

# FRANK WALTER A RETROSPECTIVE



MUSEUM MMK

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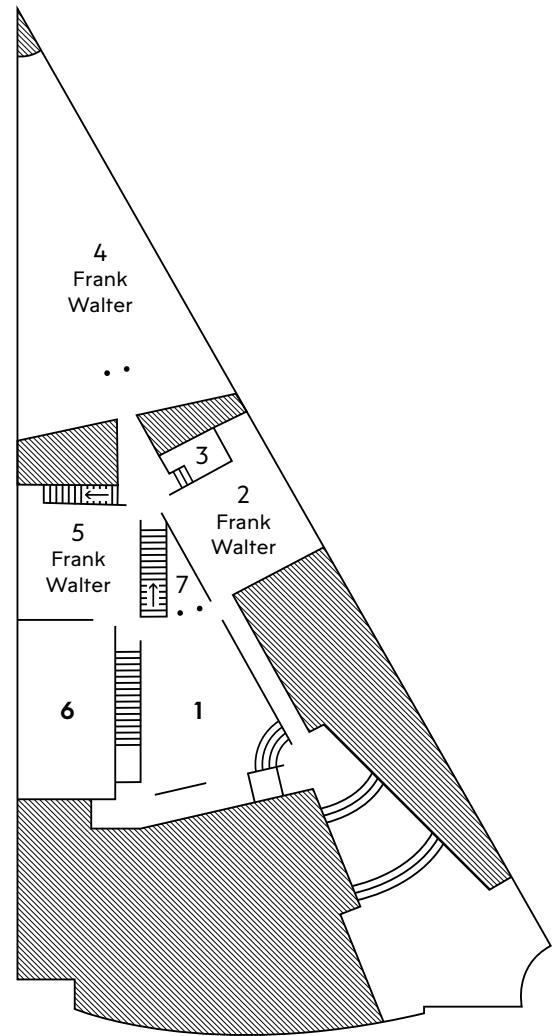


In dialogue with  
John Akomfrah  
Khalik Allah  
Kader Attia  
Marcel Broodthaers  
Julien Creuzet  
Birgit Hein  
Isaac Julien  
Kapwani Kiwanga  
Carolyn Lazard  
Julia Phillips  
Howardena Pindell  
Rosemarie Trockel

The exhibition *Frank Walter: A Retrospective* is the first to present the oeuvre of the native Antiguan and Barbudan artist Frank Walter (1926–2009) in a museum.

The works by John Akomfrah, Khalik Allah, Kader Attia, Marcel Broodthaers, Birgit Hein, Isaac Julien, Julia Phillips, Howardena Pindell, and Rosemarie Trockel revolve around colonialism in the Caribbean in the past and present as well as the intellectual contexts of colonial and post-colonial thought. They address the visual regime of racism that also finds expression in the exoticizing gaze, and describe the complexities of identity, class, and racialization. Julien Creuzet, Kapwani Kiwanga, and Carolyn Lazard have produced new works specifically for the show.

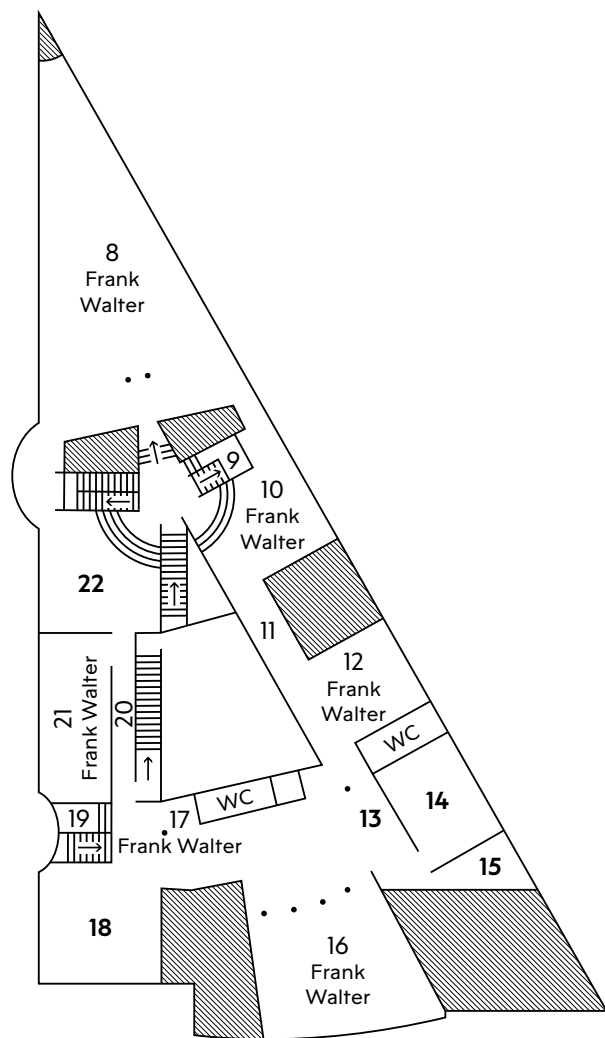
## Level 1



- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Marcel Broodthaers</b>              | 4. Frank Walter:<br>Abstract painting |
| 2. Frank Walter:<br>Cosmological painting | 5. Frank Walter:<br>Landscapes        |
| 3. Frank Walter:<br>Abstract painting     | <b>6. John Akomfrah</b>               |
|   | 7. Frank Walter: Signs                |

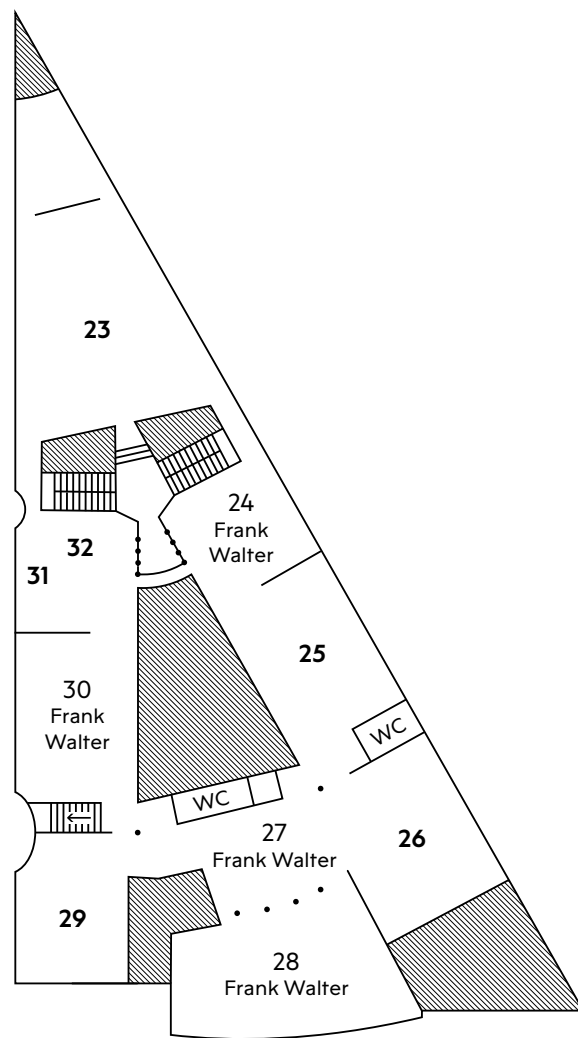
Artists' names in boldface refer to texts on their respective works.

## Level 2



- 8. Frank Walter: Landscapes
- 9. Frank Walter: Artist's frames
- 10. Frank Walter: Birds, abstract studies
- 11. Frank Walter: Sculptures
- 12. Frank Walter: Self-portraits
- 13. **Carolyn Lazard**
- 14. **Howardena Pindell**
- 15. **Rosemarie Trockel**
- 16. Frank Walter: Figurative painting
- 17. Frank Walter: Carnival
- 18. **Isaac Julien**
- 19. Frank Walter: Figurative painting
- 20. Frank Walter: Sculptures
- 21. Frank Walter: Toys
- 22. **Kapwani Kiwanga**

## Level 3



- 23. **Julien Creuzet**
- 24. Frank Walter: Writings, documents, genealogies
- 25. **Khalik Allah**
- 26. **Birgit Hein**
- 27. Frank Walter: Signs
- 28. Frank Walter: Spools
- 29. **Isaac Julien**
- 30. Frank Walter: Photographs "Frank's Photo Studio"
- 31. **Kader Attia**
- 32. **Julia Phillips**

## Seeing Frank Walter

“Our crown has already been bought and paid for. All we have to do is wear it.”

— James Baldwin at a televised roundtable, 28 August 1963, Washington, D.C.

“We made you bastards rich.”

— Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 1988

There is no typical Frank Walter. His range as a painter is extensive and unfettered. His perspective is all his own. His oeuvre seems to stand in opposition to the permanent ascriptions he was subjected to throughout his lifetime, with respect to race and nation. His cosmological paintings have a transcendental glow, his abstract works are systematic, the individuality of his figurative painting is captivating, and his landscapes gain strength through their clear abstractions. All his works exhibit an unusual degree of clarity and directness. This sense of focus in his works, which also comes from their small size, gives us an authentic way of approaching them. The complexity of Walter’s subject matter is matched by the great variety of his materials. He created works on wood, Masonite, cardboard, paper, linoleum, and the backs of photographs, and he painted and drew with oil paint, tempera, watercolor, crayon, pencil, shellac, and glitter. When he was not painting, he wrote; when he was not writing, he made sound recordings. Walter’s creativity had an unbelievable intensity, which one can see, feel, and sense in his work. It was only in art that he felt liberated: free of the brutality that lay in normative attributions, which was a permanent presence beyond his artistic work. Frank Walter believed that creating art was an inherently subversive act, and one that uniquely enabled him to assert the right to lead his own life, as determined and defined by himself.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Antigua in 1926 as a descendant of slaves and plantation owners, Walter’s education was strongly influenced by the British colonial occupation. In 1948, he became Antigua’s first plantation manager of color. His constant endeavors to improve working conditions took him to England in 1953 in order to expand his knowledge of agriculture. Yet having arrived in London he was rejected by the branch of his family there because of

their racist bias. Confronted with racism everywhere he turned in Great Britain, he was not able to find a point of entry into society despite being a Commonwealth citizen. He survived as a day laborer; his everyday life was characterized by hunger and cold, the hallucinations he suffered as a result, and racist attacks. Between 1957 and 1959, he traveled to West Germany several times to explore his family history. While there, he worked for companies such as Mannesmann in Gelsenkirchen and learned German. In 1961, he returned to the Caribbean: first to Dominica, where he created most of his sculptures, then in 1967 to Antigua. After working as a photographer from 1975 to 1984, he moved to a remote mountain location outside the town of Liberta and built a house and studio, where he lived and worked until his death in 2009.

Due to his subjectivation in colonized Antigua, Frank Walter was acutely aware of the many different identities that made up his own. His numerous self-portraits and photographs bear witness to this. His self-distancing is obvious in the numerous *Rückenfigur* self-portraits, while his internal schism is revealed in self-portraits as a white person (see room 12). In a society that had the power to define the white European male as the norm, it seemed almost impossible to him to self-identify as a Black person.<sup>2</sup> Frantz Fanon wrote at that time: “[T]here is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white.”<sup>3</sup>

As the *Rückenfigur*-like self-portraits show, the artist preferred to spend his time in the natural world, away from people. His landscape paintings testify not only to his highly precise observations, but also to his ability to encapsulate the atmosphere of his location by means of abstraction. These pictures have nothing in common with the picturesque landscape paintings so frequently found in the Caribbean that the tourist industry engendered. In sharp contrast to the idealized kitsch of palm trees and beach, Walter studied the landscape in detail. It was a landscape deeply inscribed with colonial history and one that, as Édouard Glissant wrote “is its own monument.”<sup>4</sup>

While many residents and tourists alike in Antigua were familiar with the small photocopied and colored drawings that Frank Walter sold in his photographic studio, his extensive artistic oeuvre was virtually unknown.<sup>5</sup> He did attempt several times to exhibit his work in Great Britain and even in Germany, and wrote letters to this end. Moreover, he wished to set up his own gallery<sup>6</sup> and stage a complete exhibition, the works for which he stored in boxes

ready to dispatch. Yet an exhibition of his work was never forthcoming during his lifetime, and he himself was not able to experience what people thought of it.

Susanne Pfeffer

- 1 Stuart Hall with Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*. London: Penguin Books, 2018, p. 138.
- 2 In *Familiar Stranger*, Hall explains how “much of my life can be understood as unlearning the norms in which I had been born and brought up.” Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, p. 3.
- 3 *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952]. trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008, p. xiv.
- 4 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1992, p. 11.
- 5 Apart from his close family, Connee and Fuller Cowles, who purchased works from him, and later Barbara Paca, who often talked with him about his work.
- 6 This is confirmed by letters and notes from Frank Walter’s estate (see room 24).



## Frank Walter Biography

1926

Frank Walter (Francis Archibald Wentworth Walter) is born on 11 September 1926 in Liberta on Antigua, a Caribbean island in the Lesser Antilles group.

Antigua was colonized in 1632 by the British Navy and formally annexed as a British colony in 1667. Sugar took over from tobacco as the most important commodity. The plantation economy, which was based on slavery and exploitation, developed into the most important economic sector. In 1860, Antigua and Barbuda were united.

1939–44

Frank Walter attends the Antigua Grammar School, where he achieves excellent grades, especially in the subjects Latin, modern foreign languages, and history.

1946–48

Walter gains extensive knowledge of the sugar industry by taking on various roles in production and administration. He also attends a state-funded training course at an Antiguan agricultural institute.

1948

At the age of twenty-two, he becomes a manager at the Antiguan Sugar Syndicate. He is the first person of color to secure a management role in the Antiguan sugar industry. Moreover, he achieves social recognition through his introduction of more modern methods of cultivating and processing sugar and his efforts to reduce social exploitation and racial inequality. Although he is offered the chance to become managing director of the Antiguan Sugar Syndicate, in 1953 he decides to take an educational tour of Europe in order to realize his notion of comprehensive modernization. The trip is scheduled to last ten years. A further aim of the journey is to research his family tree; the ancestors of one branch of his family came from the town of Markgröningen, near Stuttgart in Germany. Throughout his life, he conducts extensive genealogical research into his family's history.

1953

Frank Walter travels to England via France and Italy with his cousin Eileen Gallwey. Upon their arrival, their uncle Carl Walter, who lives in London, makes it clear that he disapproves of an association between the two. In light of the racism virulent in Europe, he views Frank Walter as an obstacle to Eileen Gallwey's career.

From September 1953 onward, Walter is based mainly in England and Scotland. London, Leeds, and Stoke-on-Trent in the English Midlands region are among the locations he frequents most often. He lives in a series of short-term accommodations and works mainly as an unskilled laborer in the mining and industrial sectors. In addition to his work, he conducts scientific and technological studies. In Stoke-on-Trent, he takes courses at several colleges and is a frequent visitor at public libraries. During this period, he produces philosophical texts, literary works, and a history of Antigua, as well poems, drawings, and paintings.

1957/58

Frank Walter goes to West Germany for an extended stay from November 1957 to February 1958. He visits Cologne, Düsseldorf, and Bonn, meeting up with friends and acquaintances from a previous travel. In Gelsenkirchen, he works in a colliery operated by Mannesmann.

1959

On Christmas Day 1959, Walter goes to Cologne and Düsseldorf once more for a brief visit. He reports having hallucinations. On 27 December 1959, he travels via Gelsenkirchen to Ostend and from there on to London. The hallucinations he describes lead to repeated short-stay admissions in clinics and psychiatric treatments.

1961

For years, Walter takes note of the racist attacks to which he is permanently exposed. This racism combined with his precarious economic situation motivates him to return to Antigua in 1961. He writes extensive diary entries about his journey back home via France, Switzerland, Italy, and Venezuela.

Upon his return, he realizes that his home island has become less reliant on agriculture than on tourism, and so he decides to settle on Dominica. He is assigned ten hectares of state-owned land, which he plows in order to make it suitable for agricultural use. Although he sets up



a successful facility for producing charcoal, after five years the land is confiscated. In addition to his preoccupation with painting, poetry, and music, it is during this period that Walter starts sculpting wood.

1967

Walter returns to Antigua. According to the terms of the 1967 West Indies Act, Antigua becomes an Associated State, which means it is self-governing for internal affairs but controlled by Great Britain for matters of external policy and defense.

1968

At a constituent meeting in 1968, complete with a manifesto, Frank Walter sets up the Antigua and Barbuda National Democratic Party. In 1971, he stands for election as prime minister, although his cousin George Herbert Walter of the Progressive Labour Movement ultimately wins.

From now on Walter lives at various locations in and around St. John's, the capital of Antigua and Barbuda.

1970

From 1970 onward, he manages the family's ironmonger store. In addition to this he works incessantly on his artistic and literary output, including his sole published book *Sons of Vernon Hill* (New York: Vantage Press), which appears in 1987 under the pseudonym Franz Walthe.

1973

Frank Walter devises extensive exhibitions of his artwork, which also pursue educational objectives. He contacts the National Coal Board and ministries in Great Britain, the West German youth hostel association, as well as other companies and organizations in order to interest them in his exhibition projects.

1974

In 1974, Frank Walter registers the company Walando-Angol-PanEuro Arts and Crafts Productions. He plans to open a gallery under this name in England, which will provide a forum for the display and representation of his work.

1975–84

He looks after his uncle Stanley Walter until the latter's death in 1984; during the daytime, he works in the ironmonger store and as a photographer for the Press Photo Service. Evenings and nights are reserved for his artistic activities. After his uncle dies, he is forced to give up the store.

1981

Antigua and Barbuda achieve full independence.

1992

After a legal dispute, he loses the house in St. John's where he has regularly lived since his childhood.

1993–2009

On a secluded property outside the town of Liberta he builds a house and studio, where he lives and works until his death on 11 February 2009.

By the end of his life, he has produced around 5,000 paintings and 600 wooden sculptures, numerous handmade wooden toys, painted picture frames, and photos. Frank Walter also leaves behind over 50,000 pages of prose, poetry, plays, and texts on history, philosophy, politics, genealogy, and art, as well as more than 450 hours of audio recordings.

## 1. Marcel Broodthaers

### *L'Entrée de l'exposition (Catalogue-Catalogus)*, 1974

Installation of palm trees, variable dimensions

The entrance to and exit from the exhibition is lined with kentia palms. They mark a threshold and distinguish between the institution, in which the visitor is already standing, and the actual exhibition. They are an artwork and at the same time an introduction to the show.

The Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976) took on the role of museum director himself when he created the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles in 1968–1972. With his so-called Eagle Museum, he managed to expose the power structures that constitute a museum. The eagle (*aigle*) is present everywhere: in myths and fairy tales, flags and deeds, art, advertising, and comics. The symbolically charged myth of the eagle shows that artworks cannot be 'read' without a context. On the contrary, art's purpose is to bring out the symbolic charge of objects, and thus to reveal the violent structures underlying society's institutions and norms.

What is true of the eagle is also true of the palm at the entrance to the museum. Palms within the so-called palm belt—the regions to the north and south of the equator where palms grow naturally—differ from palms in bourgeois parlors in the centers of colonial power, where they serve as decor and, as such, above all as a symbol of colonialism. The palms in the museum create this historical space which is shaped by the ongoing consequences of the colonial age.

## 6. John Akomfrah

### *The Unfinished Conversation*, 2012

3-channel HD video installation, color, sound, 45:47 minutes

Already the title of John Akomfrah's video installation *The Unfinished Conversation* points to its method and its subject. The sociologist and co-founder of cultural studies Stuart Hall regarded the unfinished—or unfinishable—conversation as the center of identity. In his own words, identity is an "ever unfinished conversation." This film about the life of Stuart Hall takes an approach that already adopts his core assumption in its three-channel images: the "magic triangle" of cultural studies, consisting of culture, power, and identity. A co-founder of the later *New Left Review* in 1956, Hall considered the neglect of the cultural realm to be one of the problems of the classical left wing. He regarded culture as one of society's decisive areas, where the ground was prepared for, among other things, political power struggles. And—as Akomfrah conveys in striking images—he saw jazz as one of culture's defining elements. Jazz pervades the film, and not just as sound. There are also recurring shots of needles riding records and musicians at pianos or playing wind and brass instruments. Neither Hall's life nor his theoretical work can be understood without this jazz impulse, any more than popular music can be understood without "a lot of theoretical work," as he himself once wrote.

Like Hall's life, the film begins with the Caribbean landscape. In vivid colors, Akomfrah shows plants and waves in the wind, dead trees on the beach. Hall was born in Jamaica in 1932 to a middle-class family that combined British, Jamaican, and Portuguese-Jewish roots. Of all the members of his family, he was the one with the blackest skin. From the start, the landscape of his origins is collaged with black-and-white images of everyday industrial life in England. This was the environment Hall lived in after he came to Oxford in 1951 to study English literature—a literature he held in high regard and in which a lot of things found a place, but not life of the kind he had experienced. The colonized had no voice, but they did have a culture. And that was Hall's concern: to conceive of culture in all its manifestations, in its struggles for existence and its class struggles, and thus to advance its struggle for political emancipation.

### 13. Carolyn Lazard

*Recto Verso*, 2020

Photographs, variable dimensions

This photographic series documents the backs of Frank Walter's paintings which also happen to be photographs. Interested in how these images might provide alternative modes of interpretation, Carolyn Lazard asked the MMK to produce these photographs for this exhibition. The series consists of headshots and group portraits which reveal glimpses of quotidian life in Antigua. Some of these photographs are partially or fully disintegrated by the wear and tear of time. Moving from representation to abstraction, these photographic documents mirror the expansive paintings they carry.

The work of marginalized artists who don't normatively fit into modernist art history have been sidelined into categories such as outsider art, self-taught art, naive art, or amateur art. These designations are meant to privilege the biographical and the historical over the formal and the aesthetic. In recent years, institutions have abandoned this discursive frame in order to consider the formal qualities of the work, moving away from artists' cultural contexts. *Recto Verso* suggests a third position outside these two poles of analysis. It takes the material surface of Frank Walter's oeuvre as its object while considering the material conditions of his life: the need to paint on whatever surface was readily available.

### 14. Howardena Pindell

*Free, White and 21*, 1980

Video, color, sound, 12:15 minutes

In her work *Free, White and 21*, Howardena Pindell confronts the viewers with descriptions of racist attacks she was subjected to as a matter of course during her childhood, at school, and later in her profession as an artist and curator. In a manner as prosaic as it is powerful, she documents racism as a pervasive physical and mental experience that becomes manifest on the skin of the Black woman.

Alternately with her own accounts, she also speaks in the role of the *white* woman incapable of grasping the racist experience. The *white* woman goes to the point of negating these experiences, of denying their reality. She symbolizes a form of social interaction in which the trauma of racism is constantly repeated and perpetuated. Historically speaking, Pindell considers the work a commentary on the ignorance of white feminism and the treacherous value system of the art world with regard to the multiple discrimination of Black women: "What the white male's voice was to the white female's voice, the white female's voice was to the woman of color's voice" (Pindell, 1992).

## 15. Rosemarie Trockel

### *Prisoner of Yourself*, 1998

Silkscreen on wall, height 127 cm, installation dimensions variable

Rosemarie Trockel's *Prisoner of Yourself* is a silkscreen printed directly on the walls of a room. Consisting of more or less identical grids, the pattern is reminiscent of a loosely knitted fabric that, stretched in all directions, refuses perfect parallelism. It was in the mid-1980s that Trockel began making her so-called knitted paintings, thus introducing a banal feminine cultural technique to the arena of art. With the knitted pattern in *Prisoner of Yourself*, she makes reference on the one hand to the paintings that made her famous: *To Live Means to Knit Stockings* (1998) is the title of one of those works. On the other hand, the screen print also bears a connection to her video work *Continental Divide* (1994). In this video, Trockel has taken herself prisoner and torments her intimidated double by grilling her with cruel insistence about her status as an artist: "Who's the best artist?" is the question laden with the name of one male star artist after the other.

In the blue grids of the wall print in which Trockel has become the prisoner of herself, nothing remains, either of the real yarn or of the split-off double. Meanwhile famous and a star herself, Trockel has become a prisoner of her work. The joy and force of an artist's artistic beginnings can wear out as he/she concentrates on his/her own formal language—an experience that makes artists prisoners of their forms. Ultimately they face the threat of self-quotation or the mystification of their own endeavor, which has lost contact to societal reality. Yet the state of being prisoner of oneself can also point to a way out, because concentration on the self can lead to the generation from within of those patterns and grids imposed on us by societal and personal power structures. And the structures thus generated can in turn constitute a freer relationship to the self that can serve as a mainstay in resistance to the powers that be.

## 18. Isaac Julien

### *Territories*, 1984

35mm film transferred to digital video, color, stereo sound, 25:45 minutes

*Territories* is ostensibly an experimental documentary about the Notting Hill Carnival in West London. This carnival has been taking place on the district's streets every year in August since 1966. Organized by the Caribbean community, it continues a tradition that has its origins in Trinidad and Tobago in the nineteenth century, where it provided former slaves a setting in which to celebrate their cultural freedom with masquerades, dances, and music. Whereas initially the London event had no more than a few hundred visitors, in the mid-seventies it developed into a huge festival attracting 150,000. In 1976, the first street riots took place during the carnival when primarily Black teenagers demonstrated against racist harassment and abuse by the police. In the years that followed—until 1984, when Julien made his film—the unrests recurred regularly, though on a smaller scale. To this day, calls to prohibit the carnival have come to naught. In the past years, it has drawn millions of visitors every year.

Archive images of demonstrations are as much a part of the film as scenes shot in the midst of the carnival with a shoulder camera. In voice-overs, people talk about their memories of the event and the police force's attempts to prohibit it. The main commentary is spoken by a woman's voice and a man's voice in equal parts. These alternating voices shift back and forth between "herstory" and "his-story" and characterize history as male hegemony. History thus becomes a territory in which the history of women and that of the Afro-Caribbean community have no place, no territory. On different levels, the film documents people's attempts to create a place for themselves to live in this carnival celebration. On the one hand, dub reggae, present in the sound of Mad Professor—one of the most important renewers of dub and reggae—, dictates the rhythm of the movements. On the other hand, by quoting passages from the writings of some of the foremost Afro-Caribbean thinkers—the art historian Kobena Mercer, the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy, the Guianese writer and diplomat E. R. Braithwaite, and the Jamaican-American writer Michelle Cliff—, the film broadens its wealth of references to include openly theoretical as well as activist perspectives. The interplay between text, image, and music

takes shape as a history and theory slam that mirrors nothing less than the reorganization of the old power structure into a new, as-yet-unformulated field.

## 22. Kapwani Kiwanga

### *Matières premières*, 2020

Reforged steel, sugar cane paper, variable dimensions

The sheets of paper in Kapwani Kiwanga's work *Matières premières* (raw materials) have been hung ceiling-high and so densely that they afford no view of the surrounding space once you enter their corridors. Their whiteness bears no drawing; the paper looks untreated. The *matières premières* cited in the title are found in the history of the materials the artist has installed here in her room work. The paper is made of sugarcane fiber, a by-product of sugar production. During the colonial period, sugarcane was the most widely grown crop in the Caribbean. Its cultivation involved the large-scale clearing of woodland and depended on exploitation and slavery. The distance between the hanging sheets corresponds to the width of the rows in which sugarcane was and still is grown. Today, this paper—among other products—is made of sugarcane and merchandised as eco-friendly because it does not contain wood. *Matières premières* thus not only tells of the history of sugarcane cultivation and slavery, but also of new production methods employed in the post-colonial Caribbean. The steel forms providing a framework for the paper were forged from the machetes formerly used to harvest the crops. They make reference to the ambiguity of the machete, which not only serves as a tool but can also become a weapon. A raw material is only raw until it becomes something different, something new. Bearing the traces of production and exploitation, the white paper in Kiwanga's work recounts the traumatic history of this process.

### 23. Julien Creuzet

*People remain asleep during bad dreams  
whereas nightmares awaken individuals.*

*heavy pulling sweat from the river  
I sweated my fears, I bled my urine  
I hid everything in my jeans*

*Most nightshades contain varying amounts  
of nicotine, a powerful neurotoxin to insects.  
However, tobaccos tend to contain a much  
higher concentration of nicotine than the others.*

*the demon had to enter us  
make us spin, thoughts in the skull*

*Unlike many other Solanaceae species, they do  
not contain tropane alkaloids, which are often  
poisonous to humans and other animals.  
Toasting in prison*

*wire mesh  
EAST  
flattened body  
cyst  
we could see inside of ourselves,*

*The family is native to the tropics of Africa and  
Asia. The plants have a large herbaceous  
growth habit with leaves with overlapping  
basal sheaths that form a pseudostem making  
some members appear to be woody trees.*

*today I feel nothing  
empty of all consistency  
I think I am alone*

*it's the beginning of my misfortune,*

*The family has been practically universally  
recognized by taxonomists, although with  
differing circumscriptions. Older circumscrip-  
tions of the family commonly included the  
genera now included in Heliconiaceae and  
Strelitziaceae.*

*today I feel several  
empty of all collective constancy  
I feel us  
a rotten us  
overripe  
too sure of him*

*Several species are widely cultivated as orna-  
mentals, and a few are naturalized in Florida,  
Gambia and Thailand. Common names for the  
genus include lobster-claws, toucan beak,  
wild plantains or false bird-of-paradise. The  
last term refers to their close similarity to the  
bird-of-paradise flowers (Strelitzia). Collectively,  
these plants are also simply referred to as  
heliconias.*

*I have botanical ideas  
in the head, since the British  
left the black sand beach*

*Although a plant of the tropics, most cultivars  
have been developed in temperate climates  
and are easy to grow in most countries of the  
world as long as they receive at least 6–8 hours  
average sunlight during the summer, and are  
moved to a warm location for the winter.*

*I, we felt cut in half  
let's talk about our petals., 2020*

Installation of various materials, dimensions variable

*mon corps carcasse  
se casse, casse, casse, casse  
Mon corps canne à sucre,  
lèche, flèche, flèche, flèche  
mon corps banane est en larm,  
larme, larme, larme  
mon corps peau noir,  
au couché du soleil, ne trouve plus le sommeil  
mon corps plantation poison  
mon corps plantation  
demande la rançon  
La pluie n'est plus la pluie  
la pluie goutte des aiguilles  
la pluie n'est plus la pluie  
la pluie goutte des aiguilles  
la pluie pesticide  
la pluie infanticide  
mon père vivait près de la rivière  
La rivière était à la lisière  
du champ de banane pour panam  
banane rouge poudrière  
sous les Tropiques du cancer (...), 2019*

Video, color, sound, 07:37 minutes

An idyllic palm-lined beach in the Antilles, a single molecule hovering overhead: seemingly unconnected to the dimensions of time, space, and material, it constantly rotates around its own axis, thus burrowing itself into the beholder's gaze. The idyll in the first take of Julien Creuzet's video *Mon corps carcasse / se casse, casse, casse, casse ...* is deceptive. The letters Cl and O—for chlordecone—glide ominously over the ends of the

molecule, which is assembled from remnants of a wide range of different materials. Chlordecone is one of the least biodegradable pesticides; it pollutes the soil for centuries. Once it finds its way into the human body, it bioaccumulates and becomes a cancer-causing, life-shattering enemy.

This deadly chlorine compound was used for many years on banana plantations on the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. The chief export market for the bananas was the French mainland, where the hormonally active, carcinogenic substance was prohibited as far back as 1990. On the islands, whose economies are dependent on banana cultivation, the ban went into effect three years later; the use of the chemical nevertheless continued until well into the 2000s. Today the soil and ground water are contaminated, and the health damages are devastating. The prostate and uterine cancer rate is the highest in the world, and chlordecone is moreover associated with premature births, complications during pregnancy, and abnormal cognitive and motor development in newborns.

In Creuzet's works, these illnesses, which were accepted as a necessary evil, are elements of a complex economic and colonial system of power structures and dependencies that still dominates the French Antilles today. Container ships float along through blood vessels, the Tricolor drifts past. Again and again, a rotten black banana, pumping like a heart, spews gold-sparkling medicines. The white snake, a viper native to Martinique and once the emblem on the island's flag—which was flown by, among others, the slave ships—, becomes a symbol of a brutal, profit-greedy racism that attacks life at its innermost core and ultimately destroys the body.



## 25. Khalik Allah

### *Black Mother*, 2018

Video, color, sound, 77:00 minutes

In a manner as cautious as it is direct, Khalik Allah's *Black Mother* portrays people on the street, strangers at markets, children playing, sick persons, churchgoers, people dancing, homeless. His images are harsh and unsparing, like the off-screen dialogues heard at the start. At the same time, they are borne by a beauty that arises from the portrait subjects' individuality but also from the landscape as seen through the filmmaker's eyes. Again and again, the black-and-white and color sequences are interspersed with older takes filmed in Jamaica by Allah himself (whose mother is from the island) when he was a teenager. His grandfather and other members of his family also appear, making the film a personal testimony as well as an inquiry into his own history. Almost always unrelated to one another but nevertheless rhythmically joined, the image and sound recordings are divided into three chapters in analogy to the three trimesters of a pregnancy.

Allah documents how the history and present of Jamaican society can be told—and the historical facts linked with the universal questions of spirituality, birth, and death—in the role of the woman and mother. In the first trimester, for example, the artist contrasts the image of woman as (Mother) Earth and the fertility of the land with the sale of women's bodies in prostitution, the history of colonization, and its perpetuation in tourism and the food industry. The political aspect unfolds further when, in the second trimester, the focus is on the struggle for identity in a post-colonial society. Women talk about how they are subjected to discrimination on account of their skin color; they tell of bleaching and self-hatred, prostitution and disrespect. At the same time, the role of the woman is repeatedly idealized and naturalized. The great importance of religion, including criticism of the Church as an institution and above all the power of spirituality and what it means for the society, is a recurring theme that culminates in the third trimester: with the matters of dying, death, and the rituals of burial, the cycle comes to a close where the actual birth begins.

## 26. Birgit Hein

### *Baby I Will Make You Sweat*, 1994

Digital video, recorded on 16mm film, color, sound, 63:00 minutes

*Baby I Will Make You Sweat* begins with passing images of a winter landscape. The deserted wasteland and the cold of the season symbolize a mood Birgit Hein seeks to penetrate in her film. Off screen, the artist talks about what it is like for a woman to age in a society in which youth determines sexual value. She speaks of loneliness and the longing for physical closeness: "Age is like a sickness that isolates you from life." Hein travels to the Caribbean. We see a palm-lined road, touristy beach scenes. The camera scans the bodies of Black men. Hein describes and illustrates the sexualized gaze that is as implicit to voyeurism and fetishization as the yearning for physicality. In this environment, the power shifts: as a *white* woman, she is free to choose a lover for herself.

Hein traces her path from an initial sexual encounter with a taxi driver to two more long-term relationships in which the power dynamic changes over time. Sex gives way to everyday closeness, conversations about racism and police violence. In a manner both sensitive and unsparingly direct, she reflects on her situation as a "white woman tourist who's just out for big black pricks," and nevertheless becomes a female appendage in the system of the temporary relationship. This is a contradiction that remains likewise unresolved in the second relationship. Even abstention from political discussion and the endeavor to communicate purely by way of physicality and intimacy cannot disguise the conditionality and ephemerality of the encounter. The film is an authentic and unpretentious testimony to how the relationships remain as dominated by colonial—and thus economic—dependency as by the patterns of patriarchal role assignments.

## 29. Isaac Julien

### *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask*, 1996

Video, color, sound, 68:36 minutes

The film *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* by Isaac Julien and Mark Nash begins in reverse biographical order with very calm shots of Algeria. It was in Algeria—which at the time was still a part of the French colonial empire—that Fanon carried out his lifework. In 1953 he was appointed head physician of a hopelessly overcrowded psychiatric clinic in Blida. He became a leading representative of the Algerian liberation organization FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) and one of the most prominent activists, theorists, and ideologists of decolonization. Like Che Guevara, Fanon was a trained physician when he flung himself into the liberation struggles of the colonized peoples of the earth. Unlike Che Guevara, however, as a practicing psychiatrist he was always first and foremost a doctor of the individual and not of the society.

*Black Skin, White Masks*, which Fanon published in 1952 at the age of twenty-seven, is a theoretical as well as a personal document of the individual struggle for liberation from the attributions which the colonizers successfully imposed on the colonized, and which found expression primarily as oppression on account of skin color. From Algeria, the filmic narrative then cautiously returns to Fanon's beginnings in Martinique, where he was born on 20 July 1925, the son of an education-oriented middle-class Black family. It was one of Fanon's strokes of luck that Aimé Césaire, the great poet and politician of the négritude movement, was among his teachers at the lycée.

From Martinique, Fanon went to Lyon to study medicine and psychology. In addition to the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, one of his formative influences was the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Fanon died of leukemia in the U.S. in December 1961, the year in which his polemic on decolonization—the book *The Wretched of the Earth*—was published. Over the course of his extremely productive life, he was active as a physician, psychotherapist, author, theorist, and politician. In a mood of contrapuntal calm, the film presents Fanon's legacy in brief original contributions by, among others, intellectuals such as Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Françoise Vergès, and Olivier Fanon.

## 31. Kader Attia

### *Repair Analysis*, 2013

Mirror, metal, 42 × 30 cm each

In his *Repair Analysis*, Kader Attia has fixed a broken mirror with heavy staples formed of bulky metal wire. The scar traverses the otherwise unharmed surface—and thus also the face of the person viewing the work. The brutality of *Repair Analysis* lies in the absurd assumption that it is even possible to mend something as fragile as a mirror.

Repair is a key concept of Attia's works. To attempt to fix something that has broken is a gesture as simple as it is intrinsic to every culture. Attia accordingly believes that every global history of mankind must devote profound attention to this seemingly so self-evident act. To repair something can also mean to introduce a new world to an old one, literally to be inventive. Yet it can also involve realizing that something can no longer be repaired and has to be replaced by something else. The replacement of something no longer repairable marks the end of the repair and makes space, as it were, for something new—a process we often view with distrust. As the artist remarked in an interview, we've been raised to believe that everything can be repaired. And that doesn't apply only to objects but also to injuries and illnesses. Attia thinks that is fundamentally wrong. To his mind, we should learn to live with our injuries and grievances.

With his mended mirror, Attia ushers us into one of the fraughtest areas of our ingrained need to repair: our self-image. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan regards the mirror stage—that is, the moment in which a child first recognizes its own mirror image (at the age of between six and eighteen months)—as “formative of the I function.” The child's identification with its self through the internalization of the image causes it to transform into the I that it believes itself to be from that moment on. When the mirror breaks, however, the image that was there just a minute ago is gone. It is not easy to repair the image in the mirror, as Attia's metal staples show. Perhaps the time has come to look for a new and different form for the constitution of the I. Not one that wants to repair and make the injury unhappen, but one that has learned to live with its flaws.

## 32. Julia Phillips

### *Exoticizer (Josephine Baker's Belt)*, 2017

Partially glazed ceramics, brass screws, metal pedestal, 100.5 × 46 × 46 cm

While the belt by Julia Phillips makes a hard, metallic impression, the ceramic pieces mounted on it look like the remains of hollowed-out bananas. The title *Exoticizer (Josephine Baker's Belt)* is a reference to the dancer and civil rights activist Josephine Baker's so-called "banana belt." In the 1920s, Baker went to Paris with an African American dance group and, scantily dressed, there performed the "Banana Dance" that was soon to become very famous. From that time forward, the stylized Black woman wearing a banana belt evolved into a symbol of racialized exoticism. The display of the belt on a base once again underscores the aspect of becoming a projection surface for colonial sexual lust. As its name conveys, the *Exoticizer* virtually becomes a tool for the violent and sexualized attributions to which Baker was subjected—or, as Grada Kilomba expressed it: "The Black subject becomes then a screen of projection for what the white subject fears to acknowledge about her/himself: [...] aggression and sexuality." At the same time, the belt buckle looks twisted out of shape, as though a body had just been violently liberated from it.

tion, Julia Phillips's work lends expression to the omnipresence of racial discrimination of Black people on account of their hair.

### *Shake (A Choreography for Flying Hair)*, 2013

HD video (loop), b/w, no sound, 00:08 minutes

In her plain, concentrated study *Shake (A Choreography for Flying Hair)*, Julia Phillips carries out movements that, with every repetition, make the image of long hair all the more present. In a manner similar to the attributions in the case of Baker, the movements evoke hair that has nothing to do with the artist's actual appearance but, precisely by means of its absence, raises the issue of stereotypical ideals of beauty. What does it look like, the head of hair elicited in the mind's eye of the beholder? The images here induced differ depending on the experiences the viewer has had in public—that is, whether he/she is conspicuous there or not—, and thus depending on his/her individual relationship to normality and violence. In the gap between actual appearance and the imagina-

# Imprint

This booklet was published in  
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*Frank Walter: A Retrospective*

*In dialogue with*  
*John Akomfrah*  
*Khalik Allah*  
*Kader Attia*  
*Marcel Broodthaers*  
*Julien Creuzet*  
*Birgit Hein*  
*Isaac Julien*  
*Kapwani Kiwanga*  
*Carolyn Lazard*  
*Julia Phillips*  
*Howardena Pindell*  
*Rosemarie Trockel*

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Susanne Pfeffer with Anna Sailer  
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EDITED BY  
Susanne Pfeffer

MANAGING EDITOR  
Anna Sailer

TEXTS  
Lukas Flygare, Klaus Görner,  
Ann-Charlotte Günzel, Carolyn  
Lazard, Susanne Pfeffer, Cord  
Riechelmann, Anna Sailer

COPY EDITING  
Nassima Sahraoui

PROOFREADING  
Deborah Bürgel, Judith Rosenthal

TRANSLATIONS  
Nicola Morris, Judith Rosenthal

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
Zak Group, London  
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