she had contacts in Denmark. I had never heard of this country before.

**BREAK**

You belong to me now, was the first thing he said when we came to the apartment in Copenhagen, which was very cold. Tomorrow night you will go to Istedgade and work!

I was freezing and I was so confused.

Istedgade was cold and clammy. I had very little clothes on and I suffered from terrible pain in the abdomen.

20 clients a day or more.

Some of them seemed nice and felt sorry for me, when I told them that I was forced to do it and that I was so scared. But they still wanted what they came for.

Many times they refused to pay, but I still had to come home with money for Mama.

Other clients were very brutal and they took me to dark places, where they could do anything to me, if they wanted to. Nobody would know anyway.

I didn't have any personal papers. I had nothing. I didn't exist.

However, I still remember the contract I made with Mama and the ju ju priest.

**BREAK**

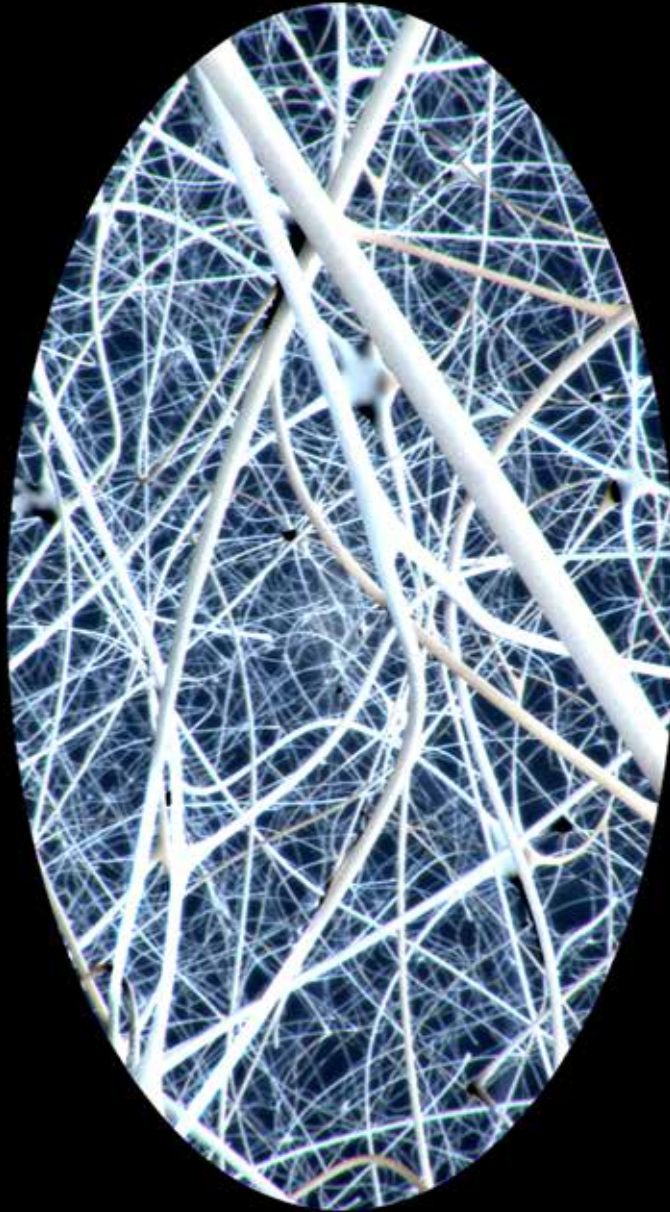
I would rather die than go back.

I dream about my Family once in a while.

But I sleep very poorly. I am haunted by nightmares of all the beatings, the rapes and the humiliation I experienced.

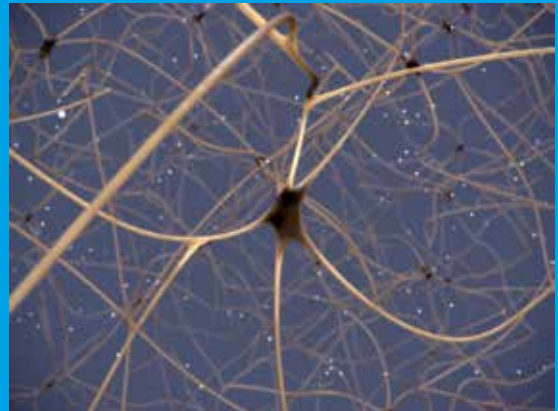
In the dark.



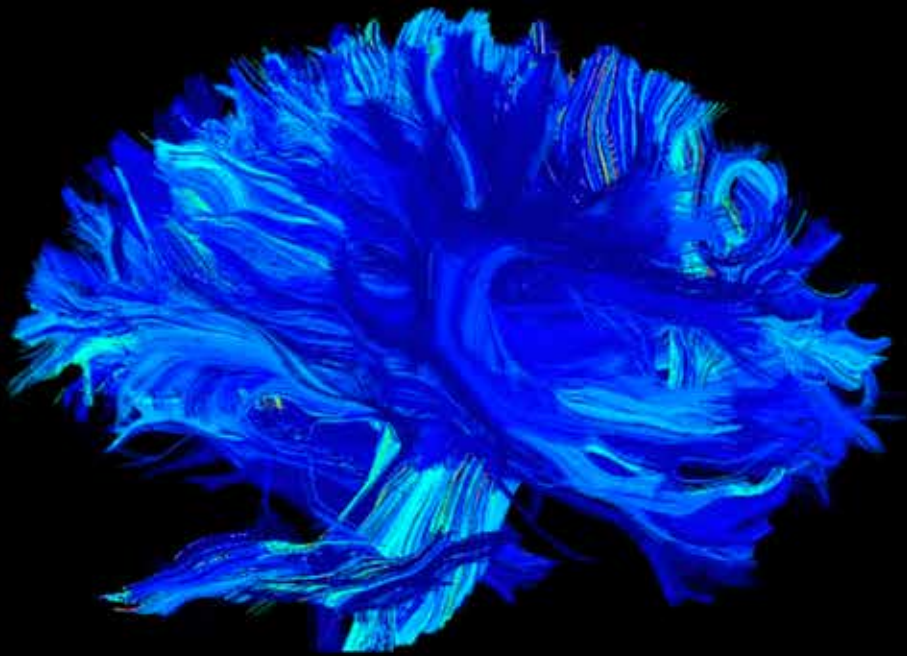


1. You see, Mommy would just put grease and water on my sister's hair and it was fine ... wave up all pretty and shiny. Shit, you couldn't slap the smile off my mother's face when she was doing my sister's hair.
2. My sister was perfect ... mommy treated her like she shit gold and had diamond tears because of her hair.
3. You know how many times she looked at me, confused as hell ... wondering where in the world I got this nappy hair from ... I swear if I didn't look just like her, she'd probably claim the hospital gave her the wrong baby.
4. Shit, it was just unheard of to have a light skinned child with grey eyes and nappy hair. I know that shit kept her up at night.
5. I got so used to the top of my ears being burned from the hot comb ... shit the last burn would barely scab over before I got another one. I got permanent lines on the back of my neck, where mommy was determined to get every single nap. She used to call it bustin' my knots.
6. It took gettin' that hot ass straghtening comb dropped down my back for her to decide that I needed to get a relaxer. 8 years old with a 2nd degree burn from a straightening comb down the middle of my back. There really aint no words to describe smelling your own flesh burning.
7. When mommy sat me down to give me that first relaxer, I was so happy. But Murphy's law is a bitch ... cause damn if that foul smellin acid in a jar didn't burn the FUCK outta my scalp.
8. It smelled like sulfur and felt like liquid fire. That shit burned so bad, I wanted to chop off my own head. But I just kept thinking about how soft and straight my hair was gon' be.
9. Still it wasn't soft enough.
10. She meant what she said about busting my knots. It was all out war she waged on my head. Made sure I got that relaxer every month like clockwork.
11. I was 12 when it finally all fell out. She was determined to get it bone straight. She didn't realize that she was burning away my hairline with that chemical. I tried to tell her that it was burning.
12. She would leave it on too long.
13. The bitch wouldn't listen. Didn't give a shit..til she saw it all dropping in the kitchen sink and going down the drain. I cried. But I cried because she cried. She just sat there and cried.
14. And then my perfect sister ... my perfect fuckin sister looked at me with sadness that broke. It was like she was exhausted of feeling sorry for me.
15. I got called nappy headed, peasy head, said I looked like I should be picking cotton. What did 7 year olds know about pickin' fuckin cotton?
16. That's not gon' happen to you ... Cause I'm smarter than my mother was. She thought marrying a light skinned nigga with half way straight hair was gon' do the trick. But I didn't take any chances.
17. I needed a guarantee. So I don't have to sit up at night rubbing my belly prayin' that the shit that happened to me, wouldn't happen to you.
18. Look at your daddy, he has the mother-fuckin' perfect shit, all fine with his pale eyes and wavy hair. You gon' have good hair. I promise. It'll be good, from the minute you're born ...

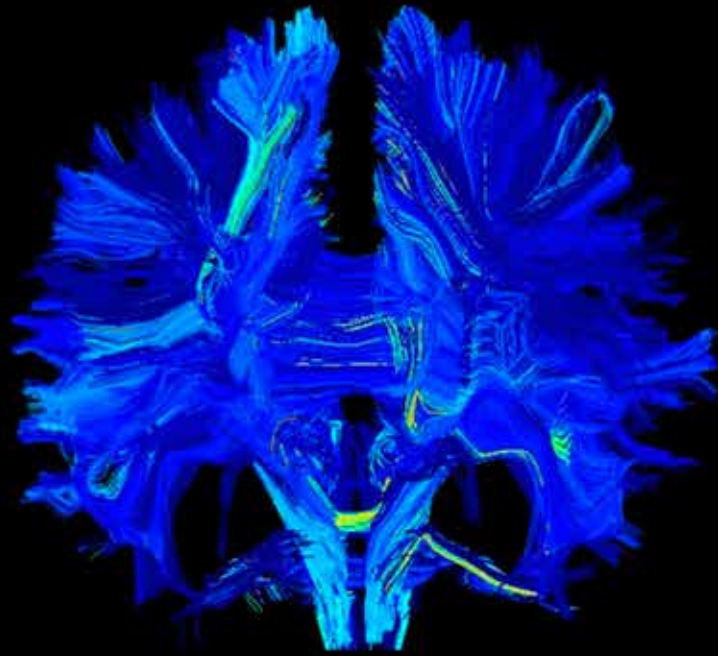
## Bustin' My Knots



Bildetekst?









# Off The Pig



Video, 5:03 min, 2012  
Recorded in Haiti





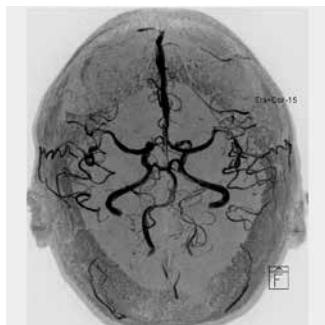








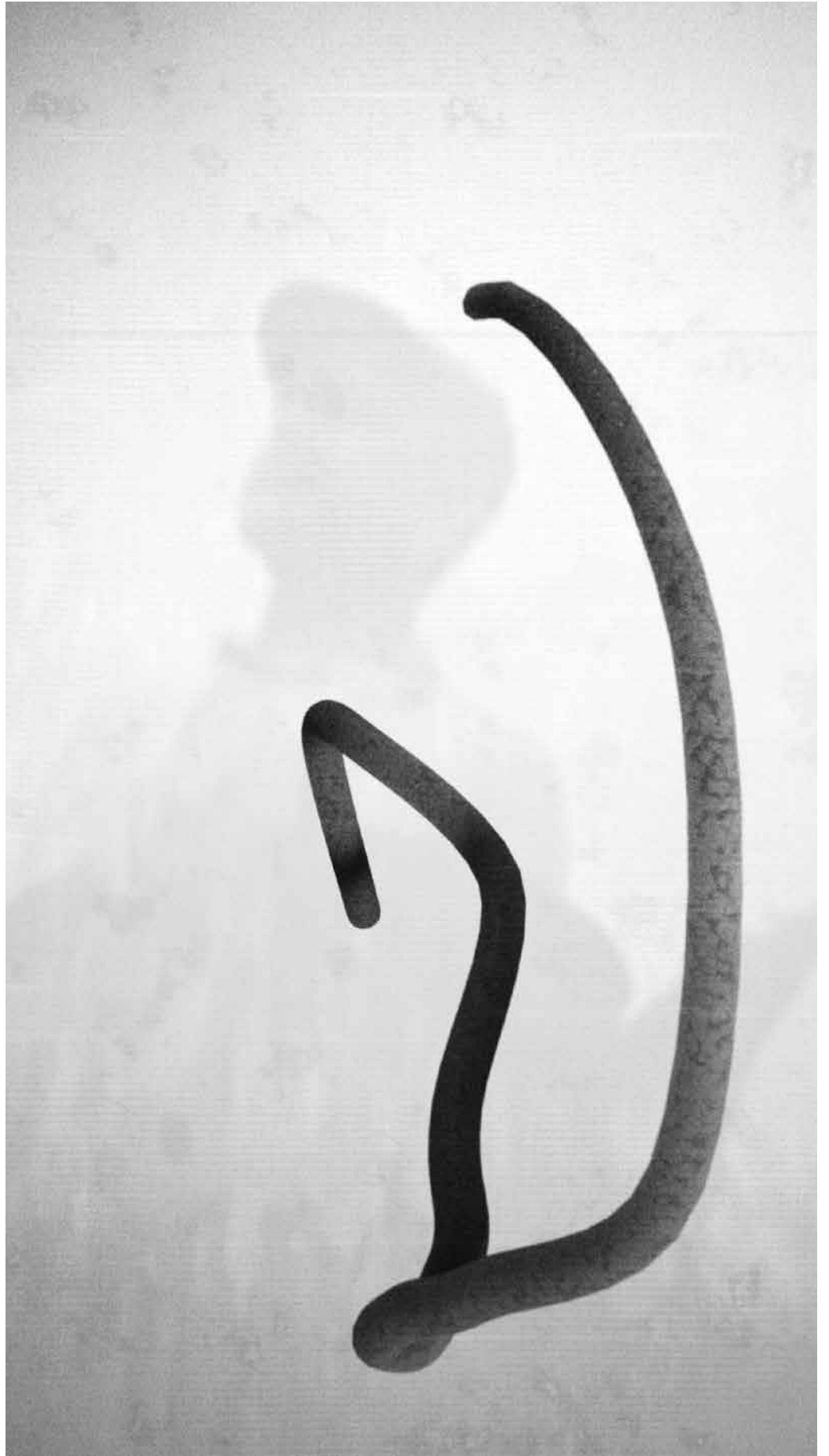


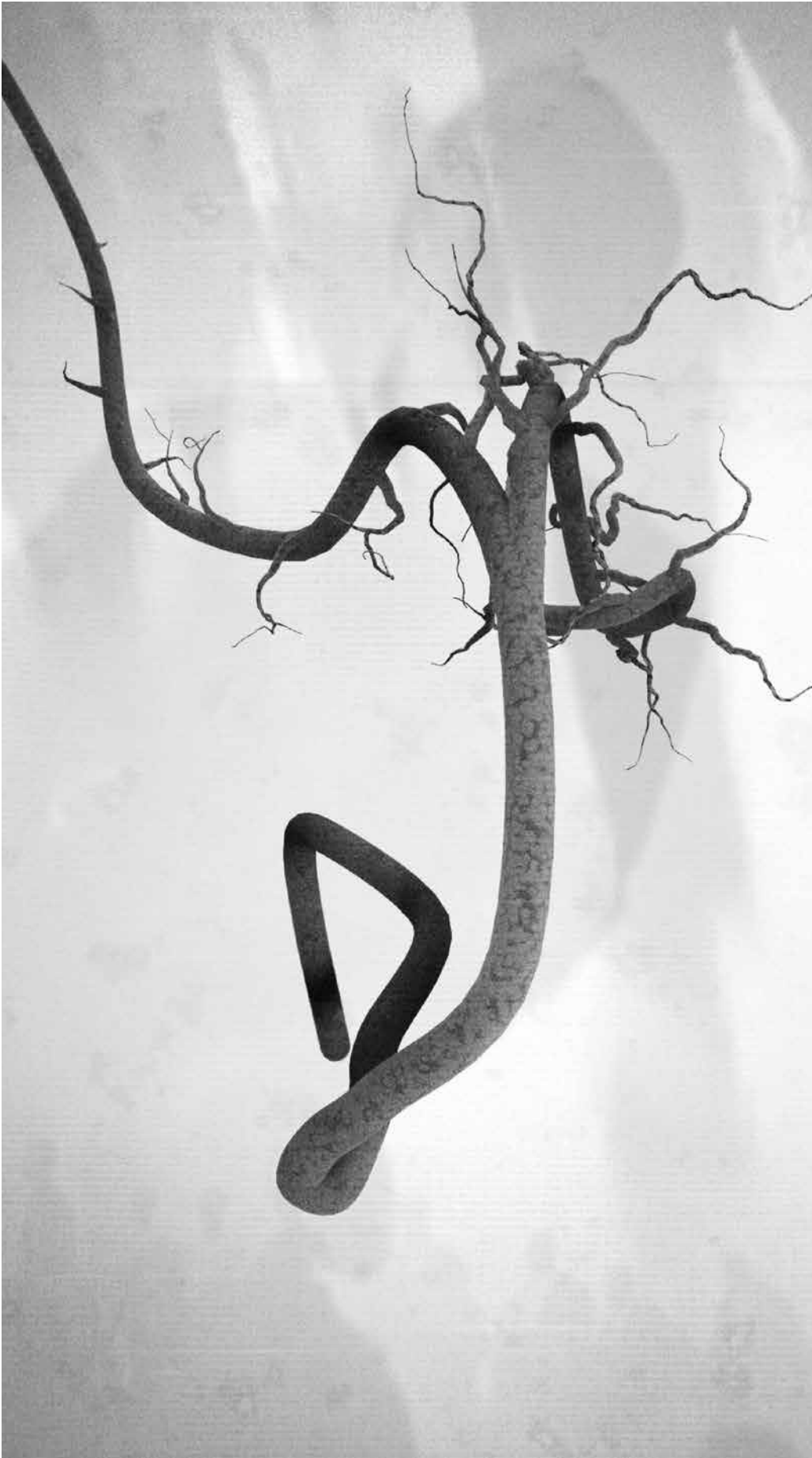


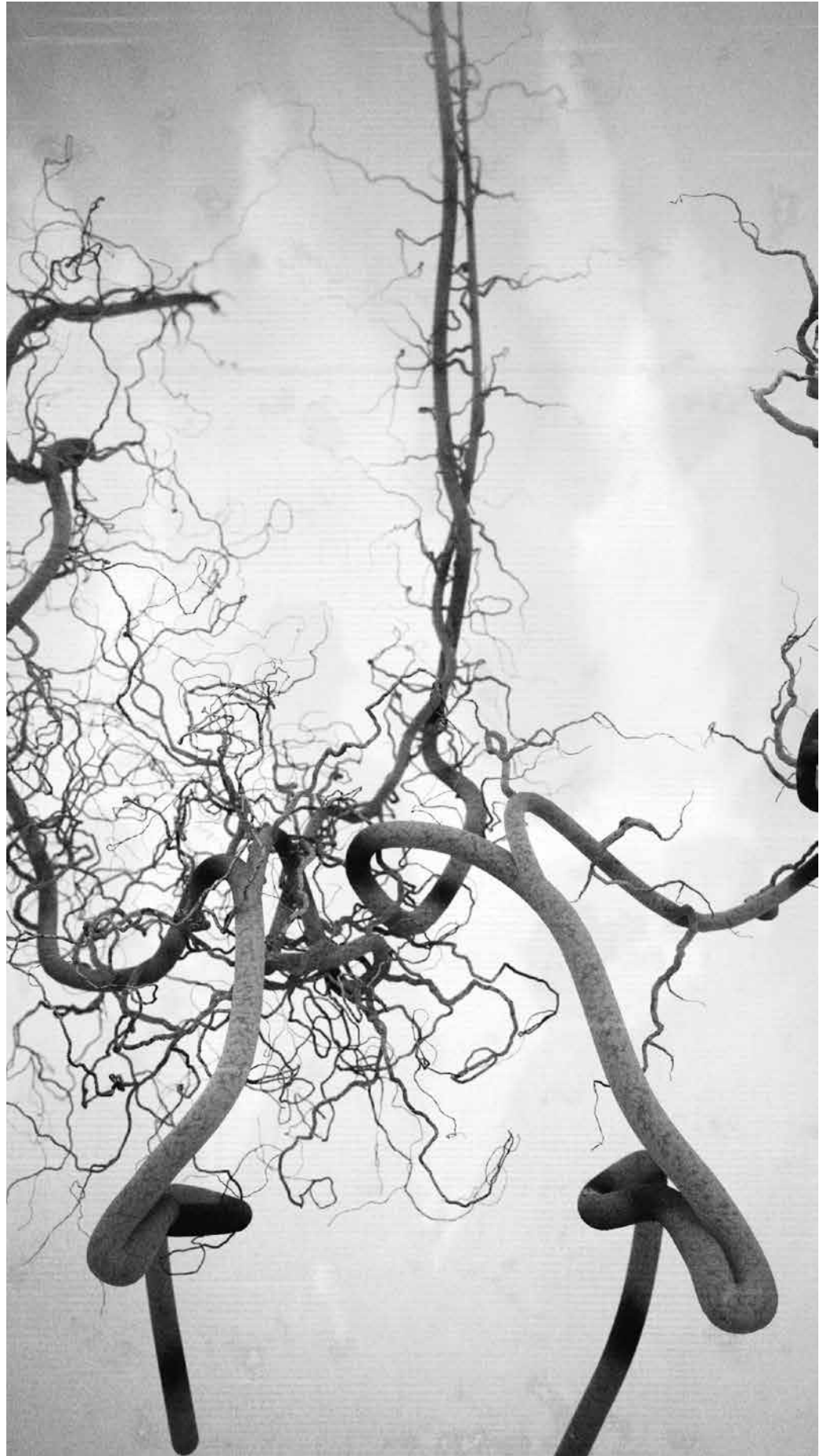
**Video, 4:43 min, 2012**  
**Archival Material from historical Marches**













Video, 4:33 min, 2012  
Recorded at The Citadel, Haiti

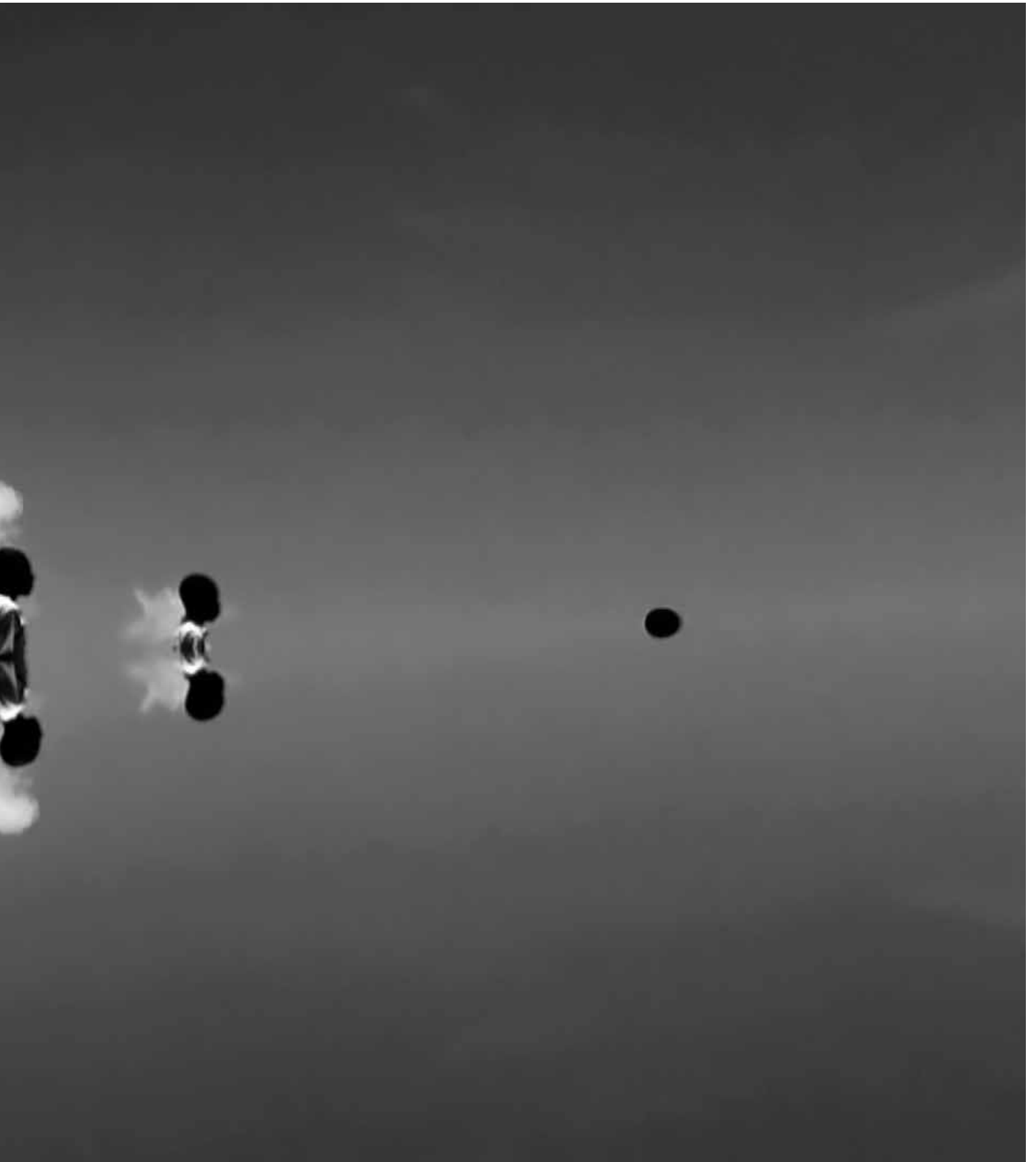




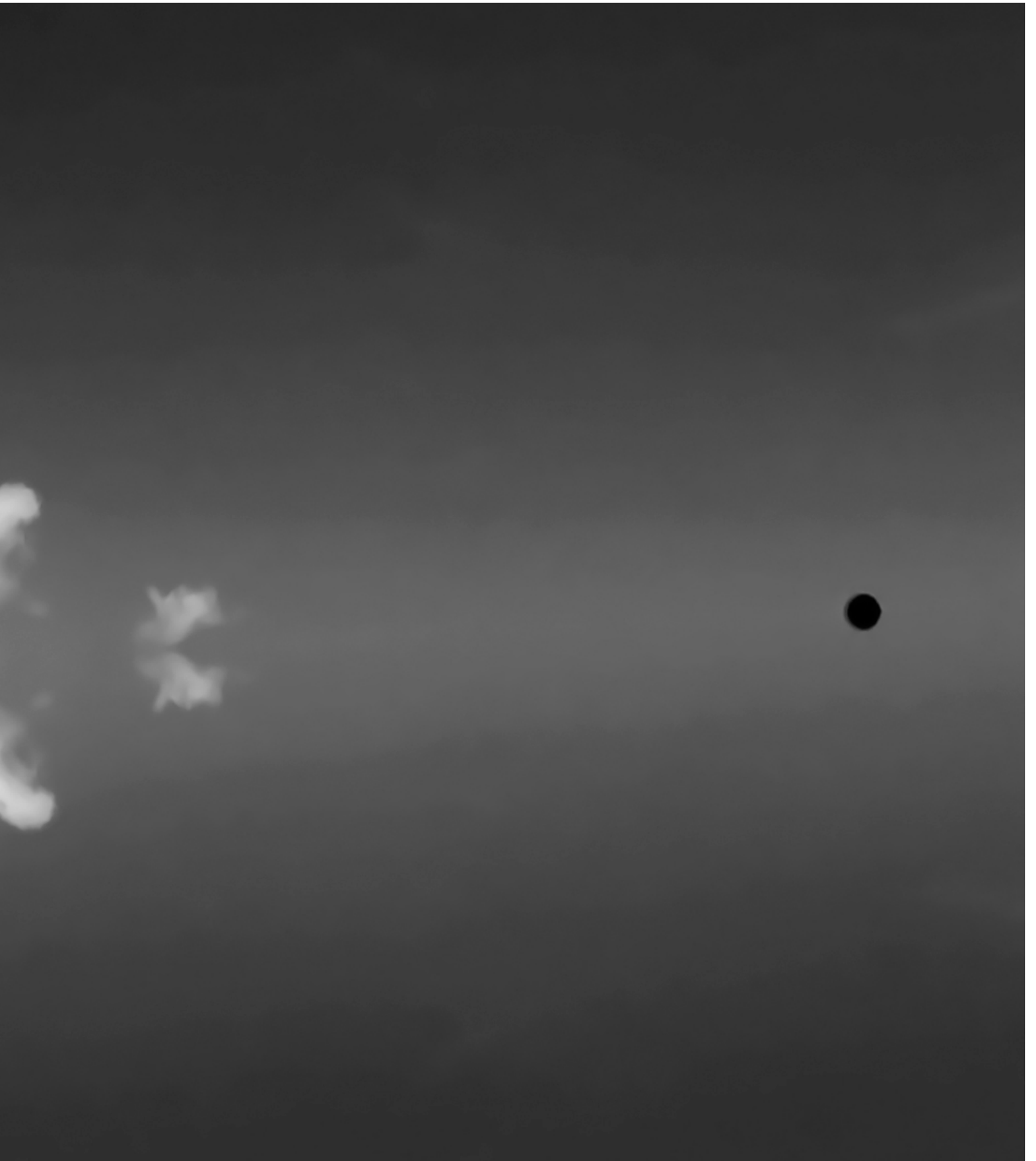












## The Image Of Me

*LORD, Why Did You Make Me Black?*

Lord, Lord,  
Why did You make me Black?  
Why did You make me someone  
The world wants to hold back?

Black is the color of dirty clothes;  
The color of grimy hands and feet.  
Black is the color of darkness;  
The color of tire-beaten streets.

Why did you give me thick lips,  
A broad nose and kinky hair?  
Why did You make me someone  
Who receives the hatred stare?

Black is the color of a bruised eye  
When somebody gets hurt.  
Black is the color of darkness,  
Black is the color of dirt.

How come my bone structure so thick  
my hips and cheeks are high?  
How come my eyes are brown  
and not the color of daylight sky?

Why do people think I'm useless?  
How come I feel so used?  
Why do some people see my skin  
and think I should be abused?

Lord, I just don't understand;  
What is it about my skin?  
Why do some people want to hate me  
And not know the person within?

Black is what people are "listed,"  
When others want to keep them away.  
Black is the color of shadows cast.  
Black is the end of the day.

Lord, You know, my own people mistreat me;  
And I know this isn't right.  
They don't like my hair or the way I look  
They say I'm too dark or too light.

Lord, Don't You think it's time  
For You to make a change?  
Why don't You re-do creation  
And make everyone the same?



*(God answered):*

Why did I make you black?  
Why did I make you black?

Get off your knees; look around.  
Tell me what do you see?  
I didn't make you in the image of darkness.  
I made you in the likeness of Me.

I made you the color of coal  
From which beautiful diamonds are formed.  
I made you the color of oil,  
The Black gold that keeps people warm.

I made you from the rich, dark earth  
That can grow the food you need.  
Your color's the same as the panther's  
Known for (HER) beauty and speed.

Your color's the same as the Black stallion,  
A majestic animal is he.  
I didn't make you in the Image of darkness  
I made you in the Likeness of Me!

All the colors of a Heavenly Rainbow  
Can be found throughout every nation;  
And when all those colors were blended well.  
**YOU BECAME MY GREATEST CREATION!**

Your hair is the texture of lamb's wool;  
Such a humble, little creature is he.  
I am the Shepherd who watches them.  
I am the One who will watch over thee.

You are the color of midnight sky,  
I put the stars' glitter in your eyes.  
There's a smile hidden behind your pain,  
That's the reason your cheeks are high.

You are the color of dark clouds formed  
when I send my strongest weather  
I made your lips full so when you kiss  
the one that you love ... will remember.

Your stare is strong; your bone structure, thick,  
to withstand the burdens of time.  
That reflection you see in the mirror ...  
The Image that looks back is MINE!

4,51 min, 2012,  
A collaboration project with Patricia Kaersenhout.  
Based on the poem by RuNett Nia Ebo: *Lord, Lord, Why Did You Make Me Black?*





# Dannebroget







**Bildetekst**  
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, conseq  
adipiscing elit. Fusce a nisi metus. Nunc  
sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.







**Bildetekst**  
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consec  
adipiscing elit. Fusce a nisi metus. Nunc  
sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.





**Bildetekst**  
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adipiscing elit. Fusce a nisi metus. Nunc  
sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.

**Bildetekst**  
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consec  
adipiscing elit. Fusce a nisi metus. Nunc  
sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.



**Bildetekst**  
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sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.

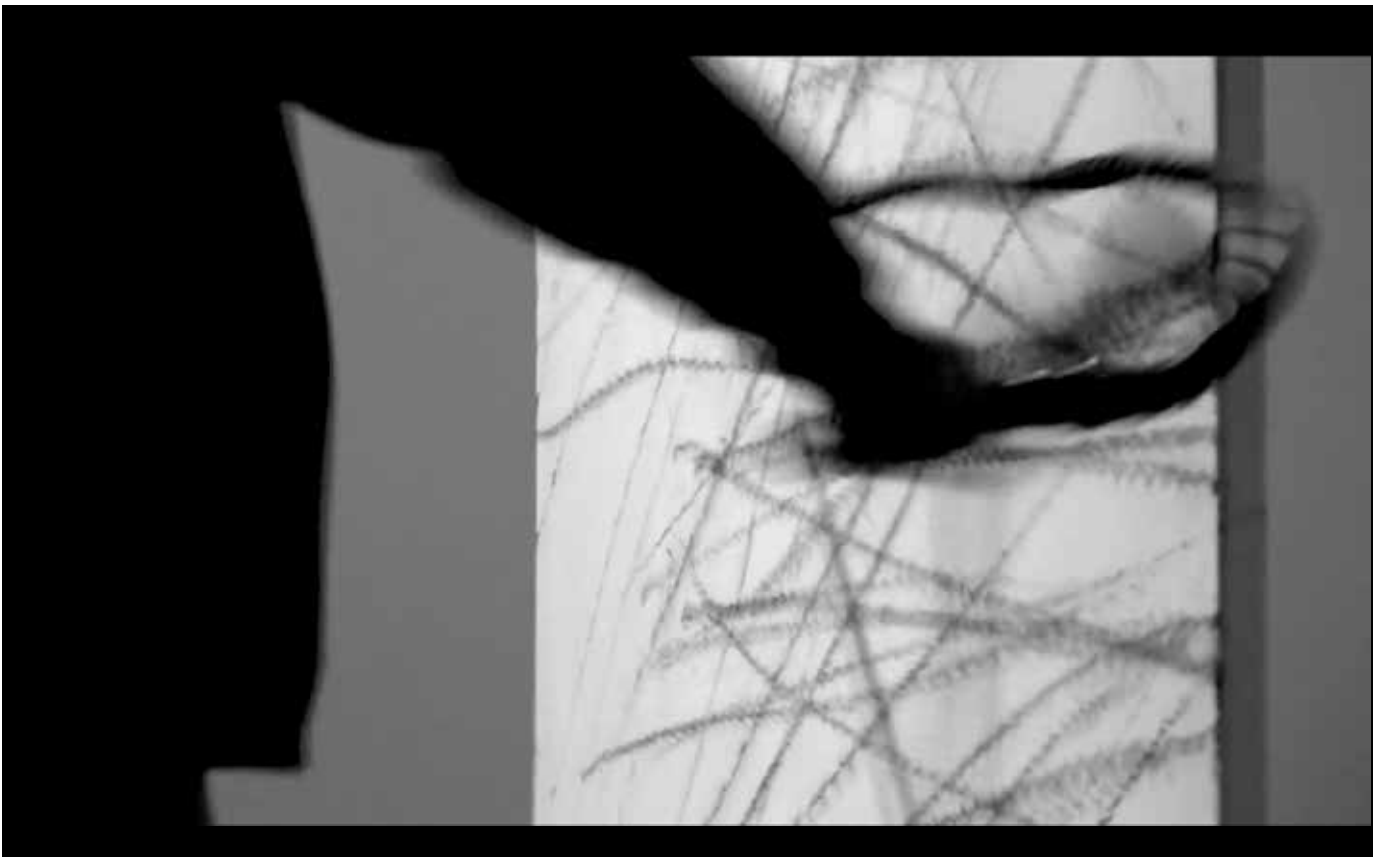
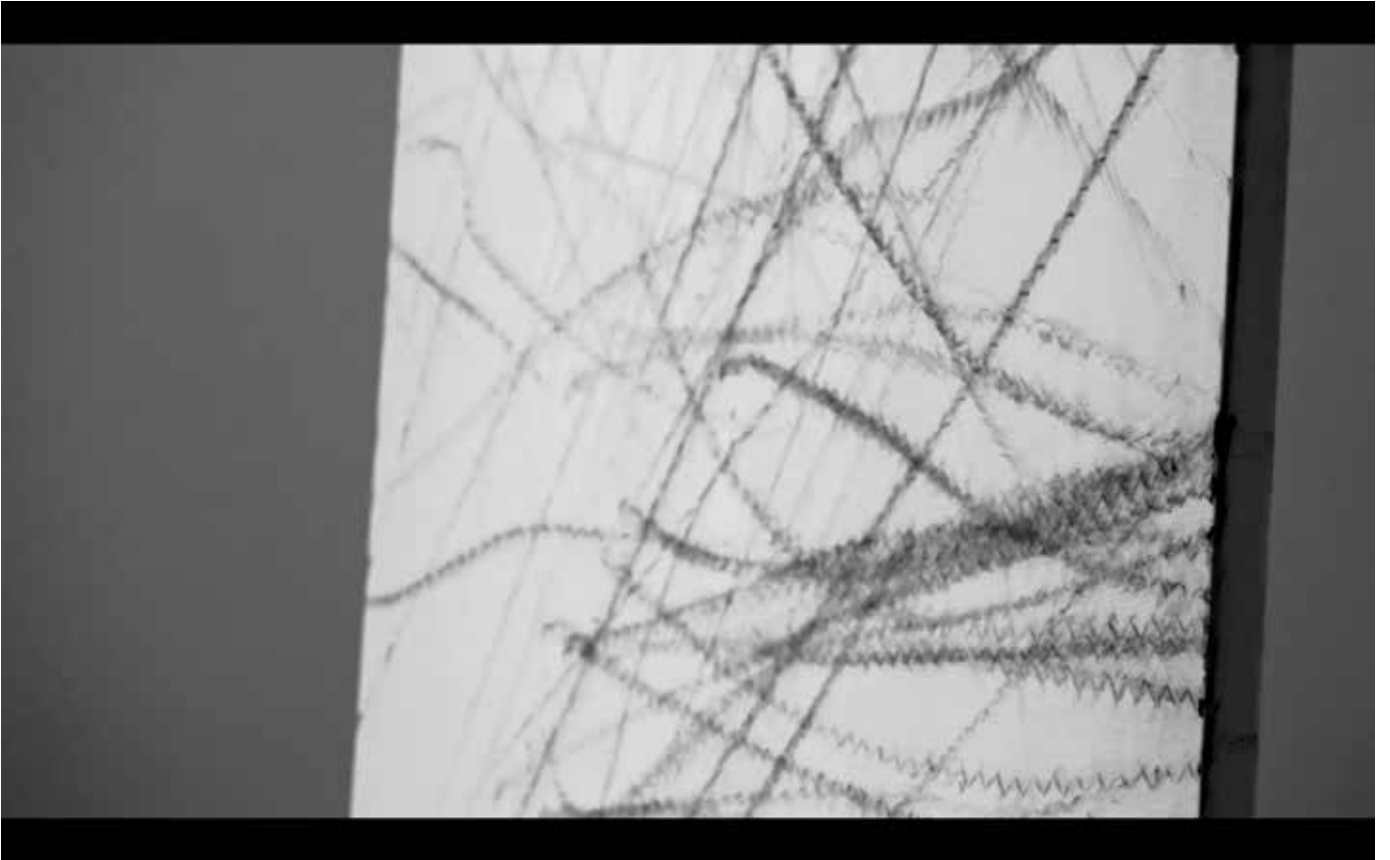


















"The racist dog policemen must withdraw immediately from our communities, cease their wanton murder and brutality and torture of black people, or face the wrath of the armed people!"

Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense



Black Panther Party for Self Defense  
P.O. Box 9641, Emeryville, California

Huey Newton (1942–1989), Civil rights activist, c. 1968.



# How Do You Talk About Threehundred Years in Four Minutes

Video, 4:00 min, 2014  
Quote by Lorraine Hansberry  
Song by Jerome Kern











## **Because the Spirits. A Conversation**

**Bildetekst**  
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consec  
adipiscing elit. Fusce a nisi metus. Nunc  
sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.











**Bildetekst**  
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, conseq  
adipiscing elit. Fusce a nisi metus. Nunc  
sollicitudin interdum tortor sed dium.















Paléme (reiser sit hoved)

Sover Du, Mulat!

Horatio.

Hvordan? Paléme!

Paléme.

Du efter Frihed længef ?

Den bringer jeg!

Horatio.

Du her i denne Nat!

Paléme.

Lidt vaad og kold er veien ind til Eder.

En dyb Cloaf

(han træder lidt frem)

See faa! Nu er jeg her!

Jeg kjender, kan I troe, til disse Steder  
Saa godt som til min hyttes Palmetrær.

Horatio.

Hvad vover Du! Rundt om der passet paa,

Paléme.

Men jeg har Venner, hvor man mindst det tænker.

Kom! I med mig den samme Bei maa gaa;  
De stolte Bjerge Eder Frihed skjæmter!

Horatio.

Mig vil du frelse!

Paléme.

Der, tag denne kniv!

Selv har jeg een. Vi kjæmpe for vort Liv,  
Hvis En os standse tør i dristigt Møde,  
Saa maae vi Kniven i hans Hjerte støde.  
Den er Døds-Englens blanke Vingesser,  
Med Blod den skriver: han er Døden viet,  
Affted! Før Dagen gryer, er I befriet!

Paléme (Lifts his head):  
Are you sleeping, mulatto?

Horatio:  
How can this be? Paléme?

Paléme:  
You long for freedom!  
I shall bring it to you!

Horatio:  
You? On this very night?

Paléme:  
A little wet and cold was the road to  
get to you.  
A deep drain.  
(He steps out to full view).  
Look! Now I am here!  
Let me say, I know about these places  
as well as I do the palm trees  
Of my cabin.

Horatio:  
Dare you to take such a risk?  
There are watchmen everywhere!

Paléme:  
But I have friends at places least  
expected, come!  
You must follow me on the same road.  
The proud mountains shall grant you  
Your freedom.

Horatio:  
You wish to save me?

Paléme:  
There, take this knife!  
I myself have one. We'll fight for our  
lives,  
should anyone dare to stop us in an  
audacious encounter,  
then shall we simply stab the knife  
in his heart.  
It is the bright wing feather of the  
Angel of death  
With blood it does  
Write: he is married to death!  
Be gone! Before the dawn of day shall  
you be free!

Horatio.

Hvad har jeg gjort for Dig! Du vover Alt,  
Dit Liv, din Frihed-

Paléme.

Villien er vor Vælde!

Saa lidt af Godt i Verden mig tilfaldt,  
At hvad jeg fik jeg sagtens kan gjengælde.  
I var mig god!- See saa, nu har vi talt,  
Nu maa der handles!

Horatio.

O, dybt ind i Sjælen

Har Du mig rørt! Hav Tak! Du er saa brav!  
Men jeg vil blive, jeg mit Løfte gav-

Paléme.

I blive vil i denne aabne Grav!  
Ero ei den Hvides Stemme! sæd og kjælen  
Kan Quinden hvifle! - Følg mig! Høst paa Pælen,  
Som Slaven bindes tidt til uden Brøde.  
Kjend Rebelliere! Viid, hvad Du gaaer imøde!  
Hof Dig vil meer end Ryg og Skuldre bløde,  
Dit Hjerte bløde vil, som engang mit.  
See Dig, Du lide skal, som jeg har lidt!

Horatio.

Farvel! Sin rige Løn Dig Gud vil give.  
Min Villie den er fast: jeg her vil blive!

Paléme.

I bliver! Hvor I viser Taab'lighed.

Horatio.

O skynd Dig bort! Minuterne de haste!

Paléme.

Sfald I pines! Da min hævn jeg veed.

Horatio:

What have I done for you?  
You risk all, your life, your freedom.

Paléme:

Volition is our power!  
So little goodness fell to me  
That what I was given I easily can repay.  
You were good to me!  
Look here, we have now spoken,  
But must act hastily.

Horatio:

Oh, you have moved me  
Deep within my soul. I do  
Thank you, how honest you are!  
But I must stay, I have made a promise.

Paléme:

You wish to stay in this open grave?  
Do not believe the voice of the whites.  
Follow me. Remember the post that  
the slave is tied to  
At no fault of his own, know Rebellière!  
Know what you are up against!  
More than your back and shoulder  
shall bleed,  
Your heart will as well, as did mine.  
Take heed! You will suffer just like me!

Horatio:

So long! God shall grant you his  
rich reward.  
My will stands firm. I shall remain here!

Paléme:

And by so doing shall you suffer!  
My revenge is already planned.  
I shall fling an ignited shingle across  
the field  
Where the sugar canes grow and  
Wind's waft  
Shall lift the flame.  
I have a powerful poison which I shall  
Blend in the water  
That they drink,  
Then shall his wife perish, as well  
as his family,  
His whole household!

En antændt Spaan jeg vil paa Marken kaste,  
 Hvor Sulferrøret groer, og Vindens Vift  
 Skal løfte Flammen. Jeg har kraftig Gift,  
 Den blander jeg i Vandet, som de drikke,  
 Saa døer hans Biv, hans Slægt, hans hele Huus!

Horatio.

Paléme! Ved Himlens Gud! Nei, gjør det ikke!

Paléme.

Den rige Pragt skal styrte ned i Gruus!  
 Hvad jeg har forudsagt, det snart vil hænde,  
 De Sorte Oprørffanen plante vil!  
 Plantagerne som Glædesblus vi tænde,  
 Og gaaer endnu der Dag og Uger til,  
 Jeg kan saa længe ei Feber glæde,  
 La Rebelliere jeg vide skal at møde,  
 Nu er han undfagt! Han for mig skal bløde!  
 I bliver her?

Horatio.

Jeg bliver! (kaster sig ned på Bænken)

Paléme.

Som I vil!

Jeg har gjort Mit og gjort det uden Nytte.

(stiger ned hvorfra han kom)

Horatio.

Guds Moder Dig ledsage og beskytte!

(han Blik hviler et Øjeblik paa det Sted, hvor Paléme forsvinder)

Hvis jeg ham fulgte, og man greb os sammen,  
 Det hed: jeg havde blæst til Oprørfflammen;  
 Jeg bliver!- jeg en sød Fortrøstning veed.  
 Der er en Gud, og der er - Kjærlighed.

Horatio:

Paléme! For heaven's sake!

Do not do so!

Paléme:

All the splendor of the rich shall fall  
 into ruins!

What I have foretold shall occur,

The blacks will plant the standard  
 of rebellion!

The plantations will ignite like bonfires,  
 And if yet more days and weeks must pass,

Well then, my fever's glow will not last  
 at such lengths.

I know, I shall encounter La Rebellière,

The gauntlet is now cast! He shall

bleed for me!

You will remain here?

Horatio:

I shall remain! (Flings himself on the  
 bench).

Paléme:

As you please!

I have done what I could without much  
 good! (goes back to where he came from).

Horatio:

May the Virgin Mary guide and  
 protect you!

(his eyes resting on the place from which  
 Paléme disappeared).

Had I followed him and had we been  
 captured

Together, it would have been said that  
 I had fanned the

Flame of rebellion.

I shall stay! I have sweet confidence  
 in the existence of both God

And love.

*[Kendrick Lamar:]*

Other than that, now that I finally got a chance to holla at you, I always wanted to ask you about a certain situa-, about a metaphor actually, you spoke on the ground. What you mean 'bout that, what the ground represent?

*[2Pac:]*

The ground is gonna open up and swallow the evil. That's how I

see it, my word is  
bond. I see and the  
ground is the symbol  
for the poor people,  
the poor people is  
gonna open up this  
whole world and  
swallow up the rich  
people. Cause the rich  
people gonna be so  
fat, they gonna be so  
appetising, you know  
what I'm saying,  
wealthy, appetising.  
The poor gonna be so  
poor and hungry, you

poor and hungry, you  
know what I'm saying  
it's gonna be like...  
there might be some  
cannibalism out this  
mutha, they might eat  
the rich

*[Kendrick Lamar:]*  
Would you consider  
yourself a fighter at  
heart or somebody that  
only reacts when they  
back is against the  
wall?



*[2Pac:]*

I like to think that at every opportunity I've ever been threatened with resistance it's been met with resistance. And not only me but it goes down my family tree. You know what I'm saying, it's in my veins to fight back

*[Kendrick Lamar:]*

Aight well, how long you think it take before niggas be like,

we fighting a war, I'm  
fighting a war I can't  
win and I wanna lay it  
all down

*[2Pac:]*

In this country a black  
man only have like 5  
years we can exhibit  
maximum strength,  
and that's right now  
while you a teenager,  
while you still strong  
or while you still  
wanna lift weights,  
while you still wanna  
shoot back. Cause

once you turn 30 it's like they take the heart and soul out of a man, out of a black man in this country. And you don't wanna fight no more. And if you don't believe me you can look around, you don't see no loud mouth 30-year old muthafuckas

*[Kendrick Lamar:]*

That's crazy, because me being one of your offspring of the legacy you left behind I can

truly tell you that there's nothing but turmoil goin' on so I wanted to ask you what you think is the future for me and my generation today?

*[2Pac:]*

Shit, I think that niggas is tired-a grabbin' shit out the stores and next time it's a riot there's gonna be bloodshed for real. I don't think America can know that. I think

American think we was just playing and it's gonna be some more playing but it ain't gonna be no playing. It's gonna be murder, you know what I'm saying, it's gonna be like Nat Turner, 1831, up in this muthafucka. You know what I'm saying, it's gonna happen

*[Kendrick Lamar:]*  
That's crazy man. In

my opinion, only hope that we kinda have left is music and vibrations, lotta people don't understand how important it is.

Sometimes I be like, get behind a mic and I don't know what type of energy I'mma push out, or where it comes from. Trip me out sometimes

*[2Pac:]*

Because the spirits, we  
ain't really rappin', we  
just letting our dead  
homies tell stories for  
us

**We, humans on the planet, cannot avoid conflictive coexistence and the solution is not to eliminate the difference but to decolonize the logic of coloniality that translated difference into values.**

**Walter Mignolo (From *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*)**



**Jeannette Ehlers on her artistic practice and about saying things loudly**

**What is the intention behind the title of this book *Say It Loud!*?**

The title *Say It Loud!* is based on my 2014 major solo show at Nikolaj Contemporary Art Centre Copenhagen. The title is taken from the iconic James Brown funk song: *Say it Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud* from the 1960's in which he addresses the need for black empowerment. I truly relate to that, but also felt it was about time to address a need in a Danish context, to openly talk about a hidden chapter in Danish history: The nation's more than 250 years of involvement in the transatlantic enslavement trade, which has been totally erased from our common knowledge. So the title is an outburst about colonial issues affecting today's society.

**In your practice you often reference iconic voices. Could you describe the voices in the audio of your video *Off The Pig* (2012)?**

*Off The Pig* (p. 73) is inspired by the Haitian Revolution that took place from 1791 to 1804 and led to Haiti's independence from France through slave rebellion as the only nation in history to have done so. The Haitian Revolution has therefore inspired numerous movements and connects multiple voices throughout time. The main characters in my video *Off The Pig* are war heroes from the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Then, there is the voice of Malcolm X, who we know as one of the leading 1960's African-American human rights activists and from the Black Muslims. We also hear political activist Angela Davis, an iconic figure in the Civil Rights Movement, known for her involvement with and dedication to Black Power movements. Davis also had close relations to the Black Panther Party that was greatly influenced by The Haitian Revolution, so there is also the voice of Black Panther Party leader Huey P Newton in the video.

**These are all voices of history and angry voices. Why do you insist on bringing them forward in your work?**

There is a lot of rage and a sense of necessity in these voices: a necessity for change. And rioting. In the sound clip I sampled of Angela Davis, she talks about her experience of the Birmingham Church Bombing in the 1960's, where members of the Ku Klux Klan bombed a church and many young girls died. The Birmingham bombing was never framed as a terrorist act. In the Western gaze. But the attack was simply harassment and terrorism. All these voices talk about the terror that black people go through and have been going through since they came to the shores of America. However, I am also deeply influenced by voices of today, like for example musician Kendrick Lamar. These different voices are incredible sources of inspiration and they serve as reminders of the black movement and ongoing struggle. The conditions for black people in today's society

are still very bad. This is why I feel it is so crucial to use these iconic voices. They give us a feeling of solidarity and they give us vision and strength.

**What do you mean when you say the Western gaze?**

I mean the white colonial gaze—the gaze that is infecting our society. And by that I mean the gaze that we have been programmed to use, the gaze that is influenced by the white man's agenda; white supremacy and hegemony.

**Could it be that this need for you to highlight colonial issues has to do with the lack of awareness on racial issues in your home country Denmark?**

That is a good point. The whole discussion around racialization in a colonial context is almost non-existent in Denmark, which does not mean that the racial challenges and confrontations are not there, on the contrary. But in general, the ignorance around Danish coloniality is tremendously high and we are not fully articulated in the discourse yet due to lack of consciousness. Even though our culture is deeply rooted in racist structures like the rest of the Western world, we have no tradition of dealing with racial issues like they have in the States. In for example the UK, because of their large communities of people from the former British colonies, they have a stronger tradition of discussing discrimination and racism. However, it is still not as persistent as in the States. And even though Americans have been discussing these issues since the first enslaved African arrived on the shores of America, black people are still silenced and systematically neglected. It's quite complex. Despite different national backgrounds, the black diaspora is struggling against the Eurocentric narrative on a global scale. But the black communities in places like the States and South Africa have a stronger tradition of articulating the impact of racism caused by their explicitly racist societies.

**Why are people being silenced?**

It is a structural thing. Racism is a structural thing. It has to do with power dynamics. Anger challenges the norm. And the norm's view upon itself. And if you don't want the power balance to shift, silencing and dehumanization are ideal tools to use. Those are core concepts of oppression. I am always struck by how the Western world has forced itself throughout the world. It brutalized from day one of colonization in the name of so-called "civilization". And it is reflected in almost every detail in society today. It is important to understand history in order to understand why the world is bleeding and why some are reacting with civil disobedience and violence. Even though I, myself, am peaceful, I understand the need or the urge to revolt.

**In the canon of contemporary Western art history, we see anger in the early performance art of the Dadaist movement and then again in the 1960's feminist movement. Anger was a separatist strategy for these movements and I wonder how anger impacts your work?**

In many of my works, anger is a driving force and provides motivation but does not necessarily show in the work. I always intend to balance intention and motivation. For instance, my performance *Whip It Good* (p. 101), which is perhaps my most explicitly angry and brutal piece, is still kind of subtle. I always strive towards expressing complex matters in a very simple manner. In that way I hope to emotionally connect with my audience. The performance includes interaction with the audience. I work with the audience. It is a very powerful piece. I whip the canvas. The sound, and the whole act, is very violent. I ask the audience to participate: to finish the painting i.e. to think and do whatever they feel is appropriate for the performance and for them. I challenge the colonial narrative in a very precise and powerful way through simplicity and poetic statements.

**Do you use other strategies other than anger when dealing with colonial issues: for instance the Greenlandic-Danish artist Pia Arke who had a curious and humorous way of exploring history and Danish culture?**

I take a humoristic approach in some of my work. *Black Magic at the White House* (2009) (p. 40) is to me very humorous, and also my very early work *Dannebroget* (2006) (p. 99) from my graduation show at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen; the title of the work twists the name of the Danish flag "Dannebrog" into the word diverse, which is "broget" in Danish. I made the Danish flag, which is red with a white cross, with Danish chocolate balls so my version of the flag was of course brown with coconut drizzled chocolate balls as the cross. It was made around the same time that Danish cartoonists had made caricatures of the prophet Mohammed and the Danish flag was set on fire all over the world. These types of chocolate balls are filled with sugary stuff and the work can also be interpreted in a colonial discourse: the sugar trade from the former plantations being a main factor behind the wealth in Danish society today.

**And a racial context?**

Yes. This specific type of chocolate balls used to be called *negerboller*, equivalent to *negro balls*. And many people insist on using this expression still. They say they do not mean any harm and are not being racist. But if you don't mean any harm, then please do not use the term, right! This country suffers from a tremendous colonial amnesia and rejection of being conscious, which certainly shows in the mindset: Often too closed around oneself and unwilling to open up to other cultures or narratives. That is ignorant and arrogant. A bad cocktail.

**This lack of empathy towards other cultures and experiences perhaps has to do with a resistance of admitting having privileges?—An attitude which maybe also shows in our hesitation towards accepting refugees in Europe at the moment.**

Yes, and it has to do with great denial. Much of what is going on is because of Western imperialism. And the immigration situation in Europe and elsewhere at the moment ... I do not want to say that it is payback time, but it is a consequence of Western colonial history. Many immigrants coming now are simply forced to come and take a piece of the cake the Europeans stole from them. Everybody wants a good life.

**As a final note I want to ask you what you are working on right now?**

I want to make a memorial statue called *Queen Mary* in front of the Royal Cast Collection, which is located at the harbor front in Copenhagen where the transatlantic trade took place. The whole area is built with money from this trade. And the year 2017 is the 100th anniversary for Transfer Day, which was when Denmark sold the Virgin Islands to the US. The Royal Cast Collection was originally built as the West Indian Warehouse and it stored all the goods imported from the West Indies: sugar and rum ... So it was a very central place for the trade. Since the 1980's, the building has housed the Royal Cast Collection: a collection of copies of Western historical statues from the Antique to the Renaissance. But it is an amazing place because of these two stories that clash: all these white plaster sculptures representing white supremacy and white Western history in this building that was made from a brutal history of black labor. In front of this building there is a huge sculpture of a white male; a bronze copy of Michelangelo's *David*. My intention is to accompany Michelangelo's *David* with a huge sculpture of a black woman called *Queen Mary*, referencing one of the three female rebellion leaders from the Danish West Indies, Mary Thomas. Queen Mary was imprisoned in Copenhagen for leading the Fireburn rebellion in 1878 and later sent back to the Virgin Islands. The memorial sculpture is indeed a statement of resistance and a reminder of our transatlantic heritage, but it is definitely also a way of establishing a contemplative space of awareness of the strong relation we share with African, American and Caribbean people. I created the *Queen Mary* character as a reference to and manifestation of freedom fighters like Queen Mary, the Black Panther Party and today's Black Lives Matter Movement. I'm fascinated by the empowerment narrative. It is crucial for the understanding of radical and decolonial thinking and doing.

Page references to mentioned artworks.

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