Leaving Home: Cathouse FUNeral Migrates North
June 24 - September 10, 2017
18 West Main Street, Beacon, New York

artists:
Michael Ashkin
Brad Benischek
Davide Cantoni
Anne Deleporte
Ana Delgado
Ellwood C. Dixon
David Dixon
Shadi Harouni
Baseera Khan
Pete Moran
Luisa Rabbia
Farideh Sakhaeifar
Tariku Shiferaw
Tim Simonds
Daniel Swanigan Snow
Tribble & Mancenido
Nari Ward

curator: David Dixon
producer: Paola Ochoa
special thanks: Joyce Pomeroy Schwartz

Situated in a 3,000 sq. ft. warehouse space a few minutes walk from the Beacon train station, Cathouse FUNeral, for the summer of 2017, will be positioned on the flip-side of town from Dia.

Cathouse continues its itinerant off-site program with an installation of harvested FUNeral walls, historical objects, and the work of seventeen deeply engaged contemporary artists. Issues addressed in *Leaving Home* are immigration, border-crossing, notions of home and *diremption*, a self tearing apart.

No natural light graces this exhibition, it is a dark and dusty space, evoking a forgotten museum's forgotten storage space with objects both of our cultural moment and of times and places past. A universal survey of crossed boundaries, both terrestrial and celestial, locating ourselves amongst ourselves in time and space, on land and at sea, in substance and in the void.

Hegel tells us: *Reason appeals to the* self-*consciousness of each and every consciousness:* 'I am I, *my object and my essence is* I'*; and no one will deny Reason this truth. But in basing itself on this appeal, Reason sanctions the truth of the other certainty, viz. that there is for me an 'other'; that an other than 'I' is object and essence for me, or, in that I am object and essence to myself, I am only so by drawing back from the 'other' altogether, and taking my place as an actuality* alongside *it.* *

Philosophy is cold comfort when you've lost your home, or your nation is war-torn, or you're bottom feeding in a culture that has forgotten you (if it ever knew you were there in the first place) or, simply, if your neighbors hate you. But applied philosophical systems do

determine ownership, justify power and even account for the distribution of food, for example. So, we are not wasting our time here by reflecting on contentiousness and conflict with art, our philosophy. The grave may be empty, but our discourse is full…

Michael Ashkin contributes a spontaneous town made of common, corrugated cardboard.

Brad Benischek contributes his exported FUNeral mural and a slice of family life.

Davide Cantoni contributes an on-site mural plus a painting of the same shifting image adrift.

Anne Deleporte contributes passport images without any images.

Ana Delgado contributes a dark painting of a house emptied and aflame.

Ellwood C. Dixon contributes the Santa Maria crossing the sea.

David Dixon, Ellwood's blood, contributes a clan and some twins.

Shadi Harouni sits at a precipice with family and fear.

Baseera Khan huddles her black shrouds throughout the space.

Pete Moran water-tortures the consequences while sending a beacon into the night.

Luisa Rabbia gives us to us in a cloud along with a belly button of cosmic dimension.

Farideh Sakhaeifar offers exploding mosques and launching rockets with nothing but the pack on your back.

Tariku Shiferaw hangs dark plastic and light plastic, side by side.

Tim Simonds contemplates his navel.

Daniel Swanigan Snow colors us all with accusations.

Tribble & Mancenido show us the comforts of home from the darkened outside.

and **Nari Ward** gives breathing directions.

This, amongst the distinctive Cathouse FUNeral walls harvested from our defunct gallery space in Brooklyn and arranged in Beacon at 18 West Main Street. Additional objects on display from China, Africa, and the American colonial past. For more information visit CathouseFUNeral.com *Free Admission*

* p. 141, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, G.W.F Hegel, A. V. Miller translation (Oxford Univ. Press)

Leaving Home: Cathouse FUNeral Migrates North
18 West Main St, Beacon NY
June 24 - Sept 10, 2017

Check List (price list upon request):

Daniel Swanigan Snow
What's Your Sign? 2017
electric lights, sign, chain, etc.

Shame On U(ZI), 2016
pellet gun, plaster, tin and iron with laser sight, etc.

Luisa Rabbia
Towards, 2012
white pencil on porcelain
variable dimension (230 figures)

Nucleus, 2016
colored pencil on acrylic on paper, framed.

Ellwood C. Dixon
Santa Maria, 1926
wood, canvas, metal

Santa Maria at Sea, 1926
rotogravure

Makonde body mask
date and author unknown
Tanzania/Mozambique
Wood

Davide Cantoni
Refugees leaving Venezuela RGB, 2017
mural, acrylic on gypsum board

Refugees leaving Venezuela RGB, 2017
acrylic on paper on canvas

Farideh Sakhaeifar
NASA/ISIS
inkjet on metallic pearl paper mounted on 1/8" sintra

Pending, 2015-present
digital inkjet print

Cong
date and author unknown
China circa 2500 BC, 20th century copy?
jade

Anne Deleporte
ID stack 2007
Photomatons, framed

Shadi Harouni
Last Day of the Bombardments, 2007/17
photographs and text on paper, framed
edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP

Cathouse FUNeral harvestings
White Harvesting, 2017
plaster and graphite on gypsum board, framed

Harvesting: Heroic Social Worker, 2014
paint on gypsum board with screws, framed

Tribble & Mancenido
Atwood Road V-1, 2016
archival inkjet print, printed spacers, plexiglass, custom welded aluminum frames with custom car paint
Edition 1 of 3

Michael Ashkin
Hiding places are many, escape only one, 2008
corrugated cardboard, dimensions variable

Timothy Simonds
Untitled, 2008
pigment print, hermetic poplar frame

Pete Moran
The searchlights could not find a name, and they were sent below, 2017
oil paint and yacht varnish on plywood

Self board water portrait (decisive threats require decisive action), 2015
plywood, bucket, water pump, silicone tubing, PLA plastic, wire, rope

Nari Ward
Hole Nation, 2017
used American history book, copper nails, indelible ink

Brad Benischek
mural harvested from his solo-exhibition, *Ghost City*, at Cathouse FUNeral in 2014

framed harvesting from *Ghost City, 2014*
graphite, shellac, pigment on plaster on gypsum board

Tariku Shiferaw
King Kunta (Kendrick Lamar), 2016
spray-paint on plastic

XXX (Kendrick Lamar), 2017
spray-paint on plastic

Ana Delgado
Papi's Gone
acrylic on canvas

Baseera Khan
Acoustic Sound Blankets
black silk, felt, industrial sound insulation, custom gold embroidery

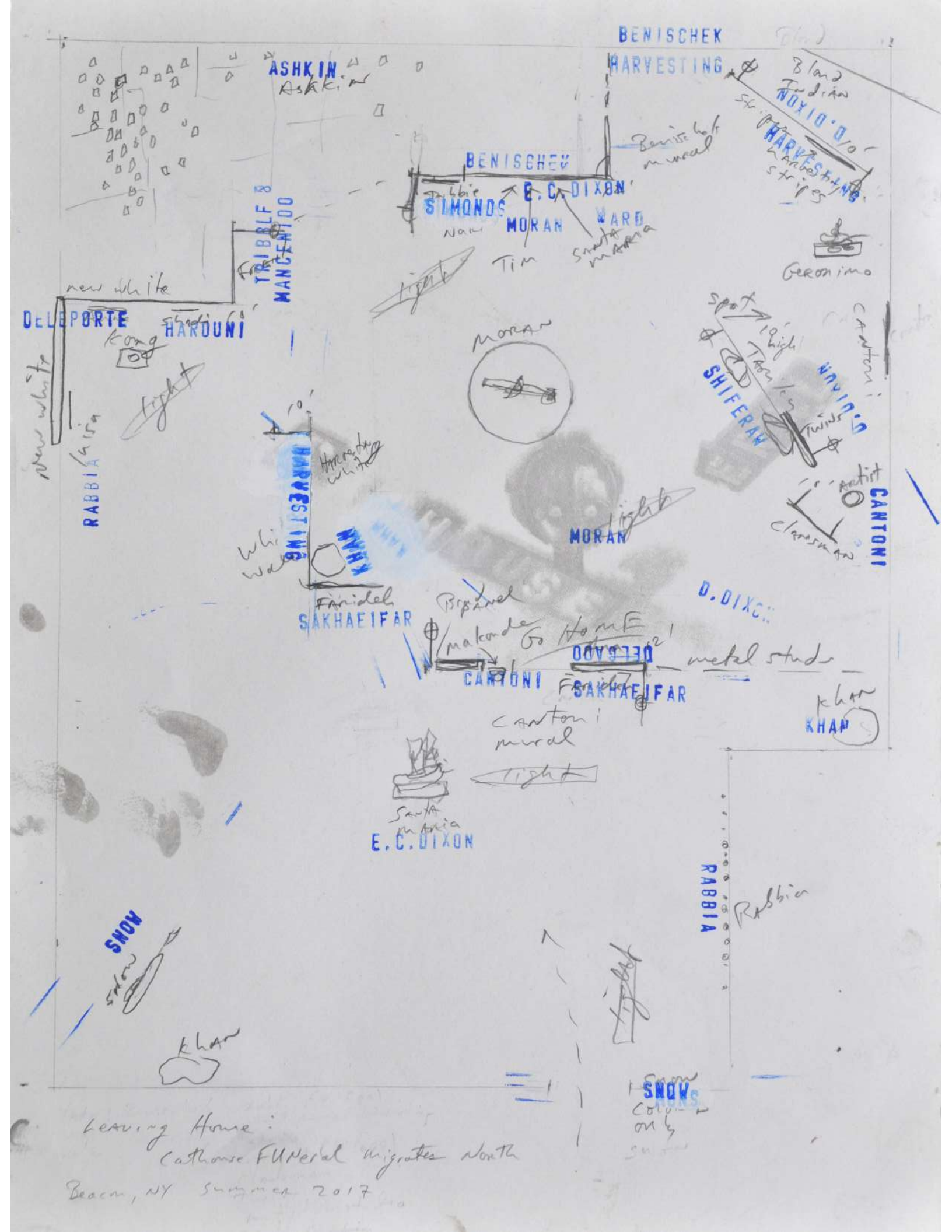
David Dixon
The Clansman, 2015
blood on plaster (fresco) on wood with metal
(free standing or hung)

Twins, 2013
canvas batiked with blood

First Performances, 1975
super 8 film to video

No. 1863, Fighting Geronimo with horse
Marx toys, Best of the West
Circa 1970

Note: Some of the wall constructions, with and without the individual pieces attached, are considered sculptural objects and can be purchased and/or displayed separately.


BENISCHEK
HARVESTING
ASHKIN
BENISCHEK
E. C. DIXON
SIMONDS
MORAN
WARD
TRIBBLE & MANGENTOO
DELEPORTE
HARDUNI
RABBIA
MORAN
SHIFERAW
NOVIN'S
CANTONI
HARVESTING
MORAN
SAKHAEIFAR
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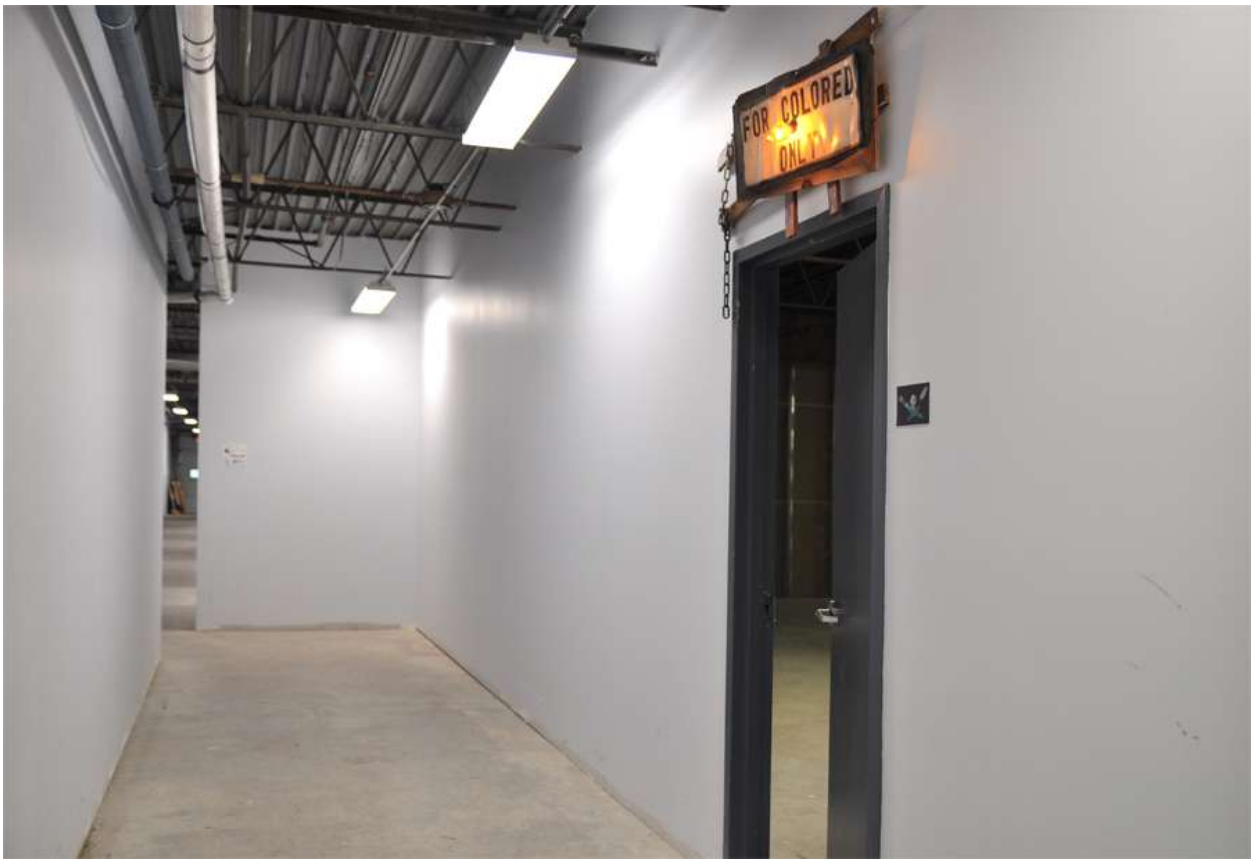
Leaving Home:
Cathouse Funeral migrates North
Beacon, NY Summer 2017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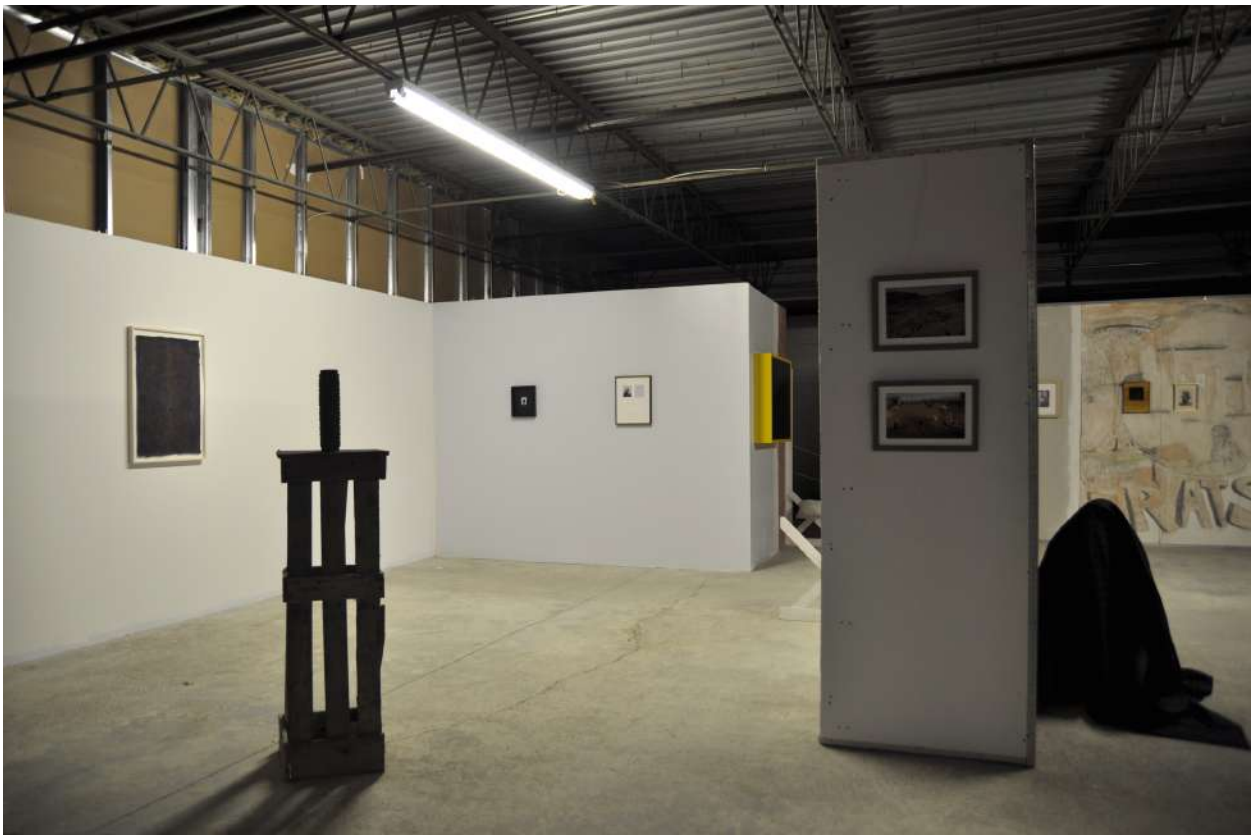

RATS


RATS


RATS

ERAL
HUGE

Multiple Authorship

Boris Groys

Maybe there is no death as we know it. Just documents changing hands.
—Don DeLillo, White Noise

For a long time the social function of the exhibition was firmly fixed: the artist produced artworks, which were then either selected and exhibited by the curator of an exhibition, or rejected. The artist was considered an autonomous author. The curator of the exhibition, by contrast, was someone who mediated between the author and the public but was not an author himself. Thus the respective roles of artist and curator were clearly distinct: the artist was concerned with creation; the curator, with selection. The curator could only choose from the store of works that various artists had already produced. That meant that creation was considered primary, and selection, secondary. Accordingly, the inevitable conflict between artist and curator was seen and treated as a conflict between authorship and mediation, between individual and institution, between primary and secondary. That era, however, is now definitively over. The relationship between artist and curator has undergone a fundamental change. Although this change has not resolved the old conflicts, they have taken on a completely different form.

It is simple to state why this situation changed: art today is defined by an identity between creation and selection. At least since Duchamp, it has been the case that selecting an artwork is the same as creating an artwork. That, of course, does not mean that all art since then has become readymade art. It does mean, however, that the creative act has become the act of selection: since Duchamp, producing an object is no longer sufficient for its producer to be considered an artist. One must also select the object one has made oneself and declare it an artwork. Accordingly, since Duchamp there is no longer any difference between an object one produces oneself and one produced by someone else—both have to be selected in order to be considered artworks. Today an author is someone who selects, who authorizes. Since Duchamp the author has become a curator. The artist is primarily the curator of himself, because he selects his own art. And he also selects others: other objects, other artists. At least since the 1960s artists have created installations in order to demonstrate their personal practices of selection. The installations, however, are nothing other than exhibitions curated by artists, in which objects made by others may be—and are—represented as well as objects made by the artist. Accordingly, however, curators are also freed of the duty to exhibit only those objects that are preselected by the artists. Curators today feel free to combine art objects selected and signed by artists with objects that are taken directly from “life.” In short, once the identity between creation and selection has been established, the roles of the artist and of the curator also become identical. A distinction between the (curated) exhibition and the (artistic) installation is still commonly made, but it is essentially obsolete.

The old question must therefore be asked anew: What is an artwork? The answer that present-day art practices offer to this question is straight forward: the artwork is an exhibited object. The object that is not exhibited is not an artwork but merely an object that has the potential to be exhibited as an artwork. Not by chance do we speak of art today as “contemporary art.” It is art that must currently be exhibited in order to be considered art at all. The elementary unit of art today is therefore no longer an artwork as object but an art space in which objects are exhibited: the space of an exhibition, of an installation. Present-day art is not the sum of particular things but the topology of particular places. The installation has thus established an extremely voracious form of art that assimilates all other traditional art forms: paintings, drawings,

photographs, texts, objects, readymades, films, and recordings. All these art objects are arranged by an artist or curator in the space, according to an order that is purely private, individual, and subjective. Thus the artist or curator has a chance to demonstrate publicly his private, sovereign strategy of selection.

The installation is often denied the status of art because the question arises of what the medium of an installation is. This question arises because traditional art media are all defined according to the specific support of the medium: canvas, stone, or film. The medium of an installation is the space itself; and that means, among other things, that the installation is by no means "immaterial." Quite the contrary: The installation is by all means material, because it is spatial. The installation demonstrates the material of the civilization in which we live particularly well, since it installs everything that other- wise merely circulates in our civilization. Hence the installation demonstrates the civilizational hardware that otherwise remains unnoticed behind the surface of circulation in the media. And it also shows the artist's sovereignty at work: how this sovereignty defines and practices its strategies of selection. That is why the installation is not a representation of the relationships among things as regulated by economic and other social orders; quite the contrary, the installation offers an opportunity to use the explicit introduction of subjective orders and relations among things in order to call into question at least those orders that must be supposed to exist "out there" in reality.

We must take this opportunity to clear up a misunderstanding that has recently come up again and again in the relevant literature. It has been argued with some insistence that art has reached its end today; and that therefore a new field—visual studies—should take the place of art history. Visual studies is supposed to extend the field of pictorial analysis: rather than considering artistic images exclusively, it is supposed to address the purportedly larger, more open space of all existing images, and to transgress courageously the limits of the old concept of art. The courage to transgress old limits is certainly always impressive and welcome. In this case, however, what seems to be a transgression of limits turns out not to be an extension at all but rather a scaling down of the relevant spaces. As we have noted, art consists not of images but of all possible objects, including utilitarian objects, texts, and so on. And there are no distinct "artistic images"; rather, any image can be used in an artistic context. Turning art history into visual studies is thus not an extension of its field of study but a drastic reduction of it, since it restricts art to what can be considered an "image" in the traditional sense. By contrast, everything that can be presented in an installation space belongs to the realm of the visual arts. In that sense, an individual image is also an installation; it is simply an installation that has been reduced to a single image. The installation is thus not an alternative to the image but precisely the extension of the concept of the image that is lost if the traditional concept of the image is readopted. If we want to extend the concept of the image, it is precisely the installation that we need to discuss, since it defines the universal rules for space by which all images and non-images must function as spatial objects. In more than one respect the transition to the installation as the guiding form of contemporary art changes the definition of what we define as a work of art. The most significant and far-reaching change is to our understanding of authorship in art.

Increasingly today, we protest against the traditional cult of artistic subjectivity, against the figure of the author, and against the authorial signature. This rebellion usually sees itself as a revolt against the power structures of the system of art that find their visible expression in the figure of the sovereign author. Again and again, critics try to demonstrate that there is no such thing as artistic genius, and consequently that the authorial status of the artist in question cannot be

derived from the supposed fact that he is a genius. Rather, the attribution of authorship is seen as a convention used by the institution of art, the art market, and art critics to build up stars strategically and so to profit from them commercially. The struggle against the figure of the author is thus understood as a struggle against an undemocratic system of arbitrary privileges and unfounded hierarchies that historically have represented base commercial interests. Naturally this rebellion against the figure of the author ends with the critics of authorship being declared famous authors, precisely because they have stripped the traditional figure of the author of its power. At first glance, we might see this as merely the well-known process of regicide, in which the king's murderer is made the new king. It is not so simple, however. Rather, this polemic reflects on real processes that take place in the art world but that have yet to be adequately analyzed.

The traditional, sovereign authorship of an individual artist has de facto disappeared; hence it really does not make much sense to rebel against such authorship. When confronted with an art exhibition, we are dealing with multiple authorship. And in fact every art exhibition exhibits something that was selected by one or more artists—from their own production and/or from the mass of readymades. These objects selected by the artists are then selected in turn by one or more curators, who thus also share authorial responsibility for the definitive selection. In addition, these curators are selected and financed by a commission, a foundation, or an institution; thus these commissions, foundations, and institutions also bear authorial and artistic responsibility for the end result. The selected objects are presented in a space selected for the purpose; the choice of such a space, which can lie inside or outside the spaces of an institution, often plays a crucial role in the result. The choice of the space thus also belongs to the artistic, creative process; the same is true of the choice of the architecture of the space by the architect responsible and the choice of the architect by the committees responsible. One could extend at will this list of authorial, artistic decisions that, taken together, result in an exhibition taking one form or another.

If the choice, the selection, and the decision with respect to the exhibition of an object are thus to be acknowledged as acts of artistic creation, then every individual exhibition is the result of many such processes of decision, choice, and selection. From this circumstance result multiple, disparate, heterogeneous authorships that combine, overlap, and intersect, without it being possible to reduce them to an individual, sovereign authorship. This overlapping of multilayered, heterogeneous authorships is characteristic of any larger exhibition of recent years; and with time it becomes clearer and clearer. For example, at a recent Venice Biennale several curators were invited to present their own exhibitions within the framework of a larger exhibition. Thus the result was a hybrid form between a curated exhibition and an artistic installation: the invited curators appeared before the public as artists. But it is also frequently the case that individual artists integrate works by their colleagues in their own installations and thus they appear in public as curators. Consequently, authorial praxis as it functions in the context of art today is increasingly like that of film, music, and theater. The authorship of a film, theatrical production, or a concert is also a multiple one; it is divided among writers, composers, directors, actors, camera operators, conductors, and many other participants. And the producers should by no means be for- gotten. The long list of participants that appears at the end of a film, as the viewers gradually begin to leave their seats and make their way to the exit, manifests the fate of authorship in our age, something the art system cannot escape.

Under this new regime of authorship the artist is no longer judged by the objects he has produced but by the exhibitions and projects in which he has participated. Getting to know an

artist today means reading his curriculum vitae, not looking at his paintings. His authorship is presumed to be only a partial one. Accordingly, he is measured not by his products but by his participation in the important exhibitions, just as an actor is judged by which roles he has played in which productions and which films. Even when one visits an artist's studio to get to know his oeuvre, one is generally shown a CD-ROM documenting the exhibitions and events in which the artist participated but also documenting the exhibitions, events, projects, and installations that were planned but never realized. This typical experience of a studio visit today demonstrates how the status of the artwork has changed with respect to the new determination of authorship.

The unexhibited artwork has ceased to be an artwork; instead, it has become art documentation. These documentations refer either to an exhibition that did indeed take place or to a project for a future exhibition. And that is the crucial aspect: the artwork today does not manifest art; it merely promises art. Art is manifested only in the exhibition, as in fact the title Manifesta already states. As long as an object is not yet exhibited and as soon as it is no longer exhibited, it can no longer be considered an artwork. It is either a memory of past art or a promise of future art, but from either perspective it is simply art documentation.

The function of the museum is also modified thereby. Previously the museum functioned just as it does today, namely, as a public archive. But it was an archive of a special kind. The typical historical archive contains documents that refer exclusively to past events; it presumes the ephemerality, the mortality of the life it documents. And indeed the immortal does not need to be documented; only the mortal does. The assumption about the traditional museum, by contrast, was that it contained artworks that possess an eternal artistic value, that embodied art for all times equally, and that can fascinate and convince the present-day viewer as well. That is to say, they did not just document the past but could manifest and emanate art as such here and now. The traditional museum thus functioned as a paradoxical archive of eternal presence, of profane immortality; and in this it was quite distinct from other historical and cultural archives. The material supports of art— canvas, paper, and film—may be considered ephemeral, but art itself is eternally valid.

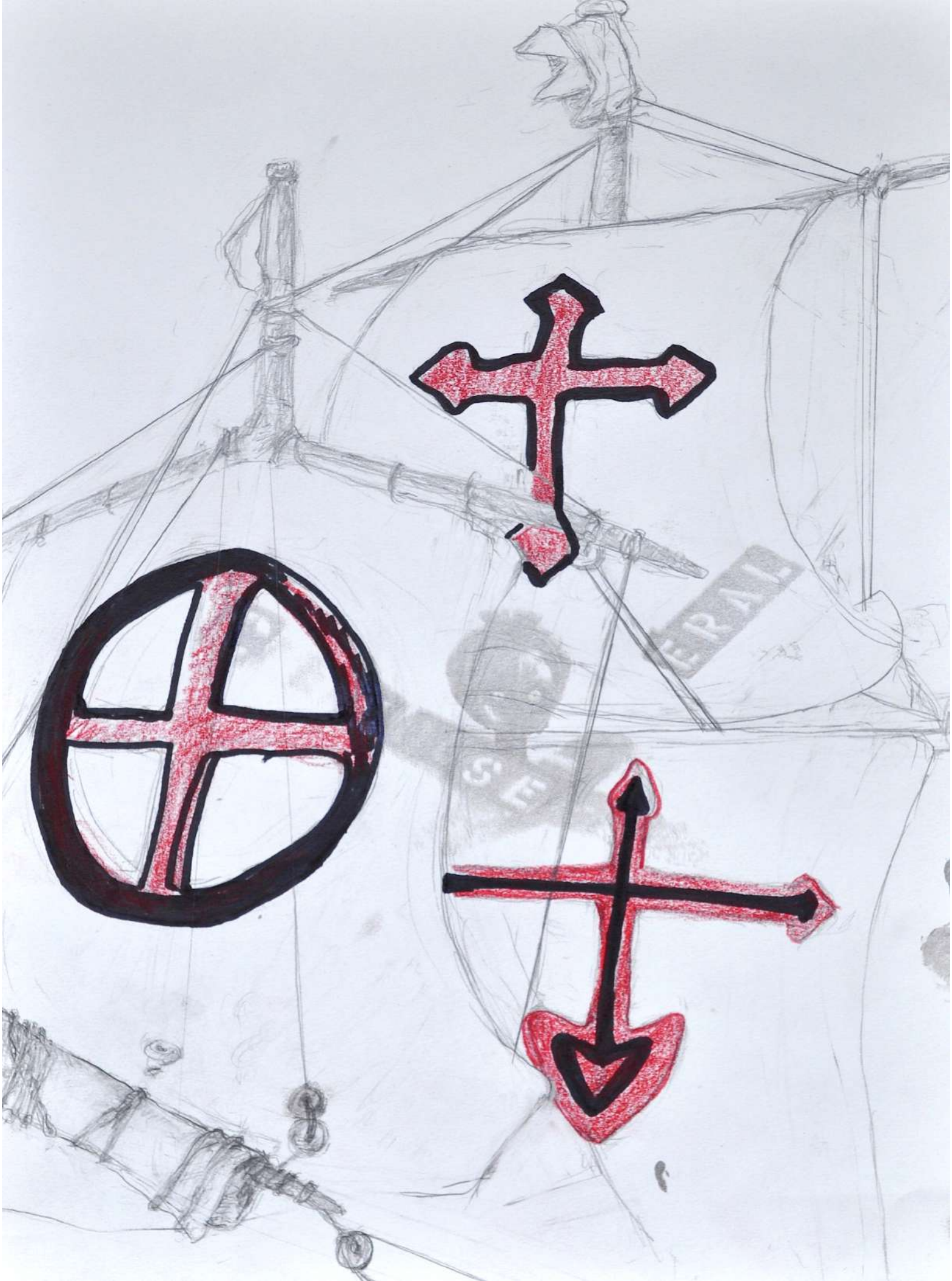
The museum today, by contrast, is increasingly similar to other archives, since the art documentation that the museum collects does not necessarily appear before the public as art. The permanent exhibition of the museum is no longer—or at least less frequently—presented as a stable, permanent exhibition. Instead, the museum is increasingly a place where temporary exhibitions are shown. The unity of collecting and exhibiting that defined the particular nature of the traditional museum has thus broken down. The museum collection today is seen as documentary raw material that the curator can use in combination with an exhibition program he has developed to express his individual attitude, his individual strategy for dealing with art. Alongside the curator, however, the artist also has the opportunity to shape museum spaces in whole or in part according to his own personal taste. Under these conditions the museum is transformed into a depot, into an archive of artistic documentation that is no longer essentially different from any other form of documentation, and also into a public site for the execution of private artistic projects. As such a site the museum differs from any other site primarily in its design, in its architecture. It is no coincidence that in recent years attention has shifted from the museum collection to museum architecture.

Nevertheless, the museum today has not abandoned entirely its promise of profane immortality. The art documentation that is collected in museums and other art institutions can always be exhibited anew as art. This distinguishes the art projects collected in museums from the life

projects documented in other archives: realizing art as art means exhibiting it. And the museum can do that. It is, admittedly, possible to present a life project anew in a reality outside the museum, but only if it itself ultimately concerns an artistic project. This kind of rediscovery of art documentation is, however, only possible because it continues the focus on multiple authorship. Old art documents are restored, transferred to other media, rearranged, installed, and presented in other spaces. Under such conditions it is meaningless to speak of an individual, intact authorship. The artwork as exhibited art documentation is kept alive because its multiple authorships continue to multiply and proliferate; and the site of this proliferation and multiplication of authorship is the present-day museum.

The transformation of the artwork into art documentation by means of its own archiving also enables art today to draw on, in an artistic context, the immense reservoir of documentation of other events and projects that our civilization has collected. And indeed the formulation and documentation of various projects is the main activity of modern man. Whatever one wishes to undertake in business, politics, or culture, the first thing that must be done is to formulate a corresponding project in order to present an application for the approval or financing of this project to one or more responsible authorities. If this project is rejected in its original form, it is modified so that it can still be accepted. If the project is rejected entirely, one has no choice but to propose a new project in its place. Consequently, every member of our society is constantly occupied with drafting, discussing, and rejecting new projects. Assessments are written; budgets are precisely calculated; commissions are formed; committees are convened; and decisions are made. In the meanwhile, no small number of our contemporaries read nothing other than such project proposals, reports, and budgets. Most of these projects, however, are never realized. The fact that they seem unpromising, difficult to finance, or undesirable in general to one or more experts is sufficient for the whole work of formulating the project to have been in vain.

This work is by no means insubstantial; and the amount of work associated with it grows over time. The project documentation presented to the various committees, commissions, and authorities is designed with increasingly effectiveness and formulated in greater detail in order to impress potential assessors. As a result, the formulation of projects is developing into an autonomous art form whose significance for our society has yet to be adequately understood. Irrespective of whether it is realized or not, every project presents a unique vision of the future that is itself fascinating and instructive. Frequently, however, many of the project proposals that our civilization is constantly producing are lost or simply thrown away after they are rejected. This careless approach to the art form of the project formulation is quite regrettable, really, because it often prevents us from analyzing and under- standing the hopes and visions of the future that are invested in these proposals, and these things can say more about our society than anything else. Because within the system of art the exhibition of a document is sufficient to give it life, the art archive is particularly well suited to being the archive of these sorts of projects that were realized at some time in the past or will be realized in the future, but above all to being the archive of utopian projects that can never be realized fully. These utopian projects that are doomed to failure in the current economic and political reality can be kept alive in art, in that the documentation of these projects constantly changes hands and authors.



Under the sign of the cross in the kingdom of Kongo

Religious conversion and visual correlation in early modern Central Africa

CÉCILE FROMONT

At the feet of a monumental cross installed in front of a church, a Capuchin friar, in full ecclesiastical garb, presides over the office of the dead in eighteenth-century Kongo[1] (fig. 1). The friar and two *mestres,* interpreters for the Capuchins and local leaders of the Church, sing the service from a book, accompanied by two children carrying the incensory and the Holy Water. A fifth man is holding a liturgical cross at the head of the tomb. A black pall inscribed with a white cross covers the grave around which all are gathered and a candle is burning at each of its corners. The congregation has brought offerings of small animals, pots, and food, which are disposed on the ground in front of the burial place.

The watercolor in figure 1 belongs to a page of the *Missione in Prattica* manuscript, conceived in the 1740s by an Italian Capuchin friar veteran of the Kongo mission as a practical guide to educate future missionaries about the nature of their work in Central Africa.[2] The volume takes part in a genre of illustrated manuscripts developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the members of the Capuchin Order's Central African missions. In these guides, full-page images glossed by a few lines of text present the natural, cultural, and religious environment of the region. Accuracy and detail are crucial to the images' didactic purposes of description of the exotic environment and prescription of the proper behavior to adopt for the novice missionaries.[3]

The watercolor presents, on the one hand, a friar and his acolytes, Catholic hymnals in hand, bathed in the burning incense, practicing for the congregation in the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, it depicts the local community and the offerings it brought to the ceremony "in favor of the souls," as the text below the image explains. For the occasion, men and women gathered at the feet of a cross, a symbol associated in the Kongo with the idea of a cyclic passage from life to death.[4] The sign of the cross is at the center of the watercolor and at the crossroads of the several visual syntaxes and religious beliefs that permeate the image. In the vignette as in the scene it represents, two different religious discourses, two modes of interpretation have

I would like to thank Suzanne Blier, Tom Cummins, Steven Nelson, Kristina Van Dyke, and Claudia Brittenham as well as my colleagues at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, at the History of Art Department at the University of Michigan, and at the University of Chicago for their feedback on the argument presented here. The Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren, the Conseil Régional de la Martinique, the IANTT/FLAD, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts provided generous financial or institutional support for this research.

1. Kongo, used as a noun and as an adjective, refers in this article to the historical kingdom of Kongo, which territory extended, south of the Congo River over the western part of today's Democratic Republic of the Congo and Northern Angola. Central Africa describes the larger region influenced by the Kongo, including areas north of the Congo River and lands under the control of the Portuguese colony of Angola.

2. Bernardino Ignazio da Vezza d' Asti, *Missione in Prattica. Padri Cappuccini Ne' Regni Di Congo, Angola, Et Adiacenti,* Turin Civic Library (ca. 1750), MS 457.

3. For the author of the watercolor in figure 1, his image is a matter-of-fact rendering of a Christian ceremony in the Kongo, its stated aim to warn future missionaries against the theft of the offerings. Father Bernardino cautions in the caption that the "Father Missionary must be careful to collect all [the offerings] as they are more than necessary to his sustenance and that of the Blacks at its service." The corpus of Capuchin images of Central Africa is discussed at greater length in C. Fromont, "Collecting and Translating Knowledge across Cultures: Capuchin Missionary Images of Early Modern Central Africa," in *Collecting across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World,* ed. D. Bleichmar and P. Mancall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming 2011).

4. As discussed later, early modern sources establish the link between the cross and the belief in a cycle of death and regeneration promoted by the Kimpasi association. Authors such as Robert Farris Thompson and Wyatt MacGaffey, drawing from the pioneering work of Congolese scholar Fu-Kiau Bunseki, have amply demonstrated that, in twentieth-century Bakongo thought, the cross formed a cosmogram that still represented the cycle of life and death. See R. F. Thompson and J. Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981); W. MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); A. Fu-kiau kia Bunseki-Lumanisa, *N'kongo Ya Nza Yakun'zungidlia; Nza-Kôngo* (Kinshasa: Office national de la recherche et de développement, 1969).

Figure 1. Bernardino d'Asti, *The Father Missionary Helped by the Maestri Sings an Office of the Defunct,* ca. 1750. Watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 28 cm. Biblioteca Civica Centrale, Turin, MS 457, fol. 10. Photograph: Courtesy of Settore Sistema Bibliotecario Urbano della Città di Torino.

converged and now overlap. The monumental cross and smaller crucifixes taking part in the event serve for the Capuchin as univocal warrants of worship to the Christian God. They are also the point of the scene where Catholic and Kongo religious traditions meet and blur between Kongo ritual offerings to the soul of the deceased, Holy Water, and incense. A univocal European or Kongo reading of the ceremony depicted does not exhaust the religious significance of the scene, of the ritual practices it portrays, and of the objects it describes. Rather, the Capuchin sensual Christianity rendered in the theatrical staging of the ceremony, complete with music and perfume, here enters in dialogue with the devotions, Christian or otherwise, of the Kongo protagonists, all happening in the shadow of the monumental cross.

The sign of the cross played a central role in the visual, religious, and artistic encounter between Christianity and Kongo worldviews in the early modern period. As the Kongo became a participant in the religious and political networks of the early modern Atlantic, the abstract idea of the cross as well as its visual manifestations emerged as a platform for artistic and religious ideas to be communicated across cultures. It formed a space of correlation, an activating ground where new conceptions and visual forms were molded that encompassed and transcended both European and Central African religious ideas and modes of representation.

An abundant scholarly literature exists on the early religious, visual, and material culture of the Kingdom of Kongo from its first contact with Europeans in the late fifteenth century to the eve of the era of imperial colonialism that emerged in the nineteenth century. Compelling analyses of this material based on the testimonies and studies of twentieth-century consultants and scholars from regions once under the rule of the Kongo kingdom have appeared in the seminal works of anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey and art historian Robert Farris Thompson who have invoked in support of their methodology a "substantial stability . . . between sixteenth and twentieth century Kongo cosmology, cultic practice, and social structure."[5] My argument,

5. See Wyatt MacGaffey's summary of historian Anne Hilton's 1985 argument in W. MacGaffey, "Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa," in *Implicit Understandings: Observing,*

in contrast, relies on the contribution of early modern sources to the history of Kongo religion and visual culture.[6] This approach allows us to acknowledge continuity but also to identify and examine change. It also offers perspective on the scope and nature of that "substantial stability."

A space of correlation

On the sails of caravels, on the chest of noblemen, in the hands of clerics, and on the stone landmarks proudly erected along newly reached shores, the sign of the cross accompanied every move of the Portuguese explorers as a banner of conquest and a standard of proselytism. Yet when Iberians and their Christian cross reached Central Africa in 1483, its presence resulted neither in colonial conquest nor forceful conversion. Rather, Christianity entered into the political, social, and religious realm of the Kingdom of Kongo at the demand of its own rulers, without foreign coercion, and a lasting relationship was established between Europeans and Central Africans without colonization. At that time, the Kingdom of Kongo was a highly centralized polity extending across the western part of modern-day Northern Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ruled by a powerful king through the governors he sent from the capital to his various provinces. In the contemporary chronicles describing the early relationship between Portugal and the Kongo, the Christian cross appeared repeatedly in the hands of Portuguese men, but was also taken over and put to work by Central Africans in powerful gestures demonstrating their control over the real and symbolic terms of their encounter with Europe and Christianity.

The first moments of the advent of Catholicism in the Kongo were recorded by the Portuguese chronicler Rui de Pina, writing in Portugal at the time of the events from eye-witness accounts and official correspondence.[7] According to his report, on May 3, 1491, the king of Kongo Nzinga a Nkuwu (r. 1470–1509) received baptism along with six of his courtiers and took the Christian name of João I on the feast of the Invention of the True Cross. The king celebrated the event with great pomp and immediately declared Catholicism the state religion, ordering that clerics be well received in all his provinces and that all local idols, altars, and temples be destroyed. The motivations for such a radical move are unclear, but a close reading of the events that occurred around the baptism elicits the visual and symbolic mechanisms at play in Kongo's adoption of Christianity.[8]

A few days after the ceremony, two of the men baptized with the king both experienced the same vision in their sleep. They received the visit of a resplendent Virgin Mary asking them to congratulate João on her behalf for the conversion of his kingdom. The next morning, as he stepped out of his house, one of the two men found a cross carved in a foreign black stone. It was two-palm high with smooth, rounded branches, as if "worked with great industry." "I found a holy thing made of a stone I have never seen before," he reported to the king and the clerics, "and it is shaped as the object that the Friars held when we became Christian and that they called the Cross."[9] Showing the stone object to the European priests, the king asked: "What do you think this is?" "Sir," answered the friars moved to tears, "these things [that is, the visions and the cross] are signs of grace and salvation that God sent to you and

Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era, ed. S. B. Schwartz (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 255. He is referring to A. Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo,* Oxford Studies in African Affairs (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1985).

6. A small number of art historical studies of Kongo Kingdom material based on twentieth-century fieldwork and some consideration of the early modern sources have been published in the past. See R. L. Wannyn, *L'art ancien du métal au Bas-Congo, Les vieilles civilisations ouestafricaines* (Champles par Wavre, Belgique: Éditions du Vieux Planquesaule, 1961); J. Franz Thiel and H. Helf, *Christliche Kunst in Afrika* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1984); or P. de Donder, "Les vieux crucifix du Bas-Congo," *Grands Lacs: Revue Générale des Missions d'Afrique* 63, no. 8 (1948):31–34.

7. Rui de Pina, "Baptismo do Rei do Congo, 3 de Maio de 1491," in A. Brásio, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana. África Ocidental* (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar Divisão de Publicações e Biblioteca, 1952), vol. I, pp. 124–125. See also the account of the event by Garcia de Resende, "Baptismo do Rei do Congo, 3 de Maio de 1491," in ibid., pp. 127–128.

8. A number of interpretations have been proposed for the conversion. Anne Hilton saw the royal interest in the new religion as a strategic political move by the ruling clan to secure legitimacy in the instable Kongo succession system and to control the new trading networks that emerged from the presence of Europeans. She also argued that the new religion was wholly taken over by Kongo cosmology, a position shared by MacGaffey who considered that the kings sought in the new religion the powers of a novel and mighty form of initiation; see Hilton and MacGaffey (note 5). In contrast, John Thornton argued that a real, sincere conversion took place, but to a form of Christianity that was typically Kongo rather than mimicking European Catholicism; see J. Thornton, "Perspectives on African Christianity," in *Race, Discourse, and the Making of the Americas,* ed. V. Hyatt and R. Nettleford (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1994), pp. 169–198.

9. See Rui de Pina (note 7), p. 124.

your kingdom, and for this we give Him and you also should give Him infinite thanks." And they took the cross in procession to the newly built church where it was prominently displayed as a relic of this great miracle.

It is significant in this context of early contact between two radically different worldviews that the original moment of conversion would include a core material and visual dimension. In a moment wrought with ambiguity and uncertainty about the possibility and efficiency of the communication of religious ideas across cultures, the stone cross provided a common ground on which Europeans and Africans could anchor their dialogue. Skilled interpreters trained in nearly a decade of contact between Portugal and Kongo facilitated the conversation, but, in this episode, linguistic communication worked hand in hand with the miraculous object to enable cross-cultural exchange. In the story, the stone cross was a pivotal element thanks to which Central Africans and Europeans were able to ascertain a mutual understanding of the significance of the king's gesture of conversion and to establish epistemological common ground about the nature of the supernatural and of its worldly manifestations.

When the nobleman came across the black stone object, he immediately recognized it as a "holy thing" (in the text: *cousa sancta*), a phrase that missionary literature would later convey in the Kongo language with the word *nkisi*.[10] The connection made by the early modern translators between the idea of the holy and that of the *nkisi* suggests that the term already carried at least part of its later meaning of a material object through which otherworldly forces make their presence known in this world. At a time of great violence marked by the destruction of the local objects of worship ordered by the king, the stone cross was, for the noble and the Kongo observers at large, a key symbolic substitute, a reassuring manifestation of the reality of the supernatural forces that were invoked in the baptism. From a Kongo perspective, its discovery was a revelation that legitimized the act of conversion. At the demand of the king, this Kongo understanding of the cross as a *nkisi* was validated by the foreign clerics. In their response, the priests indeed recognized the cross as a sign, as a manifestation of God in the world, as a *nkisi,* and a holy thing. In turn, for the European clerics, the miraculous apparition of the Virgin and the discovery of the stone cross were clear demonstrations of the will of the Christian God to see the Kongo converted. Thus the stone cross marked a *space* where European and African religious conceptions could be brought together and where the two groups could reach an agreement on the authenticity and perceptibility of supernatural forces.

In this regard, the stone cross was a generated space of correlation.[11] It was a cultural object in which heterogeneous conceptions could be approximated in a generative process creating new ideas that both encompassed and transcended the original inputs. In the stone cross, Kongo and Christian views of revelation and the supernatural met and merged. A Kongo *nkisi* became a Christian sign and a Christian cross, a Kongo power object. In the process, the perimeter of Christian orthodoxy was widened to recognize and include Kongo modes of devotion and, in turn, Kongo religious thought was transformed by its recognition of new forms of supernatural powers. Kongo Christianity emerged at the crux of these two trends, in a form that was both recognized by the Catholic Church and enthusiastically embraced by the people of the Kongo.[12]

Spaces of correlation provide such common grounds in which ideas belonging to radically different realms can come together, interact, and generate new understandings. In spaces of correlation, local thought can evolve to encompass foreign ideas, new ideas can transform old concepts, and attributes of the other can transfigure definitions and expressions of the self. As an analytical tool, the space of correlation applies to a variety of cultural objects characterized by a range of historically and culturally specific paradigms of

10. In the seventeenth century, the word *nkisi* appears in Capuchin literature as a translation for the word and concept of "holy." In a 1651 Latin-Kikongo dictionary, the entry for the adjective sanctus is translated as *quianquissi* or "of the *nkisi*" and the entry for the substantive *sanctitas* (sanctity, holiness) by *uquissi* or having the nature of the nkisi. See the *Vocabularium Latinum, Hispanicum Et Congense,* Mss. Varia 274, Fondi minori 1896 (Rome: Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio-Emmanuele II di Roma, 1651), f. 94v. See the discussion on the term in Thornton (note 8, p. 183). The modern *nkisi* is discussed at length in MacGaffey (see note 5), pp. 137–168.

11. Here I use the term "space" in the sense of *espace* in French, referring to a domain that is both localized and specifically defined. The phrase is partly inspired by Tom Cummins's discussion of images as "sites of correlation" in colonial legal contexts. See T. Cummins, "From Lies to Truth: Colonial Ekphrasis and the Act of Crosscultural Translation," in *Reframing the Renaissance,* ed. C. Farago (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 152–174; 326–329.

12. John Thornton has discussed the fluidity of Catholic orthodoxy in the early modern period, in contrast to the modern, post-Tridentine tendency for a closed, inflexible understanding of Christian dogma. See J. Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750," *Journal of African History* 25, no. 2 (1984):147–167.

change. Creole languages merging local grammar and foreign vocabulary, hybrid art from colonial contexts strategically using the ambiguity of visual representation to express a subaltern point of view, or revolutionary narratives reformulating the past from a radical, novel perspective could all be analyzed as spaces of correlation. In each of these examples, a different process of cultural change is at play from syncretism to appropriation and innovation. The interest of the idea of the space of correlation derives from its ability to examine phenomena emerging from varied historical circumstances and following mechanisms of interactions beyond dialectical relationships. In particular, it allows us to consider situations that are not necessarily defined by oppression and resistance, in contrast to other analytical or descriptive terms such as "transculturation," "acculturation," or "third-space," which all consider change in contexts "involv[ing] conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict," to use the words of Mary Louise Pratt in her definition of the related concept of contact zones.[13] These terms have in common their focus on the role of power relationships in the molding of cross-cultural discourse. In contrast, the space of correlation centers its reflection on the syntactic strategies put to play in the creation of the cultural objects—artworks, discourse, text—through which change is expressed and enacted. Focusing on the cultural objects themselves shifts the emphasis away from dialectical relationships of "radical inequality" enounced by Pratt or difference and sameness exposed by Young as the necessary motors of change.[14] Unlike the teleological tendencies of the concepts of syncretism and acculturation, it also allows us to consider the transformative powers of choice and contingency. In addition, it avoids the pitfall of creating broad and artificially coherent groups holding, for instance, Europeans or Africans as single entities without inner diversity of class, gender, or others. Rather, it allows us to single out and consider only the relevant traits from each group that are put to play in the process of change. For example, the space of correlation formed by what is often called hybrid art from colonial Latin American contexts only calls upon specific dimensions of European iconography in its reinterpretation of imported art forms.

13. M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 6. The idea of "third-space" belongs to Homi Bhabha; see H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

14. R. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.

Kongo myth, Christian history

The space of correlation of our story, the stone cross, owed its compelling role as agent of cross-cultural communication not only to its miraculous nature but also to its specific form. In the early modern Christian Kongo, the cross, as a sign, a symbol, and an object, provided a domain in which Central Africans could articulate Christian and Kongo ideas of the supernatural and related concepts of power, history, and legitimacy. If King João was the first king to receive baptism, it was his son Afonso I (r. 1509–1542) who operated the crucial symbolic reformulation that naturalized Christianity into a Central African religion while integrating the Kongo into the larger realm of Christendom. In a series of letters addressed to his vassals and to the Pope, Afonso outlined what he intended to become the official narrative of his ascension to the throne in a bitter succession battle against his heathen brother Mpanzu a Nzinga. In the story, the young Christian prince, overpowered by his enemy and at the verge of defeat, called upon Saint James before the final and surely fatal assault. As soon as his name was invoked, the warrior saint appeared leading an army of horsemen. The prodigious cavalry easily overwhelmed the heathen troops and Afonso emerged victorious, under the sign of the cross miraculously branded in the sky of the battle. With this narrative, the new king clearly placed his rule in the historical and symbolic realm of Christendom, presenting himself as a Christian prince fighting alongside Saint James and for whom the Cross of Constantine reappeared.[15] This story also inscribed Christianity into Central African mythology by likening Afonso to Lukeni, the founding hero of the Kongo kingdom. In both the myth of origin and the new Christian epic, each man appears as he seizes leadership of the Kongo through military might and eventually brings to the land a new form of knowledge, Kongo cosmology in the first case and Christianity in the latter. The bold and innovative narrative of Afonso proved successful and became an integral part of Kongo mythology. It remained a popular

15. Saint James is here presented as "heathen slayer" in a parallel to the Iberian narrative of the Reconquista, in which he was the matamoros or "Moor Slayer." A similar transposition was operated in Spanish America, later than Afonso's use of the term in the Kongo, by the *Conquistadores* who fought alongside Saint James the *Mataindios,* or "Indian Slayer." For a study of the transformation of Saint James from "Moor Slayer" to "Indian Slayer" in New Spain, see J. D. García, "Santiago Mataindios: la continuación de un discurso medieval en la Nueva España," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 54, no. 1 (2006): 33–56.

and vivid episode in the oral histories narrated in the centuries following his reign.[16]

The prominence of the cross in the advent of Catholicism in Central Africa derived from its concomitant significance as a sign for European travelers and clerics and as a key motif in the Kongo visual environment. Drawing from this ambivalence, Afonso made the motif the visual cornerstone of his reinvention of the Kongo's mythological foundation. His narrative not only included the miraculous imagery of the Constantinian cross, but also encompassed an elaborate visual dimension in the form of a coat of arms prominently showcasing the sign among its emblems. The great Christian king also inaugurated his reign with the erection of a monumental cross in front of the principal church of his capital to commemorate the momentous celestial apparition at the time of his fateful victory.[17] All across the kingdom, under his impetus, large crosses were built, grand and permanent visual manifestations of the mythological and historical innovations he formulated. The monuments, such as the one depicted in figure 1, stamped the Kongo landscape as Christian. They were imposing markers that celebrated Afonso's triumph as a legitimate king, memorialized the miraculous advent of Christianity in the kingdom, and in effect enacted the adoption of Catholicism by the Kongo crown.[18]

Yet, the sign of the cross encompassed in the Kongo more than a narrative of power, triumph, and legitimacy. In addition to the large crosses ostentatiously erected by the rulers and being used as signs in political and historical discourse, Kongo Christian crosses also took the form of portable, elaborately crafted objects for the use of individuals and small communities. The hundreds of these Kongo crucifixes that are still extant today form a coherent corpus, ranging in size from a few inches to a couple of feet. As a group, they are remarkable for their complex yet consistent iconography that grew at the crux between Christian and Kongo religious and visual syntax. The original paradigms for Kongo crucifixes were undoubtedly the European devotional objects imported en masse by Portuguese and then Italian missionaries, but key elements of their distinctive iconography also firmly characterized them as local visual expressions, such as the ancillary figures, the incised diamond shape, and the etched borders seen in a characteristic cross in figure 2. From the rare written sources documenting their production, we know that the crosses were fashioned from local and imported brass by Kongo artists working in workshops without European supervision.[19] There is no indication in the sources of the friars' involvement in the making of the crucifixes, but European examples were avidly sought by local patrons, and intently studied and reworked by local artists.

It is crucial to underline here once more that Christianity developed in Central Africa at the demand and under the control of the Kongo crown itself. The discourse of Christianity that emerged in this context grew from within the Central African worldview. Although the adoption of the new faith was from the

16. See, for example, L. Jadin, "Andrea de Pavia au Congo, à Lisbonne, à Madère. Journal d'un missionnaire capucin, 1685–1702," *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome,* no. XLI (1970): 452–453. See also L. Jadin, "Aperçu de la situation du Congo et rite d'élection des rois en 1775, d'après le P. Cherubino Da Savona," *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 35 (1963):407.

17. The Portuguese traveler Duarte Lopes, who lived in the Kongo around 1580, mentions this monumental cross; see D. Lopes and F. Pigafetta, *Relatione Del Reame Di Congo Et Delle Circonvicine Contrade, Tratta Dalli Scritti & Ragionamenti Di Odoardo Lopez, Portoghese* (Rome: Appresso B. Grassi, 1591), p. 53. See also the discussion in F. Bontinck, "Les croix de bois dans l'ancien Royaume de Kongo," *Dalla chiesa anticha alla chiesa moderna. Miscellanea per Cinquantesimo della facolta di storia ecclesiastica della PUG "Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae,"* no. 50 (1983):199–213.

18. See Bontinck (ibid.). The location marked by the cross served as burial ground for the local elite, as is depicted in figure 1: see R. Castelo de Vide, *Descrição Da Viagem Que Fiz Para Angola E Congo O Missionario Fr Rafael De Castelo De Vide,* Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (Lisbon 1780), RES 2 Maço 4 doc 74 f. 70.

19. There is no evidence that European laymen or missionaries set up metalworking workshops in the region. On the contrary, information about local mining and metalworking was avidly sought by the foreigners but kept secret by the Central Africans whose esoteric metalworking tradition required ritual discretion. Report of the hidden mines appear in most European accounts of the region—see, for example, an eighteenth-century report by the Capuchin Cherubino da Savona commissioned by the Governor of Angola: Cherubino da Savona, *Letters,* Doc 1–3, Condes de Linhares (Lisbon: Torre do Tombo, 1769–1770) (I wish to thank John Thornton for this source). In the seventeenth century, Dutch trader F. Cappelle noted the presence of mines, as well as locally produced metal crosses—see L. Jadin, "Rivalités luso-néerlandaises au Sohio, Congo 1600–1675," *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* XXXVII (1966):226. If the inhabitants of the Kongo had access to copper deposits, most surviving crucifixes are made of yellow brass of relatively high zinc content—often misidentified by European observers as gold—rather than pure copper. Cappelle again informs us that only small amounts of "a metal looking like bronze," probably a local naturally occurring brass, were found in the region. While red copper was exported from the Kongo and nearby kingdoms to Europe, the Europeans imported "yellow copper" to the region; an indicative list of Dutch imports was recorded by Capelle, see L. Jadin (ibid.), 236–237. It is likely that the crucifixes were created from both local and imported brass. Metal analysis currently under way will provide further information on these issues.

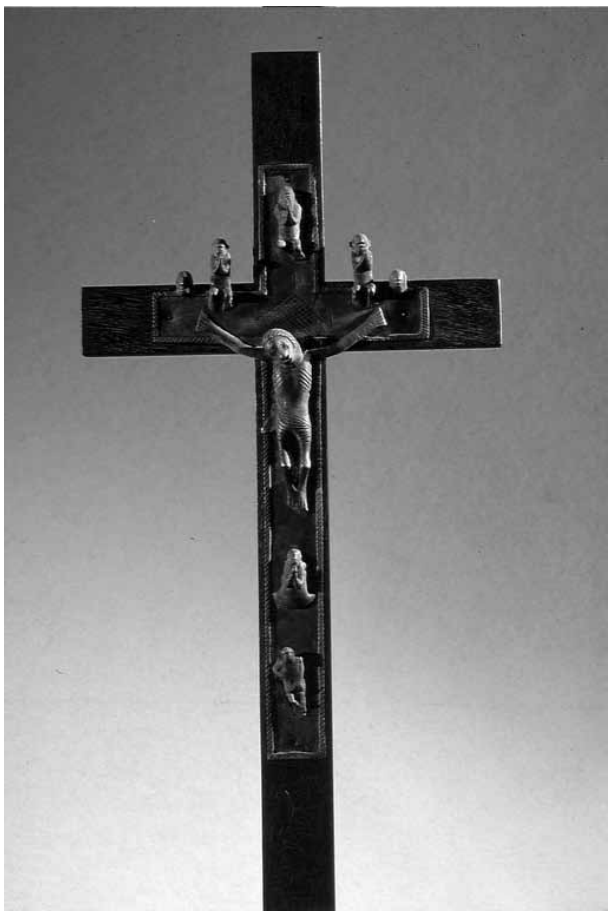


Figure 2. Unknown artist, *Kongo Crucifix*, undated. Brass and wood, 64 x 27 cm. Current location unknown. Photo from J. F. Thiel, *Christliches Afrika: Kunst und Kunsthandwerk in Schwarzafrika* (Sankt Augustin: Haus Volker und Kulturen, 1978), pl. 87.

outset accompanied by great violence with the forceful destruction of the local objects and places of devotion ordered by the ruling elite, the new faith entered into the intellectual realm of the Kongo without overarching epistemological violence or epistemic rupture between pre-Christian past and Christian present.[20]

On the contrary, the first Christian kings conducted an elaborate mythological and symbolic manipulation that successfully naturalized Christianity as an expression of the Kongo worldview, while simultaneously integrating the Central African kingdom into the realm of Christendom. By underlining this key characteristic of the advent and development of Kongo Christianity, I do not intend to downplay the real violence and disruptive effects of the Atlantic slave trade, the other phenomenon brought to the Kongo by the Europeans. Rather, I want to insist on the importance of shedding the misleading conception that sees European cultural assaults as the only motor of change in pre-colonial and colonial Africa.

The Kongo cross

At the time of the advent of Christianity, and independent from any European influence, the cross was already a predominant motif of Central African art. Cruciform designs appeared in rock paintings, weaving patterns, and engravings in their simplest expression as two intersecting lines as well as in intricate geometric derivations inspired by weaving patterns. Elaborate textiles and carved ivory tusks eagerly collected by the early modern European elite for their cabinets of curiosity as well as archeological material illustrate the prevalent Kongo visual syntax at the time of the entrance of the kingdom into European history.[21] Across the media, design patterns articulated lines, intersections, and overlaps in varied knot-like motifs organized around a central focus point and ultimately suggesting a diamond shape.[22] The schematic rendering of designs

20. In this regard, the advent of Kongo Christianity took on a radically different form from the cases of cross-cultural conversion in colonial contexts unfolding during the same period, in which epistemological rupture between native past and colonial present was at the core of the project of evangelization. These ideas have been expressed at length, for example, by Nicholas Dirk as the "cultural technologies of rule" necessary to the colonial project. See N. B. Dirk, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 9.

21. Examples are found, for instance, in the collections of the Curiosity Cabinet of the kings of Denmark that are now under the care of Copenhagen's National Museum. See E. Bassani, "Kongo Art," in *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400–1800,* ed. E. Bassani (London: British Museum, 2000). The archaeologist James Denbow excavated in the 1990s a group of decorated terracotta vessels on the Northern shore of the River Congo, with dates ranging between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. The decoration style of the objects is stylistically consistent over the period and closely related to the other Kongo artistic productions mentioned here. J. Denbow, *Rapport des progrès obtenus au cours du projet archéologique au Congo en 1993* (Report prepared for Congolaise de Dévelopement Forestier, 1993).

22. This conclusion was drawn from careful visual analysis of photographs and from direct observation of rock painting, ceramics, ivories, and textiles. Ezio Bassani's evocative juxtaposition of early modern Kongo textiles and the early twentieth-century scarification

from rock painting and engraving in figure 3 summarizes the interrelation in Kongo art between the diamond shape and the cross as two parallel expressions of the same design; the cross expands into a diamond shape (fig. 3a) and the diamond shape collapses into a cross (fig. 3b).[23] Simple rotations articulate (fig. 3c) some of the other design variations observed.

Under its diverse guises, the motif of the cross carried great significance, according to early modern primary sources, thanks to its link to the religious system promoted by the *Kimpasi,* a ritual association that heavily influenced the social and political organization of the region.[24] The elite members of the group were extremely powerful, inspiring fear even among the highest ranked Kongo political leaders and they fiercely and successfully defended their association against the assaults of Christian proselytism.[25] The defining rite of the *Kimpasi* was an initiation ceremony that staged the symbolic death and resurrection of the candidate on the grounds of a secret ritual enclosure. Novices were chosen among the Kongo elite and in the process of their admission into the group were induced to temporarily lose consciousness, later to be brought back to their senses as new members of the society.

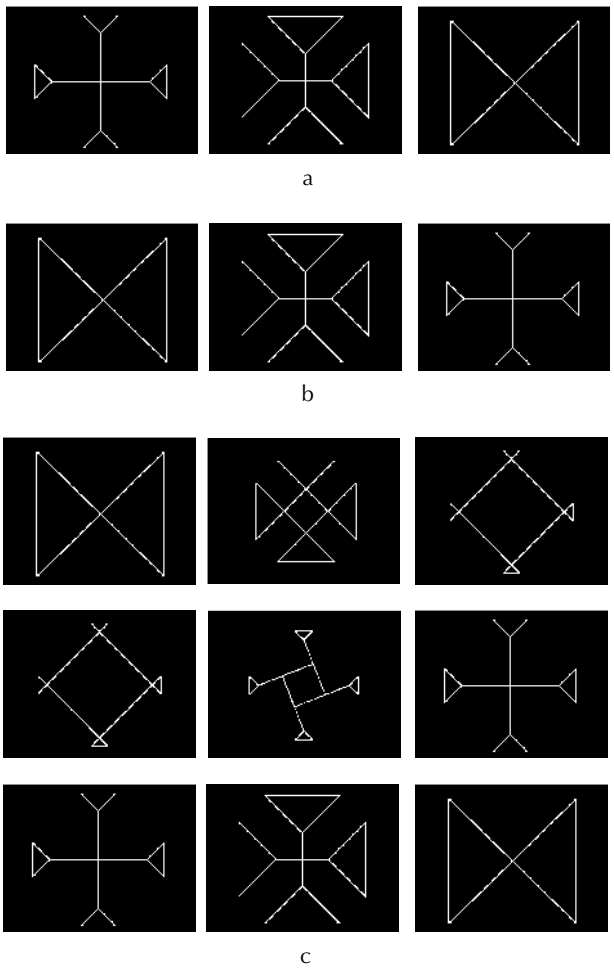


Figure 3. Schematics of Kongo rock painting and engraving designs. Drawings by the author based on Kongo rock paintings and engravings published by Paul Raymaekers in P. Raymaekers and H. van Moorsel, "Dessins Rupestres Du Bas Congo," *Ngonge—Carnets de Sciences Humaines Kongo*, no. 12–13–14 (1963), pl. 20, 21, 26, 27, 29.

patterns on the back of a woman from the Yombe people provides a compelling example of the "substantial stability" through time of these designs suggested by Thompson and MacGaffey. Their and Fu-Kiau's studies have guided my eye in this particular analysis of the design. However, as George Kubler famously sustained, one cannot presume that a continuity in form entails a continuity in meaning. Only an analysis of the historical sources such as that proposed here can establish how these designs were interpreted in the early modern period. See E. Bassani and M. D. McLeod, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections: 1400–1800* (London: British Museum, 2000), p. 283.

23. The best known expressions of kongo two-dimensional representation are the paintings and engravings found on the surface of geological landmarks. James Tuckey was the first modern observer to publish Kongo rock art. See J. H. Tuckey and C. Smith, *Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire, Usually Called the Congo in South Africa, in 1816* (London: John Murray, 1818). Particularly relevant to this discussion is number 30 of plate 9, facing page 382, which presents design variations around the motif of the cross, including diamond-shape lines and individual points arranged in a cruciform group of five, two motifs that would later be recorded in twentieth-century surveys of Central African rock art and also appear in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Kongo Christian art. The age of the Lower-Congo rock paintings is not precisely determined, although it is generally thought that they date at least as far back as the era of early modern European contact; see D. Cahen and P. de Maret, "Recherches archéologiques récentes en République du Zaïre," *Forum ULB* 39 (1974):33–37. The relevance of the designs, in the present case, is to illustrate the use of the motif of the cross in a Kongo context independent from direct European intervention.

24. For a modern description of the *Kimpasi* see J. van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo; Sociologie, Religion et Magie,* 2nd ed. Museum Lessianum. Section Missiologique, no. 39 (Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1959), pp. 420–489. In the present discussion I only consider the *Kimpasi* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as outlined in the historical documents.

25. For references to the might of *Kimpasi* see Girolamo da Montesarchio, *Viaggio Al Gongho,* Fondo Missioni Estere (Florence: Archivio Storico dei Frati Minori Cappucchini della Provincia di Toscana, ca 1668), ff. 61–66v. Montesarchio also notes that the association is open to both men and women (f. 61v).

The Capuchins in charge of the Kongo mission in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries focused much of their efforts on the uprooting of the *Kimpasi,* which prominent use of the cross-like sign in its rituals and paraphernalia particularly preoccupied the friars. Girolamo da Montesarchio, Capuchin missionary to the Kongo between 1648 and 1668, observed, in puzzlement, that "the members of the [*Kimpasi*] society had at the entrance of their meeting place a great portico with the sacred sign of the cross painted in diverse colors."[26] In fact, the motif not only announced the entrance to the *Kimpasi* enclosure, but also served as the ubiquitous sign for the association. Montesarchio's colleague and contemporary Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi also saw the cross used in the association's rituals. He wrote: "The devil had taught [the *Kimpasi* initiates] that to entice new Christians, . . . they should paint on their idols the venerable sign of the cross . . . so as to hide their pernicious sentiments and their sacrilegious impiety." "One would not believe," he lamented, "how many people were seduced by this ruse."[27]

The clerics' concern here is with idolatry, or misplaced devotion, but their observations highlight the fluidity between Christian and non-Christian symbols and ideas. To my knowledge, it is not possible to determine whether the *Kimpasi* or its use of the cross predated the introduction of Christianity in the region, although I believe they did. Regardless of the chronology, the *Kimpasi,* Christianity, and their respective interpretations of the motif coexisted in the early modern Kongo. What is more, Central Africans acutely perceived the kinship between the two institutions' ideas of death and regeneration as expressed in both cases by the cross. In one of many similar instances, the villagers from a remote region of the Kongo, less familiar with Catholicism than the larger population centers, greeted friar Girolamo as an *nkita,* the word used for *Kimpasi* initiates, and literally meaning someone who has come back from the Other World.[28] In this episode, the image of the cross prompted the association of the crucifix-bearing missionary with a local narrative of death and resurrection. The link between the missionary and the *nkita* was also reinforced by the pale skin of the friar, another indication in Kongo visual vocabulary of an individual's access to supernatural powers, an ability enjoyed, for example, by the equally fair-skinned albino men and women born in the region.[29] One could interpret such episodes as evidence that Christianity was from the outset wholly taken over by Kongo cosmology. I would like to suggest in contrast a more nuanced reading of the evidence that considers how Christianity became a Kongo phenomenon whose ideas and message articulated local and foreign thought and forms of representation.

Kongo symbol and Christian icon

An exceptional visual object showcases particularly well the organic process through which Kongo Christian thought emerged from local religious thought and symbolism. In 1937 Georges Schellings, a Redemptorist father, and Maurice Bequaert, a Belgian civil servant attached to the Tervuren Museum of the Belgian Congo, excavated the ruins of a Kongo church and cemetery that were in use in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Their exploration yielded over six hundred objects, which included local pottery, European ceramics, and Kongo artifacts of Christian form. Among these, they uncovered several tombstones, some engraved with the Latin cross, others with what they identified as a stylized Templar or Order of Christ cross (fig. 4).[30] The uncommon iconography of one of the markers especially caught their attention, here in a photograph published in the monthly Redemptorist newspaper *Sint-Gerardusbode* in 1949, as the original

26. Montesarchio (ibid.), ff. 61v–62. Note that the crosses in Kongo rock paintings are also polychromatic, mixing red, white, and black pigments.

27. G. A. Cavazzi and F. Alamandini, *Istorica Descrizione De' Tre Regni Congo, Matamba Et Angola Sitvati Nell' Etiopia Inferiore Occidentale E Delle Missioni Apostoliche Esercitateui Da Religiosi Capuccini* (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1687), p. 85.

28. Montesarchio (see note 25), f. 39 r.

29. The special status of albino men and women is discussed, for example, by Luca da Caltanisetta in F. Bontinck, *Diaire Congolais. 1690–1701.* Publications De L'université Lovanium De Kinshasa (Louvain, Paris: Éditions Nauwelaerts; Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1970), vol. 27, p. 152. See also M. de Anguiano, *Misiones capuchinas en Africa,* Biblioteca "Missionalia Hispanica" (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas Instituto Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo, 1950), vol. 7, p. 75.

30. The Portuguese Order of Christ was the heir of the Order of the Knights Templar. Upon the suppression of the Templars at the instigation of Philippe IV of France, King Dinis of Portugal obtained from the Pope the right to institute the military Order of Christ. The new institution was founded in 1319 and inherited the assets of the Portuguese Templars. The insignia of the new order was an emblem derived from the former group's Malta cross, a crimson cross superposed with a smaller white cross, that most famously appeared on the sails of caravels from the period of the great discoveries. The Order of Christ supported Iberian enterprises overseas financially and in manpower.

photographs of the excavation file are unavailable (fig. 5).[31] The tombstone articulated, explained Schellings, a "Navigator Cross (or Cross of the Order of Christ) sculpted in relief and at the same time a Latin Cross in one of the triangles formed by the former cross."[32] The European viewers identified the X shape as a stylized representation of the Maltese cross, the emblem of the Portuguese Order of Christ that played an instrumental role in the Iberian overseas endeavors. The two scholars were also without a doubt aware that some members of the Kongo elite belonged to the order, a distinction they received directly from Portugal, or else from their own king, who claimed, to the great indignation of the Portuguese, the privilege to bestow the honor upon his own people.[33]

The reference to the Order of Christ, although apt and plausible, and probably partly accurate, does not wholly explain the engraved signs on the tombstone, which articulate two different and interrelated designs. On the one hand, two intersecting lines encompassed in a diamond shape form a Kongo cross. On the other hand, the figure is broken down on the left side where the area defined by the two main diagonals is occupied by another set of intersecting lines—one vertical, and the second, horizontal. The horizontal line originates at the intersection of the diagonals so that the two designs are intricately linked. The horizontal segment in turn intersects the vertical line at a right angle at exactly two thirds of its height, forming a Latin cross. The geometry

Figure 4. Diagram of the Cross of the Order of Christ, also known as the Navigator's Cross. Drawing by the author.

Figure 5. *Ngongo Mbata Tombstone,* 17th or 18th century. Stone, dimensions of the engraving: 21 x 15 cm. Photo from G. Schellings, "Oud Kongo: Belangrijke Ontdekking Uit De Eerste Beschaving," *St. Gerardusbode: maandschrift der paters Redemptoristen* 53, no. 8 (1949):11.

of the design is complex but thoroughly thought through, as presented in the schematics in figure 6 that reproduce in scale the underlying construction of the engraving. Overall, the figure is based on the organizing concept of a slightly modified diamond shape and centers on a focal point from which the two motifs unfold (fig. 6). In this regard, the design is typical of Kongo motifs yet its structure has been reworked to accommodate the Latin cross.

Visual analysis of the tombstone alone may not permit one to declare with certainty that the motifs are indeed a combination of a Latin cross and a Kongo cross, but the context of the discovery makes the relationship clear. The cemetery of Ngongo Mbata was a Catholic burial ground

31. G. Schellings, "Oud Kongo: Belangrijke Ontdekking Uit De Eerste Beschaving," S*t. Gerardusbode: maandschrift der paters Redemptoristen* 53, no. 8 (1949):11–13. Schellings also described the stone in "Oud Kongo: Belangrijke Ontdekking Uit De Eerste Beschaving," *De Standaard,* 24–25 July 1949, biz. 1–2, and "Importante découverte au Bas-Congo. Les ruines de la première église congolaise construite au XVIème Siècle à Mbanza Mbata dia Madiadia," *Le Courrier d'Afrique,* 19/20 août 1950, 13. See also the short article by M. Bequaert that included one plate of the excavation report: M. Bequaert, "Fouille d'un cimetière du XVIIIème siècle au Congo Belge," *L'Antiquité Classique* IX (1940), 127–128. The tombstone in figure 5 was transferred after the excavation to the portal of the Redemptorist church in Kimpangu.

32. G. Schellings, "Importante découverte au Bas-Congo." The "Cross of the Navigator" refers to the Portuguese Infant Henrique the Navigator who reformed the Order of Christ and obtained immense privileges for its members from Pope Calixtus III, exposed in the Bull *Inter caetera quae* of March 13, 1496, in exchange for the commitment of Portugal and the Order to win over Africa to Christianity. See F. A. Dutra, "Membership in the Order of Christ in the Seventeenth Century: Its Rights, Privileges and Obligations," *The Americas* 27, no. 1 (1970):3–25.

33. A. L'Hoist, "L'ordre du Christ au Congo," *Revue de l'Aucam* VII (1932):258–266.

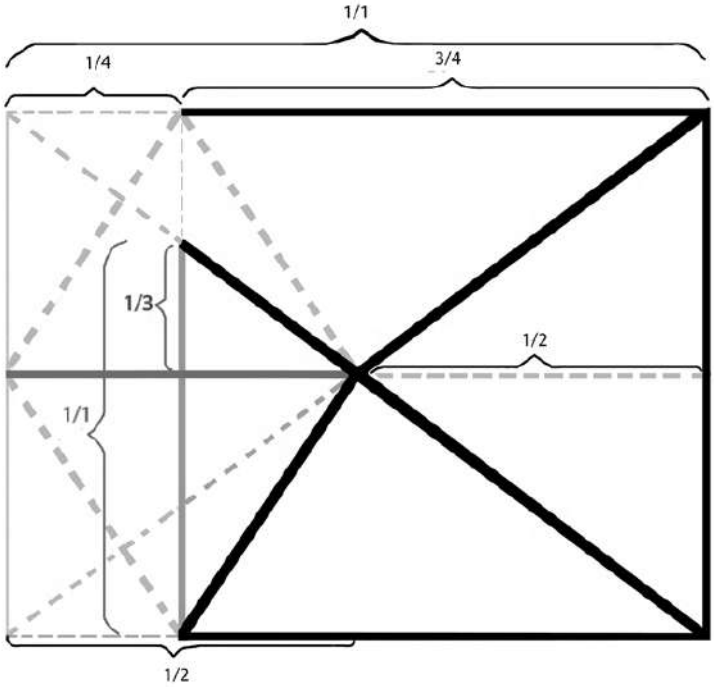


Figure 6. Diagram of the Ngongo Mbata Tombstone. Drawing by the author.

associated with a church. On this tombstone carved for a Christian patron, the maker of the engravings appears to have quoted the Kongo sign denoting the belief in an open channel between life and death in support of a Christian plea for salvation and resurrection. Such a vibrant profession of faith marked the tomb of a Kongo noble who was put to rest clad in his full regalia of Christian knighthood complete with a large iron sword. He was also provided with the comforting presence of two crucifixes and honored with a wooden coffin decorated with four brass plaques stamped with the emblem of the Order of Christ.[34]

Most of the objects unearthed in the excavation of Ngongo Mbata by Schellings and Bequaert soon disappeared from public and scholarly view. A 1950 article by Schellings from the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard,* however, includes the photograph and description of one of the crucifixes that accompanied the Kongo nobles in their tombs.[35] In addition to this image (regrettably of poor quality), I was able to identify, by comparing information from multiple sources, the photograph of another cross, collected in the twentieth century also in the region of Mbata, that is almost identical to the one found in the excavation (fig. 7).[36] The two crosses are actually part of a closely knit group of approximately twenty surviving Kongo crucifixes that share almost identical iconography and style and to which belonged most of the examples unearthed at Ngongo Mbata.[37] Mixing dark wood and yellow brass,

34. See the description of the tomb's contents in G. Schellings, "Oud Kongo: Belangrijke Ontdekking Uit De Eerste Beschaving," *St. Gerardusbode: maandschrift der paters Redemptoristen* 53, no. 8 (1949):11–12.

35. See note 31.

36. Monsignor Van den Bosch, whose bishopric stored the excavated material, noted the similarity between this crucifix and the ones unearthed in Ngongo Mbata; see file number 51.14.9 from the ethnography section of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale à Tervuren.

37. The Ngongo Mbata crucifix is one of the few examples of the group that retained all the ancillary figures originally placed around the body of Christ. Crosses in varying state of conservation are kept in public collections, such as the ones in the Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, Holland Inv. N. 29-381, the Museo de etnologia de Lisboa, Portugal Inv. N. D4.1, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New

Figure 7. Unknown artist, *Kongo Crucifix*, second half of the 17th or 18th century. Brass and wood, 26 x 13.2 cm. Current location unknown. Photo: n. 51.14.9 from the Ethnography Section of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium.

the crucifix in figure 7 is an exquisite artifact reflecting the prestige of its owner. The black wood cross is glistening from heavy patina and its edges have been smoothed by repeated use, particularly in the space between the body of Christ and the figure under his feet, where the wood slightly curves inward from wear. The four ends of the cross have been embellished with white metal covers. The top one received particular attention; it is adorned with two architectural cornices and topped with a suspension loop. At the intersection of the wooden branches, a diamond-shape metal plate has been affixed with a single nail placed in its very center. As in most other Kongo crucifixes, this metal plate, echoing the halos gracing the heads of Saints in Christian imagery, marks the precise meeting point of the two segments of the cross rather than crowning the head of the dying Christ. This special placement is also emphasized on the back of the cross, as in other examples. The diamond-shape halo, centered on a single central nail, links the crucifix to the Kongo cross designs. As in the tombstone, Kongo visual syntax and religious thought are called upon and put to work in the Christian object.

The emaciated figure of Christ is attached to the cross by three pegs piercing his oversized hands and his crossed feet. His head is wrapped by a stylized representation of his coiffure and bends to the right. He is ready to expire. The limbs are thin and elongated, the ribs represented by a few simple lines. Across the hips, the dying Christ wears a short rope-like loincloth. Above him, a decorated oval plate bears, in lieu of the INRI inscription, a zigzag line reminiscent of other two-dimensional Kongo designs. Under his feet are two ancillary metal elements. First, a medal of the Immaculate Conception depicts the Virgin carried by a crescent moon in a decorated niche topped with a cross. Then, a chubby, curly-haired angel seemingly supports the higher medal. The juxtaposition of the Virgin and angel echoes the representations of the Immaculate Conception, a devotion ardently promoted by the Capuchin friars in Europe as well as in Africa, and is a reminder of the influential presence in the region of

York, inv. 1999.295.11. In addition to these objects, I recorded half a dozen Christ figures without wooden crosses that pertain to the same stylistically close-knit group. Most of the crosses unearthed at Ngongo Mbata belonged to this stylistic group, see J. Vandenhoute, "De Begraafplaats Van Ngongo-Mbata (Neder-Zaïre)" (master's thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Gent Hoger Instituut voor Kunstgesischiedenis on Oudheidkunde, 1972–1973), p. 128.

the order and of its Franciscan imagery from the mid-seventeenth century to the early 1800s.[38]

The Immaculate Conception anchors this type of crucifix to the period of Capuchin presence in Central Africa, starting around 1650, and the excavation of Ngongo Mbata indicates that such crucifixes were still in use in the eighteenth century. This period was characterized in the Kongo first by a long period of civil wars, then by the diminished power of the kings, and overall by the strong presence and subsequent gradual withdrawal of the Capuchins.[39] The crucifixes discussed here are therefore late creations in the Christian history of the kingdom. Yet, as we have seen, through their link to the story of Afonso that was retold and appropriated by local rulers over centuries, the crucifixes conveyed a cultural narrative whose sources could be traced back to the first moments of contact between the Kongo and Christianity. Yet, over the decades, both the story and the crosses took on various forms and new meanings anchored in the issues of their particular time and place of creation.[40] Several crucifixes similar to those unearthed in the excavation at Ngongo Mbata were collected in the twentieth century in the former powerful Kongo province of Mbata, where the city of Ngongo Mbata had flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[41] Such tenuous evidence could suggest that, at a time of weakened centralized power, a local style emerged that represented a consistent and elaborate expression of the significance of Christianity and its imagery in that period of Mbata's history. This hypothesis poses the crucial question of the evolution in form and significance of the crucifixes all along the history and post-history of the Kongo Kingdom and its colonial aftermath as well as that of their possible geographical diffusion.[42]

European realism as Kongo stylization

In the crucifixes, Central African artists not only performed an iconographic synthesis anchored in the motif of the cross, but also conducted an elaborate cross-cultural reflection on style. Formally, the Kongo crucifixes were unlike European or Kongo objects; rather, they drew from both traditions in a creative way and merged the visual discourses of Baroque Europe and early modern Kongo. The main tension at play in this process was the contrast between Kongo modes of representation and the predominant naturalism of European devotional images. Early modern observers described both figurative and abstract Central African artworks but in all cases insisted on what they perceived as the composite, conceptual nature of Kongo representation. The missionaries, for instance, often described Kongo "idols" as deformed and misshapen images bedecked with horns or even as wholly abstract amalgams put together, in the words of one of the friars, "according to each person's kind of madness."[43] The "idols" of these testimonies combined visual elements following a logic that was conceptual rather than aimed at rendering the appearance of the real world.

The crucifix in figure 2 is an exquisite illustration of a Central African artist's reflection on this disparity between Kongo and European forms of plastic representation.[44]

38. The Franciscans were the champions of the very controversial doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The Capuchins, a Franciscan order, chose the devotion as their patron saint in 1621. The iconography of the Immaculate only stabilized at the end of the sixteenth century as the woman of the Apocalypse, carried by a crescent moon, often supported by cherub heads. See the study of the iconography of the Immaculate Conception by M. Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance,* Monographs on Archaeology and Fine Arts, 7 (New York: Published by the College Art Association of America in conjunction with the *Art Bulletin,* 1957).

39. The history of the period was studied in J. K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). See also for the later period Kabwita Kabolo Iko, *Le Royaume Kongo et la mission catholique, 1750–1838: du déclin à l'extinction, Mémoire d'églises* (Paris: Karthala, 2004).

40. See, for example, a version of the story of Afonso as recorded in the last century in the coastal province of Soyo; in Jadin, "Andrea de Pavia au Congo" (see note 16).

41. See figure 7. Another similar cross was published, for example, in Thiel and Helf (see note 6), fig. 84. The history of Mbata is known through the reports of Capuchins and secular clergy, present intermittently in the region, and is summarized in G. M. da Leguzzano Saccardo, *Congo e Angola con la storia dell'antica missione dei cappuccini,* 3 vols. (Venezia-Mestre: Curia Povinciale dei Cappuccini, 1982–1983), vol. I, pp. 408–410, vol. II, p. 345.

42. These issues will be addressed, I hope, in future studies, informed by further material analysis, additional archaeological and archival research, and the argument presented here.

43. G. A. Cavazzi, *Missione Evangelica Al Regno Del Congo: Araldi Manuscript,* Araldi Collection (Modena 1665–1668), vol. A, bk. 2, chap. 11, p. 171. See the translation on J. K. Thornton's blog "Central African History" at http://centralafricanhistory.blogspot.com/2008/08/giovanni-antonio-cavazzi-da.html.

44. Although the cross in figure 2, which was collected in the twentieth century, may or may not have been created in the early modern period, its iconography and meaning derive from the interactions of that period. The central metal part was later nailed on a wooden support.

The artist disposed protagonists and motifs along the surface of a yellow brass cross, bordered with incisions on a slightly elevated band. As we have already seen, at the center of the Latin cross, where the vertical and horizontal branches meet, he incised a diamond, checkered in criss-crossing lines and surmounted by a small cross at its upper corner. The left and right extremities of the design are finished in triangular forms that create two additional X-shaped crosses. The incised diamond is the only two-dimensional element of the crucifix and serves both as the center and background of the group. Once again, the rhombus, just above the head of the corpus, is reminiscent of a saint's halo but, as in most Kongo crucifixes, it is not positioned in reference to the head of Christ, but placed to monumentalize the exact location where the two branches of the cross come together. As with the tombstone of Ngongo Mbata or in the crucifix in figure 7, Kongo cross and Latin cross here merge and unite their symbolic powers for the benefit of the worshipper.

At the lower corner of the etched diamond, the artist placed the figure of Christ—head fallen on his right shoulder, arms extended, belly caved in and knees bent, in an attitude inspiring compassion. Seven ancillary figures join Christ on the cross in a dynamic kneeling pose, hands joined in prayer, attitudes typical of this category of Kongo crucifix. Overall, the treatment of the different elements of the crucifix falls between European-inspired realism and the abstracted, symbolic renderings often associated with Kongo artistic forms. Under the dying body of Christ, for instance, the small depiction of the Immaculate Conception, represented by a head and two arms folded on the chest, hands joined in prayer, is recognizable as the Virgin thanks to the crescent moon at the bottom of her body. This type of representation of the Madonna, present on many of the crucifixes, illustrates the frequent transformation of Christian motifs from the predominant naturalism of imported objects to stylized designs that nevertheless retained key attributes of their original composition. In figures 2, 7, and 8, the Immaculate takes on diverse degrees of stylization while retaining key elements of proportion and iconography such as the Virgin's flowing garment.

The central element of the crucifix, the dying corpus of Christ, was similarly redesigned yet was never stylized to the point of abstraction; it always remained readily recognizable as a human figure. Formally, the figure of Christ was the point of the crucifixes where the impact of European and Kongo images and forms of representation on each other appeared most clearly. It is as if here the depiction of the body of Christ demonstrated the interest of Central African artists in the foreign modes of representation and as the counterpoint it presented their own formal vocabulary. The plastic forms they created responded to these artistic differences with specific quotations and bold transpositions of elements of style hailing from the two traditions. For instance, the deep lines incised on the chest of the Christ figures in the Kongo crosses should not be seen as a stylized rendering of the anatomy of a dying body but as an abstracted quotation of European illusionistic representations of the bodily features of the crucified man: In the process of appropriation, the lines of the ribcage changed in nature from artists' plastic devices to suggest flesh in a metal object to topical quotations of the naturalism observed in imported artworks. Thus the beguiling combination of naturalism and abstraction in the crucifixes prefigure later Kongo artistic forms from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries admired for their formally ambivalent representation of the human figure depicted here in exquisite life-like renderings and there in bold, minimalist strokes. It also deepens, in this regard, our historical understanding of Central African artistic expressions at large.[45]

As a genre, the Kongo crucifixes formed a space of correlation in which Kongo artists and patrons brought together Central African and European artistic categories, approximated two heterogeneous visual syntaxes, and bridged the gap between two distant forms of beliefs. In the crucifixes, the meeting of Kongo cross and Christian cross naturalized Christianity into a local discourse about the nature of the supernatural and the cycle of life and death and, in turn, transposed Kongo religious signs into visual expressions of Catholic thought.

Understanding the crosses as spaces of correlation lifts the seeming incongruity of the association of Catholic and Kongo objects and attitudes, such as in the ceremony depicted in Figure 1. In the watercolor, the cemetery of Ngongo Mbata comes to life. The exceptional tombstone and crucifixes of the burial ground bring substance to the painted scene. The now lifeless objects of the excavation as well as the gestures and devotions presented in the painting are individually rooted in Kongo or Christian religious thought, but,

45. To my knowledge, there are no extant examples of Kongo anthropomorphic artworks that can be dated to the early modern period. However, two small female wooden busts created by neighbors of the Kongo, now in the Museo Preistorico Etnografico "L. Pigorini" in Rome (inv. 4525 and 4526) offer the example of an artist's stylized rendering of the human figure in a cultural area related to the Kongo, in the seventeenth century. They are discussed in Bassani (see note 21), pp. 269–275.

Figure 8. Stylized Kongo rendering of the Virgin, detail from a Kongo crucifix, undated. Brass and wood, dimensions of the Virgin approximately 3 x 1 cm. Collection Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, The Netherlands, inv. 29. 377. Photo: Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, The Netherlands.

taken together, encompass and surpass the two traditions and express new, Kongo-Christian thought. The sign of the cross in particular, prominently displayed in the watercolor and showcased by the crucifixes, is the point where Kongo worship becomes Christian devotion, and Christian faith—a part of Kongo's supernatural realm.

The New York Times

What Biracial People Know

Moises Velasquez-Manoff MARCH 4, 2017

After the nation's first black president, we now have a white president with the whitest and malest cabinet since Ronald Reagan's. His administration immediately made it a priority to deport undocumented immigrants and to deny people from certain Muslim-majority nations entry into the United States, decisions that caused tremendous blowback.

What President Trump doesn't seem to have considered is that diversity doesn't just sound nice, it has tangible value. Social scientists find that homogeneous groups like his cabinet can be less creative and insightful than diverse ones. They are more prone to groupthink and less likely to question faulty assumptions.

What's true of groups is also true for individuals. A small but growing body of research suggests that multiracial people are more open-minded and creative. Here, it's worth remembering that Barack Obama, son of a Kenyan father and a white Kansan mother, wasn't only the nation's first black president, he was also its first biracial president. His multitudinous self was, I like to think, part of what made him great — part of what inspired him when he proclaimed that there wasn't a red or blue America, but a United States of America.

As a multiethnic person myself — the son of a Jewish dad of Eastern European descent and a Puerto Rican mom — I can attest that being mixed makes it harder to fall back on the tribal identities that have guided so much of human history, and that are now resurgent. Your background pushes you to construct a worldview that transcends the tribal.

You're also accustomed to the idea of having several selves, and of trying to forge them into something whole. That task of self-creation isn't unique to biracial people; it's a defining experience of modernity. Once the old stories about God and tribe — the framing that historically gave our lives context — become inadequate, on what do we base our identities? How do we give our lives meaning and purpose?

President Trump has answered this challenge by reaching backward — vowing to wall off America and invoking a whiter, more homogeneous country. This approach is likely to fail for the simple reason that much of the strength and creativity of America, and modernity generally, stems from diversity. And the answers to a host of problems we face may lie in more mixing, not less.

Consider this: By 3 months of age, biracial infants recognize faces more quickly than their monoracial peers, suggesting that their facial perception abilities are more developed. Kristin Pauker, a psychologist at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and one of the researchers who performed this study, likens this flexibility to bilingualism. Early on, infants who hear only Japanese, say, will lose the ability to distinguish L's from R's. But if they also hear English, they'll continue to hear the sounds as separate. So it is with recognizing faces, Dr. Pauker says. Kids naturally learn to recognize kin from non-kin, in-group from out-group. But because they're exposed to more human variation, the in-group for multiracial children seems to be larger.

This may pay off in important ways later. In a 2015 study, Sarah Gaither, an assistant professor at Duke, found that when she reminded multiracial participants of their mixed heritage, they scored higher in a series of word association games and other tests that measure creative problem solving. When she reminded monoracial people about their heritage, however, their performance didn't improve. Somehow, having multiple selves enhanced mental flexibility.

But here's where it gets interesting: When Dr. Gaither reminded participants of a single racial background that they, too, had multiple selves, by asking about their various identities in life, their scores also improved. "For biracial people, these racial identities are very salient," she told me. "That said, we all have multiple social identities." And focusing on these identities seems to impart mental flexibility irrespective of race.

It may be possible to deliberately cultivate this kind of limber mind-set by, for example, living abroad. Various studies find that business people who live in other countries are more successful than those who stay put; that artists who've lived abroad create more valuable art; that scientists working abroad produce studies that are more highly cited. Living in another culture exercises the mind, researchers reason, forcing one to think more deeply about the world.

Another path to intellectual rigor is to gather a diverse group of people together and have them attack problems, which is arguably exactly what the American experiment is. In mock trials, the Tufts University researcher Samuel Sommers has found, racially diverse juries appraise evidence more accurately than all-white juries, which translates to more lenient treatment of minority defendants. That's not because minority jurors are biased in favor of minority defendants, but because whites on mixed juries more carefully consider the evidence.

The point is that diversity — of one's own makeup, one's experience, of groups of people solving problems, of cities and nations — is linked to economic prosperity, greater scientific prowess and a fairer judicial process. If human groups represent a series of brains networked together, the more dissimilar these brains are in terms of life experience, the better the "hivemind" may be at thinking around any given problem.

The opposite is true of those who employ essentialist thinking — in particular, it seems, people who espouse stereotypes about racial groups. Harvard and Tel Aviv University

scientists ran experiments on white Americans, Israelis and Asian-Americans in which they had some subjects read essays that made an essentialist argument about race, and then asked them to solve word-association games and other puzzles. Those who were primed with racial stereotypes performed worse than those who weren't. "An essentialist mind-set is indeed hazardous for creativity,"

None of which bodes well for Mr. Trump's mostly white, mostly male, extremely wealthy cabinet. Indeed, it's tempting to speculate that the administration's problems so far, including its clumsy rollout of a travel ban that was mostly blocked by the courts, stem in part from its homogeneity and insularity. Better decisions might emerge from a more diverse set of minds.

And yet, if multiculturalism is so grand, why was Mr. Trump so successful in running on a platform that rejected it? What explains the current "whitelash," as the commentator Van Jones called it? Sure, many Trump supporters have legitimate economic concerns separate from worries about race or immigration. But what of the white nationalism that his campaign seems to have unleashed? Eight years of a black president didn't assuage those minds, but instead inflamed them. Diversity didn't make its own case very well. One answer to this conundrum comes from Dr. Sommers and his Tufts colleague Michael Norton. In a 2011 survey, they found that as whites reported decreases in perceived anti-black bias, they also reported increasing anti-white bias, which they described as a bigger problem. Dr. Sommers and Dr. Norton concluded that whites saw race relations as a zero-sum game. Minorities' gain was their loss.

In reality, cities and countries that are more diverse are more prosperous than homogeneous ones, and that often means higher wages for native-born citizens. Yet the perception that out-groups gain at in-groups' expense persists. And that view seems to be reflexive. Merely reminding whites that the Census Bureau has said the United States will be a "majority minority" country by 2042, as one Northwestern University experiment showed, increased their anti-minority bias and their preference for being around other whites. In another experiment, the reminder made whites more politically conservative as well.

It's hard to know what to do about this except to acknowledge that diversity isn't easy. It's uncomfortable. It can make people feel threatened. "We promote diversity. We believe in diversity. But diversity is hard," Sophie Trawalter, a psychologist at the University of Virginia, told me.

That very difficulty, though, may be why diversity is so good for us. "The pain associated with diversity can be thought of as the pain of exercise," Katherine Phillips, a senior vice dean at Columbia Business School, writes. "You have to push yourself to grow your muscles."

Closer, more meaningful contact with those of other races may help assuage the underlying anxiety. Some years back, Dr. Gaither of Duke ran an intriguing study in which incoming white college students were paired with either same-race or different-

race roommates. After four months, roommates who lived with different races had a more diverse group of friends and considered diversity more important, compared with those with same-race roommates. After six months, they were less anxious and more pleasant in interracial interactions. (It was the Republican-Democrat pairings that proved problematic, Dr. Gaither told me. Apparently they couldn't stand each other.) Some corners of the world seem to naturally foster this mellower view of race — particularly Hawaii, Mr. Obama's home state. Dr. Pauker has found that by age 7, children in Massachusetts begin to stereotype about racial out-groups, whereas children in Hawaii do not. She's not sure why, but she suspects that the state's unique racial makeup is important. Whites are a minority in Hawaii, and the state has the largest share of multiracial people in the country, at almost a quarter of its population. Constant exposure to people who see race as a fluid concept — who define themselves as Asian, Hawaiian, black or white interchangeably — makes rigid thinking about race harder to maintain, she speculates. And that flexibility rubs off. In a forthcoming study, Dr. Pauker finds that white college students who move from the mainland to Hawaii begin to think differently about race. Faced daily with evidence of a complex reality, their ideas about who's in and who's out, and what belonging to any group really means, relax.

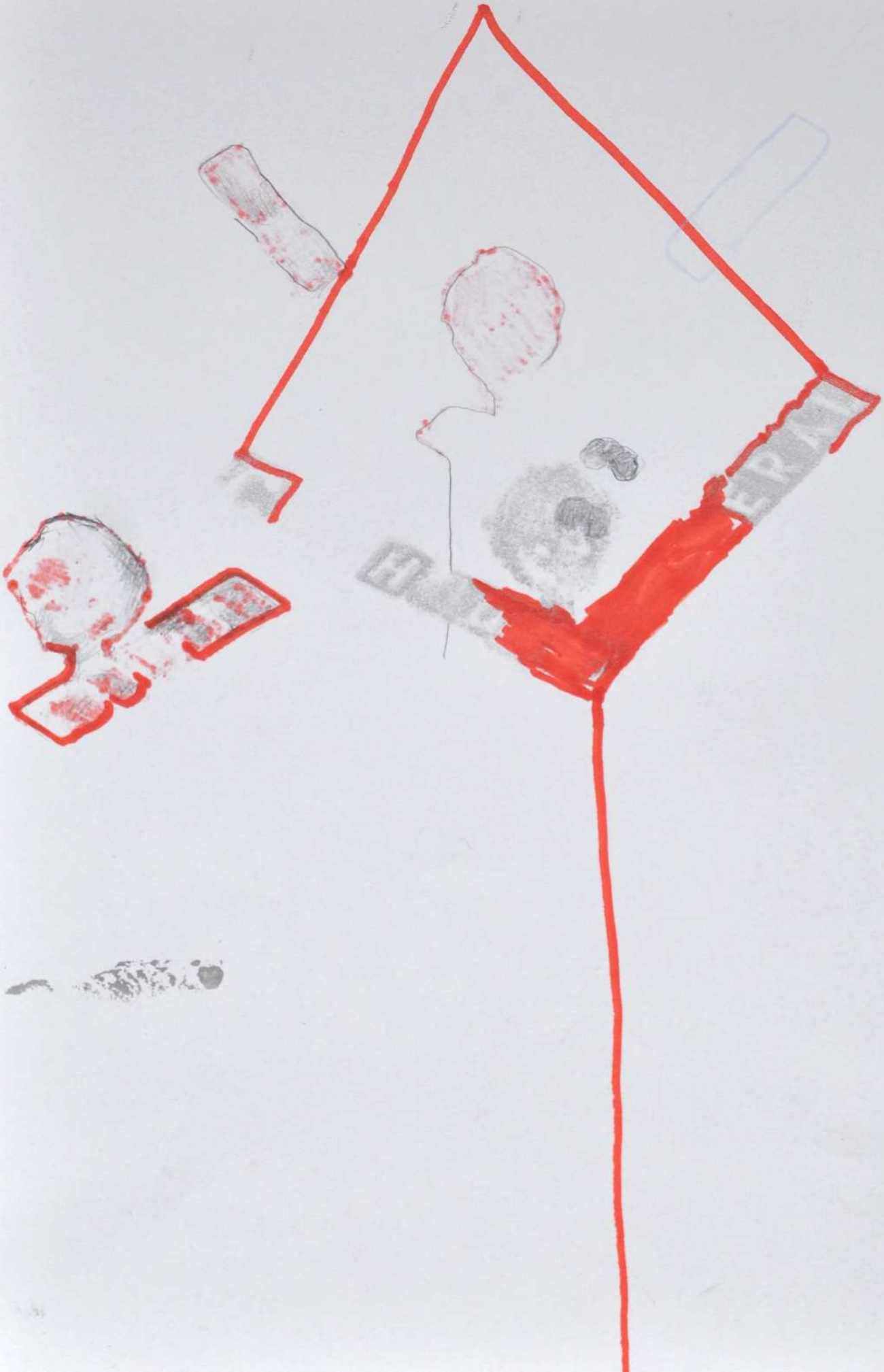
Clearly, people can cling to racist views even when exposed to mountains of evidence contradicting those views. But an optimistic interpretation of Dr. Pauker's research is that when a society's racial makeup moves beyond a certain threshold — when whites stop being the majority, for example, and a large percentage of the population is mixed — racial stereotyping becomes harder to do.

Whitelash notwithstanding, we're moving in that direction. More nonwhite babies are already born than white. And if multiracial people work like a vaccine against the tribalist tendencies roused by Mr. Trump, the country may be gaining immunity. Multiracials make up an estimated 7 percent of Americans, according to the Pew Research Center, and they're predicted to grow to 20 percent by 2050.

President Trump campaigned on a narrow vision of America as a nation-state, not as a state of people from many nations. His response to the modern question — How do we form our identities? — is to grasp for a semi-mythical past that excludes large segments of modern America. If we believe the science on diversity, his approach to problem solving is likely suboptimal.

Many see his election as apocalyptic. And sure, President Trump could break our democracy, wreck the country and ruin the planet. But his presidency also has the feel of a last stand — grim, fearful and obsessed with imminent decline. In retrospect, we may view Mr. Trump as part of the agony of metamorphosis.

And we'll see Mr. Obama as the first president of the thriving multiracial nation that's emerging.



THE BELIEVER

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2012

RACHEL COHEN

GOLD, GOLDEN, GILDED, GLITTERING

REPRESENTATIONS OF VALUE, OR THE UNEXPECTED DOUBLE HISTORY OF BANKING AND THE ART WORLD

DISCUSSED: *Shadowy Holding Companies, The Questionable Ontology of Finance Itself, Very Public Vanitas, Financiers' Tastes, A Whole New Shark, Begetting the Federal Reserve, Tiny Areas of Color, Vast Amounts of Liquidity, An Unexpected Madonna, Duccio's Compatriots, Double-Entry Bookkeeping, Leaves Blowing in the Wind*

In 2007, with financial markets ballooning on every side, the artist Damien Hirst cast a real human skull in platinum, encrusted the cast with 8,601 diamonds that might or might not have come from "conflict-conscious" sources, and called his construction *For the Love of God*. Images of the macabre object circulated with incredible speed, and there was cheery debate about whether the accomplishment of the work was in the realm of aesthetics or that of the market, whether what mattered were the artist's choices or the fact that the piece had lived up to its announced intention to be "the most expensive piece of art by a living artist" and had sold for $100 million. Two years later, with financial markets imploding on every side, it was reported that the work had in fact been sold to a holding company that turned out to consist of Hirst's gallerist, his business manager, his friend the Russian billionaire art collector Viktor Pinchuk, and Hirst himself. There were then those who, staring at their own newly empty stock portfolios, found in the title apt expression of their feelings. The work

itself, with its diamond-laden eye sockets and its original inhabitant's grinning teeth, seems unperturbed by any hollowness of value in the financial or art markets. It does not matter to this cynical epitome of our glittering age whether it was made for the love of anything but more zeroes.

Still, museum curators have found in Hirst's skull and title connections to earlier eras of artistic creation. The Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam, showed the skull among works of the Dutch golden age. In 2010, in Paris, the Musée Maillol displayed it among works that grapple with mortality. This past summer, the skull was part of a Hirst retrospective at the Tate Modern, in London. These exhibitions evoked the long tradition of including skulls in *vanitas* paintings, before which a viewer is meant to consider how little time we have. Hirst's mocking of this time-honored tradition seems superficial and acquisitive to me, but he is not only far and away the richest living artist, he is also a tremendously popular one, and one whose art provokes thoughtful discussion. The curators of the Rijksmuseum mounted a wonderful website of the talking heads of viewers responding to the Hirst work, which make it clear that the skull is indeed understood by museumgoers as an important representation of our times. But to my mind, what the work represents, specifically, is not our artistic, or not *only* our artistic, but our financial life. As Blake Gopnik pointed out in the *Washington Post* at the time the skull was unveiled, it's the purchase of the work that is the work. Sale at outlandish price, just as was true at Lehman Brothers, is what defines and confers the value.

Lately, I find that I read the financial news with the constant sense of sleight of hand at work. Since 2008, and the crisis of mismanagement that resulted in the failure of Lehman Brothers and precipitated our current financial woes, it has seemed to me that the business of all the large financial institutions—even the ones that conspicuously did not fail, like Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase—has something important in common with the sale of Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull. All of these institutions have, or had, significant interests in financial products like derivatives and mortgage-backed securities. These products, or "instruments," or "vehicles," are anchored not to any concrete goods but only to finance itself. It was in this way that, in 2010, during the midst of the financial crisis, the gross domestic product of the entire world was between $50 and $60 trillion, while the volume of derivatives trading was about twenty times the size of the GDP—$1,200 trillion, or $1.2 quadrillion.

Mortgage-backed securities are created by assembling thousands of particles of debt —pieces of debt owned by homeowners in Peoria and by southern African governments at war over the diamond trade—and then packaging these together and selling them. Before the crisis, the banks claimed to their investors that it didn't much matter whether there was anything solid underpinning the value of these vehicles. It was the picture—made by a financier at a computer, out of thin air, between one moment and the next—that made the value. Like the men of Wall Street, Damien Hirst is a creator of astronomical value, seemingly out of nothing. The diamonds on the Hirst skull were reportedly worth $23.6 million—the rest of the work's value was

created, overnight, in the assemblage. *For the Love of God* applies the technique of a leveraged buyout not only *to* a work of art but *as* a work of art.
In fact, we have long entrusted the task of representing our ideas of value to members of two professions that might seem to have little in common: banking and art. And, in the last seven hundred years or so, it has happened more than once that visual and financial inventors have come up with strikingly similar representations. There is more than a shadow of resemblance between the purchase of the Hirst skull in 2007 and the mortgage-backed-securities debacle that made of Lehman Brothers in the following year one of the great public pictures of *vanitas* we've had. And, when you look further into these intersections, you often find that what is really at stake is a change in the way we feel and understand time.

In the last several years, I've been at work on a book about the art connoisseur Bernard Berenson and the picture trade in which he made his living. In studying the value associated with art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I've spent a lot of time at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is, among other things, a vast compendium of the tastes of financiers. From the days when J. P. Morgan was the powerful president of its board to the period in which Robert Lehman donated nearly three thousand works to be housed in a separate wing bearing his name, the museum has been built, stocked, and guided by bankers.
When I've gone to the Met to study the early Italian works that Berenson loved and appraised, I've often wandered into other parts of the museum, and gradually a looping chain of connections among certain works of art and their financial eras has grown up in my mind.

For several years, the Met had on display another work by Damien Hirst, one called *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. This work is famous for containing a real tiger shark, first preserved in formaldehyde by Hirst's team in 1991. It was lent to the museum by hedge-fund financier Steven Cohen, listed in *Forbes* magazine as one of fourteen collectors whose art holdings are evaluated in excess of $700 million. Cohen paid for his Hirst, in the pre-leverage era, $8 million.
At the Met, people, especially small children, approach the gray, pendulous beast in its glass-and-riveted-steel tank with a certain anxiety. The piece combines menace and precariousness. I often find myself imagining the glass giving way and the blue-tinted formaldehyde pouring out into the room. The title of the work argues, convincingly, that it is hard to bring yourself to believe that the animal is really dead, and the use of this uneasiness to create the artistic impact is sinister. But under what is sinister is what is bewildering, and the bewilderment is common to both the new conceptual art and the new finance. The original shark, it turns out, rotted.
Something about the formaldehyde process was miscalculated. The *New York Times* reported that they had to get a whole new shark in 2006; the work was evidently not constructed to stand the proverbial test of time. Steven Cohen was asked if he thought it was still the same piece, given that it wasn't the same shark. He responded—and one feels that he could be talking as much about his profession as about his collection—that it didn't really matter if the object itself endured: "We're dealing with a

conceptual idea." Or, as Hirst himself put it in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* last year, "We're here for a good time, not a long time."

In analyses of the financial crisis, it has become commonplace to point out that the prognosticators at Lehman Brothers and Goldman Sachs, and the hedge-fund financiers and advertising moguls who love to collect Hirst's art, seem to think about only extremely small windows of opportunity in time. The long future of their investors and even, strangely, of their own enterprises, does not seem to be, to them, terribly compelling. We are reminded by pundits on the right and on the left that a hundred years ago, when the Morgan and Lehman and Goldman and Sachs families ran these banks, the long-term reputation of the enterprise was a crucial asset to the bankers. Even in the riotously speculative Gilded Age, this fact acted as a curb against profiteering, one that no longer seems to have any effect on many members of our financial classes. But can it be that it is only our bankers who have lost the sense of enduring value over time? It may be that our helpless rage at finance comes in part from our sense of bewildered complicity: how did these crazy instant values come to be the realm in which we live? To this question neither *For the Love of God* nor *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of the Living* gives a satisfactory answer. But, though it may not be what the curators at the Rijksmuseum and the Musée Maillol had in mind, the long double history of painting and banking that lies behind the Hirsts does suggest some clues.

In the Gilded Age, many of the banks that have recently played important and devastating roles in our financial life—Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan, Lehman Brothers—were guided by men who had a passion for painting. J. P. Morgan's collection was legendary. Paul Sachs, an early partner at the family firm, left banking to become a specialist in Italian Renaissance art, and to found the program in curatorial studies at Harvard. Robert Lehman and his father, Philip Lehman, each of whom ran Lehman Brothers, together assembled one of the great collections of Florentine and Sienese art outside Italy. Even the bank established to bail these other banks out, the Federal Reserve, had at its inception Paul Warburg. Warburg, often referred to as the "father" of the Federal Reserve, was the brother of Aby Warburg, one of the greatest scholars of the Italian Renaissance. In much the same way that aptitudes for math and music seem to descend together in families, so do there seem to be lineages for those gifted in the representation of value: the bankers and the painters. Not only did Gilded Age bankers study and collect art, their financial inventions were structurally quite like those of painters working at the same time. In particular, the financiers, as was true of Cézanne and his followers among the cubists, were interested in new representations of the future.

In the past year, there have been a great many articles in financial journals about one Cézanne in particular, *The Card Players,* which became the world's most expensive painting when it sold to the nation of Qatar for $250 million. Some of the journals felt that Qatar had paid so much for its Cézanne (one of five versions of *The Card Players*) because elite institutions, including the Met, already own the other members in the series, and Qatar is trying to become a nation known for its museums. But,

following this line of thought, a great many canvases important in art history and museum culture might have been satisfactory, and cheaper. The longer I spend in front of the Met's Cézannes, the more sense it seems to make that, of all the pictures it might have chosen, Qatar put its money on a Cézanne.

In the Robert Lehman collection at the Met is a wonderful Cézanne, painted in about 1886, called *Trees and Houses Near the Jas de Bouffan*. When you stand looking at *Trees and Houses,* your eye might first take in the oddly angular bare limbs of the dark-patched autumn trees, then perhaps the greens and lavenders around their roots, the bits of sky between their branches, and, later, at the back of the painting, the ochre house with its steep roof. Cézanne's project was to find ways to indicate volume and substance to the eye by breaking down every region of a painting into tiny areas of color. A house is not a square outlined shape, but hundreds of strokes of blended yellow, rose, brown, and green.

Studying Cézanne with great absorption, Picasso and Braque made the first cubist paintings in 1906 and 1907. These were works in which hundreds of shattered aspects were reassembled. Things that one would ordinarily be able to see only with movement and the passage of time, like the front and profile of a woman's face, could be seen simultaneously. Cubist paintings showed "now" and "next" at the same time. By breaking larger spaces into increments, visual art became capable of representing a tangible view of the future from *within* the present. If you spend a while in front of Robert Lehman's Cézanne, reassembling the picture with your own eyes, one of the things you may notice is that your sense of the light in the painting grows stronger and stronger. As you look at the facade of the house, it may become possible to feel a pulse of light, almost as you would standing outside early in the morning, or late in the day, when the degrees of the sun's rise and fall seem perceptible. Looking at a Cézanne, you seem to feel the movement of light in time.

In the period when Cézanne, whose father was a banker, was at work on this painting, French financial life was wracked by a series of spectacular failures that bankrupted many hundreds of thousands of households. Finance had discovered that to leverage funds for large projects, like the building of the railroads or the Panama Canal, the Rothschilds and the Warburgs had insufficient capital. New schemes involved the investment, in many small increments, of giant numbers of households. Many of these initial schemes were ill-founded or corrupt, and soon bankers found that they were having trouble persuading investors to have confidence in the future of stock offerings. Nothing that the bankers presented could distract investors from their conviction that, if companies were going to go belly-up, they wanted to be sure that they would get paid back. They expected the value of a company to be based on its present value alone, the sum of its graspable parts, its inventory or its physical plant, things that could be resold. But this produced a very limited idea of the value of a company and did not generate the kind of liquidity to which the bankers aspired.
In 1906, Philip Lehman, then the head of Lehman Brothers, joined together with Goldman Sachs, where Paul Sachs was then a partner, and the two banks instigated a small revolution. They made an initial public offering of the Sears Roebuck company

that changed the way the value of a corporation was represented: based not on its total assets but on its price-to-earnings ratio. The relationship between a corporation's stock price and its annual earnings was one that allowed time, and changes over time, to be incorporated into the valuation. The level of this ratio is still part of what allows bankers to make predictions about future earnings and growth. Both large- and small-scale investors could see that this new method produced, as the painters had done, a convincing representation of the present and future together. Vast amounts of new liquidity were generated, and one of the things that the new financiers had money to buy was paintings.

One of the great joint projects of painters and bankers—the modern art market—was also an invention of the Gilded Age. What made the art market as we know it possible, starting in the middle of the nineteenth century, was the availability of cash. Among the art market's first historians was Gerald Reitlinger, a son of the Reitlinger banking family. In 1961, Reitlinger pointed out, in his classic work *The Economics of Taste,* that large sums of cash could not be offered for paintings until people *had* large sums of cash, which no one did when wealth was held in land. It was only in the nineteenth century that industrialization and financialization produced the liquidity we now take for granted.

For as long as artists have made a living from their art, even if a meager one, some version of the art market has been negotiated between people with power and people with artistic talents. But in each era, what was held to be valuable was different. Though the art market has always measured value, that value was not always expressed in exclusively financial terms. Take, for example, fifteenth-century Florence, where the Medici banking family held sway. At that time, bankers worked in long-term partnerships with one another, and painters had workshops that were passed down from master to apprentice. Ongoing relationships with men of standing were very valuable. The exchange between, say, Lorenzo the Magnificent and Botticelli took the form of an enduring patronage relationship with large-scale commissions for churches and palazzi. Much of the value exchanged was not monetary but religious or reputational. Both the banker and the painter were understood to be more pious and significant men as a result of their relationship. But in the Gilded Age, price was increasingly felt to be the measure of value which subsumed all others. In 1825, a Botticelli of the Holy Family sold for £10 and 13 shillings. In 1898, when offered another well-known Botticelli, of Saint Jerome, for £500, the British National Gallery was content to turn it down. But in 1912 that Saint Jerome sold to the American collector B. Altman for about $50,000. And by the time Andrew Mellon, in 1931, bought a Botticelli, together with a Rembrandt, he felt he was getting a rapaciously good bargain at a mere $1 million. Works by Botticelli were becoming increasingly prized during this period, but prices for all of the most valued paintings leaped up almost shockingly in the years before and after the first IPOs and the first cubist pictures. Suddenly people began to see paintings as representations not only of age-old values but of future values. And once they began to look at them that way, it mattered less how much time they'd withstood the test of. What people became interested in was not what the pieces were worth a hundred years ago but

what they might be worth tomorrow. All through the twentieth century, prices for contemporary artwork were rapidly catching up to prices for works by old masters. Now, the first time a Damien Hirst is sold, the price is at a level only the greatest works of the past have achieved after being sold and resold for a century or more. The Hirst sale is part of an art market that, we are frequently told by gallerists and auctioneers and press agents, is currently at an all-time high. The numbers certainly are staggering. A Warhol, three Van Goghs, three Picassos, a Klimt, and a Munch have all broken the $100 million barrier. Not so long ago a banker's widow paid the highest price for a work sold at auction, $104.3 million for Giacometti's sculpture *Walking Man I,* and that record was broken in 2012 by Munch's *The Scream*. In 2006, the year before Hirst's skull self-purchase, two of the most expensive paintings ever sold, two works of abstract expressionism, changed hands. One was a Willem de Kooning that Steven Cohen bought for $137.5 million. The other was Jackson Pollock's *No. 5, 1948,* purchased for $140 million, the record price for a painting until this year. The Pollock seems to have gone to a Mexican hedge-fund financier, although the extremely private man in question issued a press release of angry denial. So many different ideas of value are now contained within these enormous prices that it can be hard to discern an artist's innovations among the zeroes. But it turns out that, like Cézanne's *Card Players,* the previous record-holder also makes a revelatory representation of new ideas about time. And these ideas are in fact related to conceptions of temporality that are to be found in another record-setter, from 2006, a painting 650 years older than the Pollock. It's a painting for which the Metropolitan Museum paid, by leaps and bounds, the most it ever had for a work of art. The tiny panel, made by the artist Duccio, in Siena in 1300, measures eight and a quarter inches wide and eleven inches tall, and it sold for over $45 million.

In the Met's orderly room of small, gold-framed Sienese and Florentine paintings, the little Duccio stands slightly off-center atop its rectangular podium. It has traveled a long way, but it was made small to travel with its owner. The frame is of worn wood, burned in two places by the candles of one of its early owners, who prayed to it. The Madonna and child are backed by traditional flat gold, very thick and solid, and into which the marks for the two halos seem to be incised quite deep. Against this gold background, the Madonna is long and graceful. Her blue robe gathers gently about her inclining face; she looks, as we immediately do, to the child she holds in her left arm. He is wrapped in cloths of pale orange and of lavender. The picture's drama is all in its fabric: the baby reaches up and carefully tugs the blue robe aside so that he can see his mother's face.

There was great fanfare around the Met's acquisition, and at least one enthusiastic patron declared that the museum now had its *Mona Lisa*. But except for the bulletproof Plexiglas protecting the painting, the room that holds the little Duccio has very little in common with the thronged room at the Louvre where tourists vie to take pictures. I have often stood alone for fifteen or twenty minutes in front of the Duccio, uninterrupted except perhaps by a dutiful docent or the patient tread of a passing guard. Once, while I was there looking, two young women of college age breezed through—"Religious painting is so boring," one said laughingly to the other.

I recognized the feeling. I've often felt stifled in rooms full of medieval madonnas—the stiffness of the poses, the sameness of the faces, the heavy sense of time that makes me feel that I am falling asleep, and that wherever we are going we will never arrive. When the two young women in their Uggs charged through to more-recent, more–*Mona Lisa*–ish paintings, what they wanted to get past wasn't the Duccio in particular, but all the Byzantine madonnas that line the walls of the room. At the Met now, it is easy not to notice the difference between the Duccio and its neighbors, but, to Duccio's contemporaries, in Siena, around 1300, the difference was overwhelming. And, gradually, I've come to think that, even a continent away, and at the distance of seven hundred years, it is possible to see the first slight tremblings of the Lehman Brothers crash in this tiny painting of a mother and her child.

This is a painting built around a gesture, and this kind of gesture was then new. The paintings that preceded Duccio are generally very still. When you see an immobile Byzantine Madonna with a Christ child enthroned on her lap, you never ask yourself, I wonder what they're going to do next? They're not going to do anything next, they are there for all eternity. But the way Duccio's mother and child lean together suggests that this happens between them right now, and that many things might happen next. The child might laugh, the mother might put her veil back in place. We are looking at one small moment in a sequence, and we do not know what the next moment will be. In a medieval painting of a biblical story, there may be a narrative sequence, but, to the painter and the viewer, the points of the story are fixed, and the outcome is already known. This new kind of painting is concerned with contingency—it is based on an idea of sequence not eternal but human. The little Duccio suggests something about its own future from its present point of view.

Duccio's compatriots were thunderstruck by the beauty of his work, and commissioned him to complete the altarpiece for their great church, the Duomo. Many of the most prominent citizens of Siena at that time were bankers; in 1300, Siena was the banking capital of Europe. And, like the painters whose works they admired and commissioned, the bankers were coming to new ways of seeing.
The Italian bankers of this period invented significant aspects of our modern practice of banking, even the word *banking* itself. The early Italian bankers sat out in the streets behind modest tables, or benches, and it is from these benches, *banchieri,* that we get our word *bank*. The bankers were specialists in moving money: they lent popes and princes gold to leverage armies, and they sent travelers and pilgrims with bank orders to redeem currency in branch offices in London and Bruges. At this juncture, bankers were chiefly concerned with making money on the exchange of currency, a practice that had incipient within it some, but not nearly all, of what would make later financialization possible.

There was an idea of the future in currency exchange. When a depositor stepped up to a bench in the street in Siena and said that in six months he would like to redeem his deposit in London, a future exchange rate was determined and recorded on a slip of paper. This determination was a way for both the banker and his customer to gamble on the future values of two currencies. But this bet remained anchored to a concrete

value—coins or bills would buy a certain amount of wool or food, and this was what determined the currency's value. Over the six months, the money itself did not grow or shrink, but the goods whose value the money measured would be worth more or less. Exchange rates, unlike interest, are not an idea of money making money *from itself*. And indeed, at this point, playing on exchange rates was acceptable, but the more purely financial practice of charging interest was not. The closest bankers got to charging interest in these early days was accepting deposits from landowners, and making small annual "gift" payments on these, which they were careful not to call "interest" payments to avoid the Church prohibition against usury. And the Church prohibition wasn't the only obstacle. At that time, each transaction between a banker and a customer was recorded on a different slip of paper. The bankers' methods did not incorporate a coherent idea of sequence that would make clear representations of contingency possible. Financial processes, including the accumulation of interest over time, were hard to visualize.

But the northern Italians around 1300 felt time moving around them differently. It was still true, as it had been for many centuries, that the sun and the moon made the day and the night, and the calendrical heavens made the rounded year. But a period of sustained economic growth and huge military ventures (the Crusades were fought from 1095 to 1291) had brought Europe into contact with the much more mathematically advanced Arab world. New exchanges had galvanized travel, agricultural production, and trade. European sailors had begun to use Arab navigational tools to locate themselves in the ocean. European crusaders, merchants, pilgrims, bankers, and artists needed, and brought back from their travels, new ideas of coordinated movement, and of sequence in time. Everything, even eternity, began to be expressed in sequences that admitted contingent possibilities, with different possible "nexts." After many centuries of dismissing the idea of purgatory as an absurd, mystical notion, the Church rapidly reversed its position. In about 1262, the existence of purgatory became official doctrine. The afterlife was now a territory through which you could travel in more or less time. The series of contingent possibilities was given literary form in Dante, just a few years after the Met's Duccio was completed. It was now possible to wonder, even in the afterlife, What happens next? But, though contingency had made its entrance, financialization was still held at bay. Dante still consigned the usurers to the seventh circle of hell.

As early as 1202, the Pisan mathematician Fibonacci, who was trained in north Africa among Arab mathematicians, had published his *Liber Abaci*. In this book, he encouraged merchants to take up the much more powerful Hindu Arabic numerals for calculation and also explained in detail methods of calculating interest. But even much later in the thirteenth century, the Church, in an opinion written by Saint Thomas Aquinas, held firmly to its creed that usury was immoral.
Aquinas based his position on the teaching of Aristotle, whose work had also been preserved in the Arab world and only recently reintroduced in the West. Aristotle held that the proper function of money was to move the value of one concrete object—a donkey—into another—five bushels of corn. In usury, money was able to generate value itself and, anchored to nothing concrete, its value was given to dangerous and

erratic pulses. The movement of money was permissible when, as in exchange, the value was in "just proportion," but not as usury—uncontrollable growth. In other words, the danger of usury was that it introduced a special form of contingency, one that we've lately felt the consequences of: usury had the potential to create unpredictable future value. Even the bankers who stood to profit most hesitated over Aristotle's warning that value without correspondence to the concrete was as formless as fire: the more you fed it, the more it would burn.

In about 1310, Duccio finished his commission for the Duomo. This, his masterwork, called *The Maèsta,* had dozens of small panels depicting episodes from the life of Christ. The people of Siena held a parade. Robert Lehman gives the details in his erudite catalog of his father's paintings: "So great was the enthusiasm of the people of Siena upon the completion of this great altarpiece, that it was carried in procession to its place in the Cathedral amidst great celebration." Lehman seems especially taken with the fact that, at that time, painting could still get commerce to stop: "Such was the event, that all business was suspended, all shops closed, and all Siena solemnly joined in the ceremony to mark this extraordinary occasion."

The Sienese bankers had more reason than usual to celebrate the enduring value of art. Some ten years before Duccio completed the altar, all the Sienese banks, long the most prosperous in Europe, had suffered a collapse so profound that Siena never recovered as a financial center. The end of war and an agricultural downturn had brought a severe contraction, and it seems the bankers had overextended their loans to crusading princes.

It took a while for Florence to emerge as the new financial center, and when it did, the Florentine bankers had in their hands a marvelous new method of representation. In various places in northern Italy, and then definitively in 1340 in neighboring Genoa, a wondrous device had come into use: double-entry bookkeeping. Now a regular column of money received could be reconciled with a parallel column of sums paid. Suddenly, bankers could represent, in one regular quadrant, a visually clear picture of the sequence of gestures between two financial actors over time. The Italian bankers had found a method of representation like that of Duccio and other painters, one which allowed them to represent progress toward the future.

In finance, people won't invest in schemes unless they can see how the value of their investment will be affected over time, and it's not possible to make money in the absence of chance and change. In his scholarship on bankers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Florence, Aby Warburg pointed out that in Latin "*fortuna* signified not only 'chance' and 'wealth,' but also 'storm wind.'" Many Florentine banking families had ships with full sails as their emblems. The Florentine bankers, hoping they had made profits on currency, or waiting for ships they had backed to come in, were fond of saying, "Winds and exchange often change." The winds were represented not only in their financial records and their emblems but in the paintings they hung on their walls. Warburg gave an elegant description of the two most famous paintings that Lorenzo the Magnificent commissioned from Botticelli—the

Venus arriving from the sea, and *Primavera,* with its blowing figures of spring—as studies in wind.

In the last few years of thinking these things over on my afternoons at the museum, when I left the little Duccio and went back out into the main entry hall, walked through drawings, photographs, and impressionism, and made a right into twentieth-century art, I would see Damien Hirst's shark, also in a glass case, glimmering in its new blue formaldehyde. But if I walked two rooms past the shark, I would come to one of the few comfortable benches at the museum, where a person can sit with other travelers weary from their exertions in earlier eras. Here, though, after a while, people realize they are sitting not because they are tired but because they are absorbed. The bench is perfectly placed to allow one to lose oneself in Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30),* painted in 1950.

To make this painting, as he did for all his action paintings, Pollock tacked his canvas onto the floor. Then he moved over and around it, making the sweeping curves of black, lavender, green, but mostly black, leaving the bits of cigarette paper where they clumped and fell. Pollock said that he wanted "motion made visible / —memories arrested in space." You can see him doing it, the evidence not just of brushstrokes but of his whole body's movement. At every curve, as the line thins and speeds up, or thickens and slows down, you can feel all the different ways he might have moved. Duccio gave to his figures gestures dense with contingency. In Pollock's work, we see the gestures of the artist himself, and the contingency is not merely represented in a narrative scene but is held within the process of creating the very representation we are viewing.

After the Second World War, using math borrowed from physics, economists and mathematicians developed the extremely complicated models that are now the basis of work done by futures and derivatives traders. These models allow financiers to represent a whole probabilistic future realm. We often say that the investments of the wealthy are hedged in every direction. By this we mean that the risks, and insurance against those risks, have been calculated and folded into current investments. Any future possibility could be represented in a present price. Now the colossal rippling waves of future possibilities—their volume so many times greater than the trade in any actual goods—are bought and sold in current terms. But, as Steven Cohen said of his Damien Hirst, endurance is not the question: "We're dealing with the conceptual idea." Whether these values are sustained in the actual future does not matter; the creation of the value is always in the present. The bankers of the recent cataclysms—at Lehman Brothers and Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase—could not have been expected to take account of time everlasting, or rather, they did take account of it, only that time everlasting is now.

Duccio was a passageway from an old sense of time into a new one, from time stretching eternal to time broken into increments, each one awaiting the movements of *fortuna*. The Pollock stands on the cusp between Gilded and Glittering, between the beauty of the lit Cézanne and the more terrifying gleam of sharks and eyeless

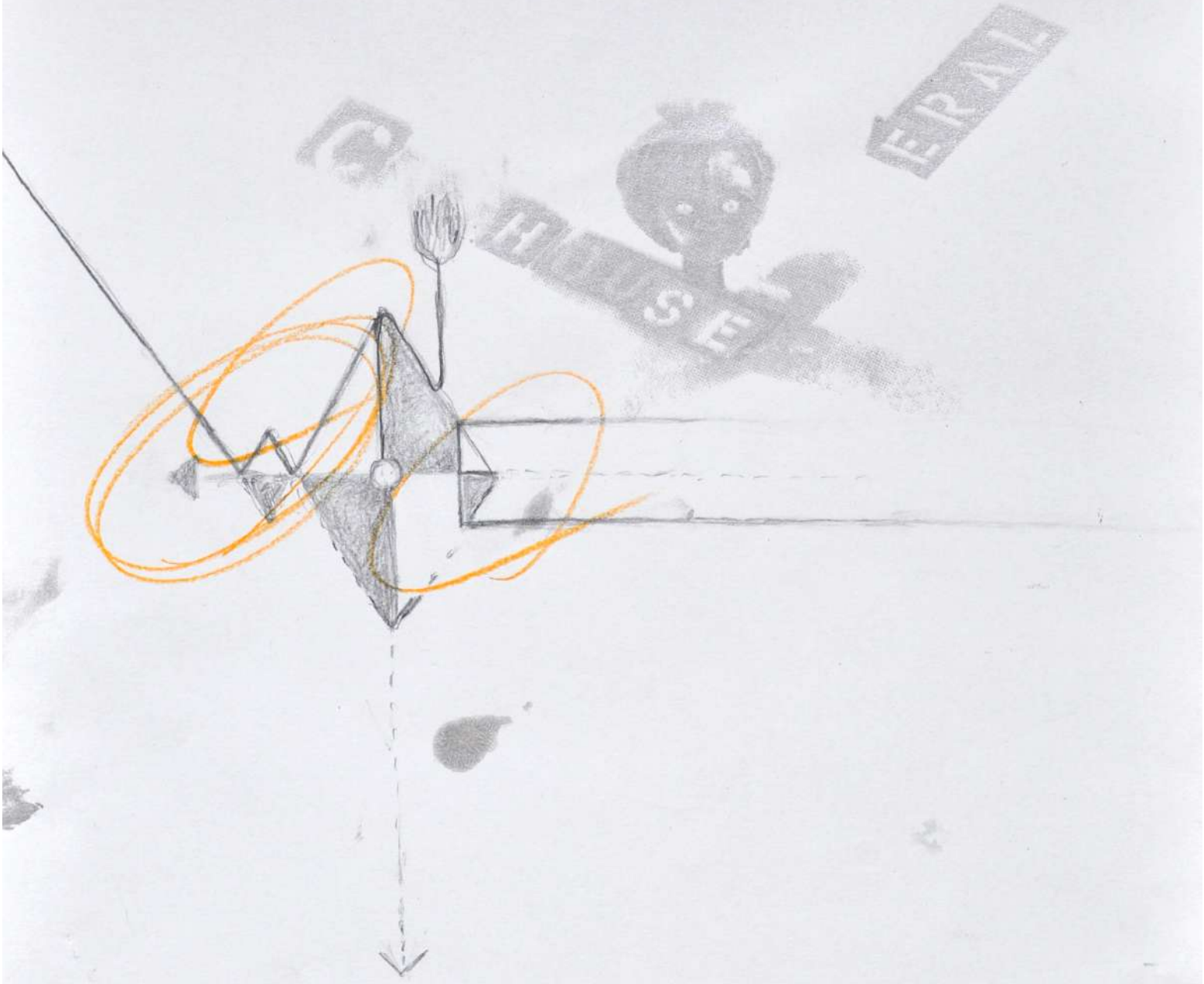
skulls. Pollock's friend the poet and curator Frank O'Hara felt that it was with a kind of desperate bravery that the abstract expressionists attempted to give us future possibilities of movement embedded in a canvas of here and now. O'Hara thought that it was no accident that action painting was invented after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He wrote in an essay on Pollock, "It is not surprising that faced with universal destruction, as we are told, our art should at last speak with unimpeded force and unveiled honesty to a future which well may be nonexistent, in a last effort of recognition which is the justification of being."

After Pollock's death, a friend of his remembered that on a day at the beach the artist had said: "See that, the beach grass waving in the breeze, that's life, that's everything." The winds of change were a great subject of the painter's. Once, last fall, I shared the low, wide double-bench in front of the Met's great Pollock with two girls, teenagers. Several feet from me, they had the privacy to play a daydreaming game: "I think it looks like the clouds, you know when you watch them and try to make pictures," one girl said, and asked her friend, "What's yours?" And though I had spent so many years looking at the painting, the friend's reply had never occurred to me: "I think it looks like leaves blowing," she said, "when they're on the ground and the wind picks them up." Then she added, candidly, "Still, I cheated, I looked at the title." "What is it?" her friend wanted to know. "It's called *Autumn Rhythm*."

It must be, finally, what it is in painting that is beyond banking that drives the prices of paintings ever higher. Their ability not just to represent the hazards of fortune but to let us feel the wind and the turning stars that mark our deepest sense of time and change. It is for this that we close up our stalls and carry the canvases to the church. How much is it worth, a moment of surcease? The Duccio and the Pollock suggest that we will not be able to get an answer to that question. There is that within them representable by no sum. It's possible that there is no limit to what bankers will pay for these visual inventions, ones so like their own and yet eluding them all the same.

Rachel Cohen is the author of *A Chance Meeting,* and of *Bernard Berenson: A Life in the Picture Trade,* which is forthcoming from the Yale University Press Jewish Lives series in fall 2013. She teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

Visitors to the Met in front of Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*



David Dixon with Houman Harouni in front of one-half of *Twins*, installed in Houman's apartment (Cambridge, Mass.), the other half in *Leaving Home*.

* Drawings made by David Dixon on the occasion of this exhibition, summer 2017

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