3 Bagasse

Caribbean Art and the Debris of the Sugar Plantation

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert

The recent emergence of *bagasse*—the fibrous mass left after sugarcane is crushed—as an important source of biofuel may seem to those who have experienced the realities of plantation life like the ultimate cosmic irony. Its newly assessed value—one producer of bagasse pellets argues that "symbol of what once was waste, now could be farming gold" ("Harvesting" 2014)—promises to increase sugar producers' profits while pushing into deeper oblivion the plight of the workers worldwide who continue to produce sugar cane in deplorable conditions and ruined environments. Its newly acquired status as a "renewable" and carbon-neutral source of energy also obscures the damage that cane production continues to inflict on the land and the workers that produce it. The concomitant deforestation, soil erosion and use of poisonous chemical fertilizers and pesticides on land and water continue to degrade the environment of those fated to live and work amid its waste. It obscures, moreover, the role of sugarcane cultivation as the most salient form of power and environmental violence through which empires manifested their hegemony over colonized territories throughout the Caribbean and beyond.[1]

In the discussion that follows, I explore the legacy of the environmental violence of the sugar plantation through the analysis of the work of a group of contemporary Caribbean artists whose focus is the ruins and debris of the plantation and who often use bagasse as either artistic material or symbol of colonial ruination. I argue—through the analysis of recent work by Atelier Morales (Cuba), Hervé Beuze (Martinique), María Magdalena Campos-Pons (Cuba), and Charles Campbell (Jamaica)—that artistic representation in the Caribbean addresses the landscape of the plantation as inseparable from the history of colonialism and empire in the region. Embedded in these representations of the ruins and debris of the sugar plantation "landscape" are a number of colonial and neocolonial relationships to the environment that engage central themes in artistic and literary production in the region: land tenure, diaspora, slavery and indentured servitude, family networks, community, and modernity, among others. In their multifaceted representations through photographs, paintings and installations, these artists insist on the eloquent capacity of the engagement with ruins and debris—chief among this debris, bagasse—to address the continuing impact of colonial

and imperial power on the landscapes and peoples of the region. This visual engagement, moreover, also insists on its political nature, as it seeks to denounce the ruination brought to the Caribbean islands by the plantation and to display for viewers perhaps unfamiliar with the history of the plantation the despoiled environments that local populations continue to inhabit. My analysis of this work owes much to the critical and methodological tools developed under the aegis of the environmental humanities for the study of narrative and post-colonial ecologies in the Caribbean region.[2] It seeks to push the boundaries of our definitions of the environmental humanities to encompass the work of visual artists engaging with postcolonial ecologies and addressing the ruination that empire left in its wake. Their works offer highly nuanced *visual* narratives, versions of a history of imperial ruination that draw upon a broad range of traditions of visual representation and whose importance in narrating the story of empire has received scant attention to date.

My interest in the ecological impact of the plantation stems from a deep personal connection to the history of sugar production in my home island. For decades, my father worked for the Aguirre Sugar Cane Mill, the last operational sugar refinery in Puerto Rico, which closed its doors in 1993. As a result, my childhood and adolescence were dominated by the rhythm of the cane planting and harvesting seasons and by the absorbing narratives of the day-to-day struggles of the cane workers—some of them my relatives—that represented the largest segment of the population in our small town and whose children were my classmates. The history of my maternal family is intricately bound with relentless efforts to escape and then stay away from the cane fields.

The landscapes of my hometown were dominated by cane; its cyclical evolution from green stalk crowned with flowery spumes to pungent bagasse served as backdrop to our yearly routines. As children, we anxiously awaited the burning of the fields before harvest and pretended to ice skate on the pavement made slippery by the falling ashes while our mothers rushed to get the clothes off the line before they were covered in soot. We played among the rows of canes, careful to avoid the razor-sharp leaves of the stalks, and begged for rides on the narrow-gauge trains bringing the canes to the mill in Aguirre. We were also keenly familiar with the troubles of the *tiempo muerto*, with the unemployment and penuries of the fallow season when there was no employment and therefore no income.

When the cane industry began its slow decline in the 1960s, we followed closely the fate of the land—and of the local economy—as cane ceased to be what we saw everywhere we turned. The collapse of the sugar industry developed across several decades and impacted the landscape and our townspeople in myriad ways: fallow fields were reclaimed by bush; new crops were tried in order to provide a new economic base; ostrich farms came and went; short-lived oil refineries polluted the air, the soil and the water, leaving rusty carcasses and unexplained maladies in their wake; a

plan to build a lab monkey–breeding facility split the community; housing developments named after former plantations sprung on former cane land; solar panel farms replaced failed pineapple farms, genetically modified seed–processing plants experimented without regulation on the land—while the ruins of the sugar *central* rusted away as a much photographed "romantic" ghostly *revenant*. The deforested hills, nonetheless, remained denuded; without the trees, the rains have not returned. What is not irrigated remains parched, arid land. At school we read our writers' attempts to come to terms with our problematic history as cultivators of sugar, responding viscerally against nineteenth-century exalted celebrations of landscapes dominated by the swaying flower of the sugar cane plant—the *guajana*—to be found in works like José Gautier Benítez's 1846 poem "A Puerto Rico." We also discovered the complexities of tales of individual struggle between financial security and ethical treatment of both workers and the environment, as in Enrique Laguerre's 1935 novel *La Llamarada*, with its sad lament for the loss of the mighty and once abundant *ausubo* trees to the spread of the canelands. It was a story that reverberated across the islands through other poems, novels, and short stories.

Rooted in the culture of sugar cultivation, our readings of its representation in literature and art were guided by our understanding of its economic, social, and environmental realities. Even then, albeit in the most unsophisticated ways, the question of how to adequately represent this most disturbing development in the history of the Caribbean region loomed large before us. The issues have grown more complex, more nuanced, but the question of how best to represent this historical trauma ethically while creating art whose aesthetic quality engages us with its vexed and vexing history of human and environmental exploitation remains a central one. This is the basic question I would like to address through the analysis of a number of examples drawn from the work of artists equally familiar with the nuances of the region's history of cane cultivation.

A central aspect of my query addresses these artists' environmental premises. United States' artist Lynne Hull has developed a list of principles—listed on the Green Museum's website under "What is Environmental Art?—that can guide us towards an understanding of the qualities we seek in art that addresses ecological concerns. Environmental artists seek to create art that "informs and interprets nature and its processes, educates us about environmental problems," and "is concerned or incorporates environmental forces and materials." It should help us "re-envision our relationship to nature, proposing new ways for us to co-exist with our environment" while it "reclaims and remediates damaged environments, restoring ecosystems in artistic and often aesthetic ways." Such art can be ephemeral, and is often produced in collaboration with others in order to underscore community goals or the cooperative nature of environmental remediation efforts."[3] This definition, however, broad as it is, needs to be expanded if it is to include artists whose work explores the specificities of imperial practices that have resulted

in despoiled landscapes and the obstacles to reclamation and remediation in small postcolonial nations whose economies are unable to support complex land rehabilitation schemes. The fate of the landscape, for the artists whose work I discuss here, is fundamentally tied to questions of power and empire. Echoing Ann Laura Stoler, their goal is not simply "to mount a charge that every injustice in the contemporary world has imperial roots, but rather to delineate the specific ways in which peoples and places are laid to waste, where debris falls, around whose lives it accumulates, and what constitutes [in the words of Derek Walcott] 'the rot that remains'" (Stoler 2013, 29).

The representation of the Caribbean plantation in art is rooted in the landscape-with-sugar-plantation tradition that dominated the development Caribbean artistic expression from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century—produced mostly by amateur artists or traveling professional painters. Artists like Frans Post (1612–1680), Agostino Brunias (1730–1796), Michel-Jean Cazabon (1813–1888), Víctor Patricio Landaluze (1828–1889), and Eduardo Laplante (1818–1860), or amateurs such as the diplomat and traveler Pierre Eugene du Simitiere (1737–1784) produced reassuring images that captured the landscape, architecture, and economic potential of the plantation without addressing the harshness of its labor conditions or the system's immersion in global patterns of exchange dependent on the slavery and the slave trade. These consumable images of picturesque otherness, like the American plantation paintings that John Michael Vlack examines in *The Planter's Prospect: Privilege and Slavery in Plantation Paintings*, fulfilled "an important social function: they made a positive visual argument on behalf of plantation society" and "constituted a pleasant propaganda that covered plantation life with a sweet veneer of tranquility" (Vlack 2002, 89, 109).[4]

New approaches to the depiction of the plantation through art emerged following emancipation in the British colonies in the mid-1830s among Creole painters sympathetic to the abolitionist movement. Influenced by new social theories ranging from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *On the Social Contract* (1762) to Karl Marx's *Capital* (1867) this new work challenged previous images of the plantation and slavery as benign institutions. Moving from the romanticized views of the plantation house to depictions of the boiling houses or of laborers struggling in the fields, these new images offered a critique of the plantation system that reflected emerging labor and prodemocracy movements in the Caribbean. Perhaps best known among them is turn-of-the-twentieth-century Puerto Rican painter Francisco Oller (1833–1917), whose series of paintings of Puerto Rican plantations remain as a challenge to the power of an established Creole plantocracy. Oller sought, as Katherine Manthorne (2001) has argued, to problematize the familiar bucolic presentations of the plantation, seeking instead to depict them "as sites of interaction between races—between white Creole elite and slaves of African descent—[his] plantation images represent an attempted synthesis of the overlapping narratives of land control/reform and race that engulfed Puerto Rico during his lifetime" (2001, 321). These

plantation images—*Hacienda La Fortuna* (1885, Brooklyn Museum) most particularly—show fields covered in debris during the cane harvest, from the debris left on the field as oxen carts move the cane to the mill to growing piles of bagasse outside the mill building after processing. Workers mill about this debris, signaling an identification between labor and plantation waste that disrupts the viewer's expectations from earlier plantation paintings.

Oller was not alone in his critique of the plantation through art. Its negative legacy is powerfully addressed by Cuban painter Wilfredo Lam in his most famous work, *The Jungle* (1943), where he sought to capture "the drama of my country" and "disturb the dreams of the exploiters" through the creation of phantasmagoric African warriors adrift in a forest of cane (Fouchet 1976, 188–189). As sugar production in Cuban and Puerto Rico moved from medium-sized family-owned concerns to huge corporation-owned *centrales* (US-owned "factories in the fields") after the Spanish-American War (1898), Oller's careful deconstruction of the plantation order was echoed in the work of photographers such as Jack Delano (1914–1997), who arrived in Puerto Rico in the early 1940s as part of the New Deal's Farm Security Administration to chronicle the lives of cane workers (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Jack Delano, ***TFSA Borrower and Participant in the Sugar Cane Cooperative, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico*** (December 1941), photographic slide. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Delano's work challenged the confident image of prosperity and bounty that emerged out of official depictions of the industrialized sugar production featured in newspapers, government reports and tourist postcards.[5] It refocused attention away from these images of the industrial plantation as

"modern" landscape and toward the plight of workers in the fields and the dignified poverty of their homes and families. His portraits of Puerto Rican cane workers underscored their individuality and inscribed them into the history of labor exploitation and institutionalized poverty that was the legacy of the "bucolic" plantation of earlier representations. In many of his portraits of cane workers in the field, as we see above, Delano used cane and bagasse as background, immersing his subjects in the fields of cane production and its debris. He was particularly interested in chronicling the experience of workers—like the one pictured above—who had joined a cooperative to plant cane to sell to the American mills, one of the many ventures through which cane workers sought to better their economic circumstances through gaining some measure of control over the land. His aesthetic and ideological approach to the depiction of the plantation is echoed in the work of other prominent artist of the mid-twentieth century, perhaps chief among them Cuba's Mario Carreño and Jamaica's Albert Huie, whose iconic plantation paintings captured the collective and unifying nature of hard labor in the cane fields at a crucial moment in the history of labor organization in the twentieth century and who, as Oller and Delano before them, depict the cane workers as embedded literally and metaphorically in the canes and bagasse. Delano's photographs, like the work of Carreño and Huie in Cuba and Jamaica, were crucial documents in the development of a nationalist critique of the industrialized plantation in Puerto Rico. Circulated freely through newspaper articles, history textbooks, postcards, and pro-independence political posters—and generously contextualized by Delano himself through multiple press interviews and presentations in a wide variety of venues—the ubiquitous images became instantly recognizable markers of nationalist goals, embraced particularly during the resurgence of the pro-independence movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

Contemporary Caribbean artists have sought to engage the vexed history of the visual representation of the plantation in the region through *dialogues* with earlier iconic images. That is the case of a photographic series by Atelier Morales (Cuban architect Juan Luis Morales and his wife and artistic partner Teresa Ayuso) who in *Los Ingenios: Patrimonio a la deriva* (*Adrift Patrimony: Sugar Refineries* 2004) seek to capture "with a bitterly beautiful technique of digital photography and gouache the ruined remnants" of the once thriving sugar industry in Cuba (Santiago 2005). The series uses as a point of departure the work of French painter and lithographer Eduardo Laplante, whose thirty-eight lithographs of Cuba's principal sugar plantations illustrated Justo Cantero's excellent study of the history and condition of the island's principal mills in 1857, *Los Ingenios: Colección de vistas de los principals ingenious de azúcar de la isla de Cuba*. Laplante's "colorful landscapes of smokestacks towering higher than royal palms and his romanticized view of life on the plantations" (Santiago 2005) served as the inspiration for Atelier Morales reimagining of the Cuban plantation landscape (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Eduardo Laplante, ***Ingenio Tinguaro***, from Justo G. Cantero's ***Los Ingenios: Colección de vistas de los principales ingenious de azúcar de la isla de Cuba*** (1857).

Atelier Morales' *Los Ingenios/The Sugar Mills* consists of twenty-five images, in editions of ten each (with the exception of two images in editions of fifteen), signed and painted with gouache. The project was envisioned in 2002, shortly after the Cuban mills closed, as an attempt to "reflect on heritage and loss caused by abandonment, negligence and corruption, all consequences of inefficient and unilateral political systems" (Menocal 2004). The photographs capture the sugar mills of Laplante's iconic lithographs as they are today—the old machinery rusted, the wood buildings crumpled, the sites abandoned, some half-submerged in water, others covered by bush. They also, perhaps unintentionally, leave ample evidence of the myriad ways in which land was misused. The photographs of the ruin mills, with their brooding, poignant depiction of the collapsed buildings and rusted machinery, can be linked to the recent interest in ruins photography, with their aestheticization of the abandonment and decline of architectural and natural spaces that were once central to Cuba's national iconography (see Leary 2011 and Mullins 2012). Their ghost-like appearance recalls figures associated with sugar production and slavery, like zombies or revenants from a forgotten past—they also emerge from the bush or disrupt the landscape as unfathomable, unnatural debris. Their dialogue with the nineteenth-century images that precede them, however, allows Atelier Morales to transcend the

simply maudlin and to transmute Laplante's romanticized view of life in the plantation, which already negated a history of forced labor and land abuse, into a contemporary "tale of loss and an ode to poetic memory." As Morales and Ayuso described in an interview with Fabiola Santiago: "An entire industry destroyed, a way of life lost and no one thought to at least preserve some of these historical relics and turn them into museums for the generations," Morales has argued (Santiago 2005). Stoler (2013) speaks of the trauma behind the treatment afforded to "sites of decomposition that fall outside historical interest and preservation" (13), a sentiment echoed in Atelier Morales' project to bring to the spaces photographed the honor due to them "as ruins of empire proper."

The photograph of the Tinguaro plantation reproduced here (see below) captures the evocative quality of Atelier Morales' sense of patrimonial and historical loss. The corroded machinery emerging from the luscious vegetation, its reddish rust in glaring contrast to the vivid green, forces us to confront the poignancy of the decaying infrastructure of an abandoned and superseded industry. The image, on the other hand, can also be read as an illustration of another kind of decline and obsolescence—that of nature trying to regain its ascendance over the formerly abused plantation terrain and the infrastructure through which this mistreatment was achieved. The ambivalent quality of this nostalgia—as Morales asserts—is clearly imprinted in the composition of images like that of the abandoned boats before the sweep of what remains of the old palm-lined plantation driveway in the photograph *Unión* (2004) or the harmonious sequence of palm trees and rusted building posts seen in *Constancia* (2004). It points to loss and romantic regret, while also functioning politically as a not-too-subtle critique of the Castro government for allowing this part of Cuba's historical legacy to go to ignominious (rather than properly honored) ruin. The critique, as Morales argues, is not centered on ideological concerns, but on a preoccupation with erasure and, concomitantly, with rescue (see Figure 3.3).

This concern with erasure encapsulates the environmental component of Atelier Morales' project, as the representation of the ruins amidst encroaching bush (*Tinguaro*, *Vereda*, *Cimarrones*), the partly submerged plantation structures of *Narciso*, or the fallow grasslands of *La Angosta* brings to striking visual light what Jamaicans so poetically call "ruinate"—the type of useless bush that is left after formerly cultivated cane land has been abandoned, illustrating the toll of the plantation on formerly fertile lands. As a photograph, *Tinguaro* works both as a beautiful image of the *recovery* of the rusted machinery through art or as an equally beautiful nostalgic image of the process of erasure of a historical marker about to disappeared into ruinate. As Michelle Cliff describes it:

> *Ruinate*, the adjective, and *ruination*, the noun, are Jamaican inventions. Each word signified the reclamation of land, the disruption of

Figure 3.3 Atelier Morales, ***Tinguaro*** (2004), from the ***Adrift Patrimony: Sugar Refineries*** series, photograph and gouache. Courtesy of Atelier Morales.

> cultivation, civilization, by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable forest. When a landscape becomes ruinate, carefully designed aisles of cane are envined, strangled, the order of empire is replaced by the chaotic forest. The word ruination (especially) signifies this immediately; it contains both the word *ruin*, and *nation*. A landscape in ruination means one in which the imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin.
>
> (Cliff 2003, 157)

At the center of Atelier Morales' concerns with Cuba's disappearing patrimony, we find a preoccupation with the integrity of the island nation that echoes Michelle Cliff's concerns with ruinate. They share the same unease about how to address creatively the problematic legacy of the plantation system in Jamaica and Cuba from their exile. As environmental photographers and artists and exiled Cubans, Morales and Ayuso have created an art stemming from a space of nostalgia, a space of in-betweeness from which they address their perception of the Cuban regime's neglect of the island's historical and architectural patrimony while simultaneously capturing the environmental manifestations of the systemic misuse of the land. This in-betweeness is conveyed through what I would call, for lack of a better term, their work's *intervisuality* to borrow from Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language* (1980)—their insistence on creating visual materials that shape their meaning through clearly articulated dialogues with other images, working against codes imparted to the viewer through earlier iconic

representations. Their images of plantation ruins are metaphorically superimposed on earlier, *whole*, depictions of the spaces and architecture now ruined—a superimposition conveyed in more recent work through lenticular photographs that allow for the image to move or change when viewed from different angles. (Exhibits of *Adrift Patrimony: Sugar Plantations* display the photographs by Atelier Morales alongside Laplante's prints of the same spaces). The juxtaposition—whether through side-by-side displays of the before-and-after of the spaces represented or achieved through lenticular technologies—articulates wholeness and ruin simultaneously, thereby capturing loss as a concrete and specific wrenching from a historical past. The nostalgia is embedded in the interstices between the two images. What is lost is captured as much through the representations of the rusted metal debris left behind as through the disappearance of what has been carted away and is no longer visible in the new image: cane, slaves, bagasse, forests, provision grounds—the human and vegetable debris most vulnerable to time and the elements.

These concerns are shared by Martinican artist Hervé Beuze, who has built an impressive body of work focused on a sustained critique of Martinique's history of sugar production, which he addresses through installations that use fermenting and pungently smelling bagasse as prime material. His most important project of the last decade, presented in a number of different iterations, is titled *Machinique*, an amalgam of the words *Machine*, *Inique* (iniquitous), and *Martinique*. The project's design is a simple one—sculptures in the shape of the island of Martinique are generally filled with bagasse, cane leaves, or trash and then set in place (i.e. placed on the floor of a former sugar mill, suspended in the air or floating on a pond), deriving their particular meaning from the installation's context. His goal is that of establishing an "archeology of the territory" of the Martinique's sugar cultivation through what he has called his "Matrice-Cartes" or Master (matrix/womb) Maps (Ravion-d'Ingianni 2007, 5). The project stems from Beuze's understanding of mapping as "the point of departure of the geographic, military and human conquest of the world"; his maps, he has explained "are linked to notions of borders and peripheries" (Ravion-d'Ingianni 2007, 5). All the map installation and sculptures he has produced are, in his words, "one single series of islands […] different facets of one entity" (Ravion-d'Ingianni 2007, 9).

In the project's first iteration in 2001, installed in a Martinican park, the form was at its simplest—merely a metal outline of the island filled with a pile of bagasse. His 2003 installation at Martinique's superb Sugar Cane Museum (with the outline of the island filled with cane leaves) added nuance to the basic premise through its mirroring a map of Martinique owned by the Museum (a map of the *Terres de l'Isle de la Martinique concédées par la Compagnie des Iles, les seigneurs propriétaires et la Compagnie des Indes Occidentales),* which showed the lands given to planers

for cane cultivation in 1671, the foundations of Martinique's plantation society—and by its setting (the Museum is located in a former sugar mill and displays machinery, implements, documents, and photographs pertaining to sugar cultivation on the island). The work was placed on polystyrene floating in the middle of a pond and on panels set on the ground Beuze identified the location of the island's first sugar plantations, making of his installation a "spatial inventory" that anchored the production of sugar and rum on the island. The installation was meant to highlight how these ancient divisions of the land continue to hold sway over island land tenures (Brébion 2011, 85). Beuze has described the series as "an attempt 'to perceive the marrow of our being in the world,' through forms and materials associated with sugar production" and plantation debris (Walmsley 2011, 82). Beuze's privileging of the island's silhouette as a container for plantation debris invites us to read his art installations as meditations on Martinique's history as a dumping ground for capitalism's refuse, as a geographical spaced crushed altogether by the forces of empire. The use of the silhouette allows him to effectively link the protocapitalistic enterprise that gave birth to the would-be nation to the crushing of landscapes and lives. His reflection on the series as aiming to grasp "the marrow of our being in the world," moreover, speaks to the depth of this colonial exploitation as having reached the marrow—the very source of the blood—of the nation, crushing it to the bone.

Beuze's most memorable *Machinique* (2007) installation (see Figure 3.4) was mounted at the old distillery buildings of Habitation Clément, one of Martinique's best-known producers of artisanal rums. The Clément Distillery was founded in 1887 by Homère Clément, the son of a tailor who studied medicine in France and rose to become a *grand mulâtre* after purchasing a bankrupt plantation, the Domaine d'Acajou, where he developed the techniques of rum production that would in time make him "the father of rhum agricole." His *domain*, now known as Habitation Clément (Clément Plantation) is a popular heritage tourism site in Martinique; its historical buildings frequently house art exhibits sponsored by the Fondation Clément. Like the Maison de la Canne (The Sugar Cane Museum), the Clément Distillery provided an ideal "context" for the display of Beuze's installation. Both have been praised for the excellence of the historical research guiding their restoration and curatorial efforts. Beuze's work both benefitted from their reputation for high curatorial quality while providing "authentic" special contexts that both validated his critique of the system and allowed his work to enter into a dialogue with the objects and portraits of cane workers displayed in the venues alongside his installation. In the *Machinique* installation at the Habitation Clément, the "map" was suspended over the grinding machinery of the former sugar factory by thin plastic threads. The juxtaposition of the bagasse-filled map, the plantation implements, and the life-size portraits of the cane workers in a room from whose large open windows one could see the still active cane fields gave

Figure 3.4 Hervé Beuze, ***Machinique*** (2007), bagasse, plastic wire and metal structure, 5 × 2.5m. Fondation Clément. Photograph by Dino Feigespan.

this installation a poignant cumulative quality, highlighting the specificity of Beuze's concerns with landscape, history, and debris.

Anne Walmsley and Stanley Greaves, commenting on the piece in their book *Art in the Caribbean*, underscore the multiple resonances of the installation's venue: the use of bagasse "as a powerful symbol of the crushed spirit" of the formerly enslaved; the map's suspension as a "gigantic spider in the middle of its web" as a reference to the Anansi trickster/god figure

of Caribbean folklore, who often takes the shape of a spider; and its suspension as a reference to the island's existence in limbo, "surrounded by free nations, yet still attached to the colonial power as a formal part of it, a puppet controlled by outside strings" (Walmsley and Greaves 2011, 82). For Beuze, the importance of the venue rested on its forcing the viewer to "confront the vastness of the architectural space and the reality of the elements that composed it: the grooved wheels oozing grease, the geometry of the modern metallic framework" (Ravion-d'Ingianni 2007, 7). He also calls attention to what he describes as the "quasi artisanal" nature of the process of installation: "the patient work of collection and assemblage, the repetitive gestures that allowed him to line up the cane leaves, the delicate piling up of the bagasse, all confer on the installation the airy and fragile appearance of a weaving loom" (Ravion-d'Ingianni 2007, 9). Beuze is not alone in seeking to equate the intense labor involved in the preparation of his installations to the labor of workers in the cane fields, seeing in this labor equity a symbolic identification with the crushing enterprise of empire through slavery and postslavery exploitation.

These "ephemeral installations," as Beuze describes them, have been inspired—as the artists has repeatedly asserted—by Glissant's assessment in his *Caribbean Discourse*, that "because the collective memory was too often wiped out, the Caribbean writer [or artist], must 'dig deep' into this memory, following the latent signs that he has picked up in the everyday world" (Glissant 1989, 64). It is a preoccupation that links his work with that of Atelier Morales, placing them in a creative continuum. Moreover, the ephemeral quality of Beuze's work—bagasse rots, smells, decays and transforms into compost—underscores an element of central importance to Beuze—the ways in which Caribbean nations and peoples have been marked by the crushing and discarding of cane turned into bagasse and of the bodies whose very blood marrow has joined this imperial debris. Beuze has frequently described his work as a metaphor for the impact of colonization on the people of the Caribbean, left crushed and drained like bagasse, a metaphor reinforced by the pungent smell of the fermenting bagasse of his installations—the sweetly rotting smell that signals both decomposition and transformation. Hence the poignancy of his installation at the Habitation Clément, fermenting canes that signal both the crushing exploitation of sugar cane production and the redefinition on an industry that has turned rum production into Martinique's quintessentially artisanal product.

In more recent work, Beuze, who has used his signature Matrice-Charte concept to address a multiplicity of themes, has devoted his installations to other environmental concerns facing Martinique. His silhouettes of Martinique have been filled in with garbage (disposing of refuse is a rising problem in Martinique) and also with canned food to highlight Martinique's acute levels of food insecurity. The island produces only 2 percent of what it consumes and even minor problems with shipments of basic foodstuffs

can lead to severe and immediate food shortages. In installations like the 2009 reiteration of Machinique, you see the silhouette of Martinique placed under looming pieces of sugar mill equipment, a juxtaposition that negates the nostalgia of the images by Atelier Morals we saw earlier. Gleaming and menacing—as if to express the possibility of their eternal return—as possible revenants or returning ghosts—the machinery hovers over the island, ready to crunch cane again at any moment.

The sugar mill as *revenant* also haunts María Magdalena Campos-Pons' *Sugar/Bittersweet*, a site-specific installation commissioned by the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts, for exhibition in November 2010. Born in 1959 in the Matanzas province of Cuba, Campos-Pons (who has lived in Boston since 1989) has spoken frequently about her personal connection to Cuba's history of sugar production with which her family's history is intermingled. She grew up near one of the now-defunct sugar factories in the town of La Vega, and lived in the former slave barracks of a plantation of the kind featured both in Eduardo Laplante's prints and Atelier Morales' photographs, sharing with the latter a deeply felt and historically complex relationship to sugar. Matanzas was a center of Cuban sugar production from the late eighteenth into the twentieth century as well as at one time a port of entry for African slaves. Her own great-grandfather was brought from Nigeria to Cuba as a slave, while her great-grandmother, a Chinese woman said to be from Canton, came to Cuba as an indentured servant to work in the sugar fields. "Sugar is the reason the town was built as a plantation […], sugar is what my ancestors worked in, sugar was the main product of La Vega, sugar is Cuba," Campos-Pons has explained, adding that the exhibit "has a lot to do with home, place and territory" (Bell 1998, 35). Like Beuze, Campos Pons' preoccupation with place and territory has led her to recreate the space of the plantation in installations that seek to immerse the museum goer in the visual and olfactory experience of being amidst the debris of the sugar field. Campos Pons does not work with bagasse—a material not readily available in the northeast region of the US, where she works and teaches—but seeks instead to recreate the olfactory quality so striking in Beuze's work through the inclusion of fermenting sugary confections (see Figure 3.5).

Given her interest in the recreation of the plantation space in the museum space, *Sugar/Bittersweet* is conceived as a sugar cane field represented by "a gridded layout of wooden carved stools, each containing a spear positioned upright from the stools," which reference the slaves who worked in the sugar fields (Smee 2013). Its initial impact is described by Sebastian Smee in a review for *The Boston Globe* as "weirdly thrilling" (2013). The spears pierce columns of actual raw sugar disks and cast-glass forms, becoming "visual metaphors for the tall, graceful stalks of the sugar cane plant;" roped-together Chinese weights allude to the weighing of the crop after harvest and to the Chinese indentured servants that included her grandmother (McQuaid 2010). In all, the installation, which is accompanied by a video

Figure 3.5 María Magdalena Campos-Pons, ***Sugar/Bittersweet*** (2010), mixed-media installation, including wood, glass, raw sugar, metal, video, and stereo sound; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Smith College Museum of Art. Photograph by Stephen Petegorsky.

of interviews with Afro-Cuban subjects, shows how Cuba's deep involvement in the production of a major commodity impacted millions of Creoles, Africans, and Chinese. As a result the work, "rather than envisioning sugar as a crystallized and easily melted confection," conjures through the use of squares and discs of white and brown sugar respectively, not sugar's syrupiness—to which the exhibit constantly alludes, but to the less appealing human and environmental exploitation that accompanies it (Buttenwieser 2011). The installation included actual sugary cakes, the smell of which was "contagious, pervasive" (Buttenweiser 2011).[6] Set against sterile white floor and walls, the work conjures the barrenness of the soil to which such labor led. The sterility marks the physical transformation of the land that created the plantation's landscape. Where Beuze used bagasse and debris to conjure the ecological devastation the sugar plantation left in its wake, Campos Pons trusts emptiness to speak of the lives and landscapes sacrificed to the advance of sugar production on her home island. This is an element underscored both through the references to forced migration throughout the installation and through the videos, which capture the narratives of subjects whose lives were significantly impacted by cane—particularly those of Campos-Pons' own family.

Like Beuze, Campos-Pons also invokes the exploitation implicit in the production of sugar by engaging in the laborious task of handmaking many of

the objects included in the installation. Cuba's sugar fields, Campos-Pons has explained, loomed large for her as places of familial and historical import. "When I tried to figure out how to construct the field, I could see in my mind, in my dreams, that green field, the sugar field. I wanted to express mobility and flexibility and sturdiness. I wanted to show what sugar production means to Africans" (Buttenwieser 2011). She designed and crafted the spears herself and made the glass discs that appear in her installation. Throughout the production of the exhibit, she explained, she remained constantly aware of the labor she was doing being somehow akin to how much labor goes into producing sugar. Her self-described task, in part, was to translate the extremely hard work entailed in this substance, to offer a sense of the intense effort involved—the relentless labor associated with sugar production (Buttenweiser 2011). There is in this recreation of the intensity and relentlessness of plantation labor, both in Campos Pons and Beuze, an element of penance—an understanding that as artists they have been spared the life of their ancestors but must remain committed to speaking to the history of a colonial enterprise that claimed millions of life and decimated hundreds of thousands of acres of land in the name of capitalist profit. Like Beuze, Campos Pons trusts to the importance of immersion in the cane field (visual, olfactory, spatial) to bring the museum audience into contact with the realities of the cane field.

In 2009, the same year Beuze opened his most recent iteration of *Machinique*—its bright yellow island with the menacing machines over it—and just months before Campos Pons *Sugar/Bittersweet* installation opened, Jamaican artist Charles Campbell unveiled the first iteration of his monumental *Bagasse* cycle, later featured in *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, a 2011 exhibit at the Museum of the Americas in Washington DC (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6 Charles Campbell, ***Transporter*** 2 (2011), screen print on card, metal clips, 101 × 101cm; ***Bagasse*** (2009) acrylic on canvas, 550 × 220cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Campbell, now the head curator of Jamaica's National Gallery of Art, shares Beuze's commitment to creating spaces for reflection by immersing the viewer in the materiality of the historical and ecological realities of Caribbean islands that share the same trajectory of imperial ruin. This Campbell accomplishes primarily through "a graphic codification" that seeks to transform daily experience "into patterns and signs:" in his work, miniature Dutch slave ships transform into DNA sequences, and atom-like forms become flocks of migrating birds (Cozier 2011, 11). I want to focus here on two of his recent installations. *Actor Boy/Bagasse* (2009–2010) features large-scale paintings of forms suggesting atoms and mandalas filled with *trompe l'oeil* detail that references a multiplicity of historical, cultural and environmental themes: slavery, the slave trade, bird migration/forced migration, slave ships, the sea, conflict and violence—all presented through repeated patterns in the service of the creation of the larger images. The second series, *The Transformer Project* (2011), translates the motifs and forms he developed in the first *Bagasse* series into large but remarkably light three-dimensional objects (primarily painted or laser-cut round sculptures, see above) on whose surface the earlier motifs are applied with a variety of techniques to produce "a play between heavily loaded political narratives and utopian ideals, image and object" (see Campbell's website at http://charlescampbellart.com).

Both installations share the same backdrop: a large-scale black-and-white painting that reproduces the visual disorder of milled cane and "speaks to the island's economic lifeblood that was once tended by slaves" (Tischler 2011). The painting, *Bagasse*, represents a bed of crushed canes as if seen from above, offering a vertical view of what is normally a horizontal landscape. In the painting, Campbell uses the same *trompe-l'oeil* of the accompanying paintings and sculptures to incorporate "embedded in the frenzied and telling lines"—hidden in the bagasse itself, that debris of the history and environmental devastation of the plantation—repeated images of the Dutch slave ships that brought their human cargo to the Caribbean. Tamara Flores writes that the painting "negates the traditional association of a painting as a window onto the world and as a beautiful object to offer instead a bleak vision of an anti-landscape. In a stark palette of black and white, the artist portrays a bird's-eye view of crushed stalks of sugar cane on the ground," suggesting "chaos and destruction" and forcing us, through a life-size representation of plantation debris covering the land, to "witness the traces of suffering that remain, stark reminders of the legacy of slavery" (Flores 2011, 21). In a review of the *Wrestling with the Image* exhibit, Marta Fernandez Campa speaks of an "ironic resemblance between [Jackson] Pollock's abstract work and the literal image of the bagasse in Campbell's painting," whose significance is enmeshed in the privileging of abstract over conceptual art in the west (Fernández Campa 2012, 12). Campbell has explained his use of bagasse as "a metaphor for an economic system that views society and human relationships as by-products," as part of a project that "attempts to

re-image the past in a way that liberates the future" (Cozier and Flores 2011, 42). This point in underscored by Michaeline Crichlow, when she writes:

> Here, Campbell seems to ask us to imagine history approached from the angle of its recyclable elements. But to experience the full impact of such imagining consider the way in which this crop was introduced into the so-called New World, the bitter sweetness of its production, its global reach sweetening the diets of so many, linking diverse geographies and fates, and the way in which it facilitated the crushing of so many humans, disposable bodies, and like bagasse considered detritus but not quite. Bagasse is now recycled as the ultimate product of sustainability and resilience as a form of energy. Its black and white appearance, captured here, is rendered stunning, abstract, a large triptych sanitized and objectified for a different presence and imagination. (2013, 131)

Bagasse shares with Campbell's earlier work, *Transformations and Meditations* (2004), a deeply ecological foundation. In *Bagasse*, the crushing of the natural world (what Campbells calls "the unnatural") creeps out from the interstices of the crushed cane, neither hidden nor forgotten. This unnaturalness, however, is balanced by a complex interplay of motifs that link the possibility of transcending the experience of slavery through the cyclical processes of the natural world. The installations show the natural order (the migrating bird and the metamorphosing insect, for example) as *healing* the wounds and violence of history. Migrating birds stand for slaves in the ship's hold before breaking into a flock in flight; butterflies interrupt patterns of "meditations" on slavery and violence. Campbell sees these transformative paintings and sculptures as means of suggesting "possibilities that exist outside of the deterministic view that may be implied by work that points to the past," of pointing to "the necessity of halting the trajectory that propels them from past events to future actions." On his website, he cites the work of Buckminster Fuller, the early environmental activist and designer of the geodesic dome, as a major influence on the development of his art, giving Fuller credit for inspiring his "playful use of pattern and symmetry" to counterbalance the "gravity of the underlying issues" he seeks to address. The sculptural forms of his sculptures, Campbell has argued, "point to Fuller's idea of a rational utopia" and allow him to navigate "between heavily loaded political narratives and utopian ideals, object and image, public and private spaces" (see Campbell's website at http://charlescampbellart.com).

Campbell's work seems to encapsulate the concerns of this subset of contemporary Caribbean artists whose "ephemeral installations," often so dependent on their evanescent material, underscore a shared preoccupation with the ways in which Caribbean nations, peoples and environments have been marked by the crushing and discarding of cane turned into molasses,

bagasse, ruined environments and impoverished exploited lives. His work shares with that of the other artists discussed here an insistence on the representation of the Caribbean region's legacy of colonial violence as constitutive to environmental representation. Together, their depictions of ruined landscapes and the crushing of cane through which this ruination is articulated, points to a violence that equally affects humans and nonhumans in an unbroken continuum. From Atelier Morales' sugar mill ruins, through Beuze and Campbell's insistence on the power of bagasse to capture the exploitation inherent to the plantation, to Campos-Pons incorporation of the sweet smell of decay in her symbol-laden reconstruction of a sugar field, these works demonstrate that the landscape of the plantation becomes a canvas for the reconstitution of the violent history of the Caribbean environment and the people who inhabit them.

In "There is a Country in the World," Dominican poet Pedro Mir spoke of the Caribbean as "an implausible archipelago/of sugar and alcohol" in which land and men "belong[ed] to the mill," exhorting his readers to "tell the wind the surnames/of the thieves and the caverns/and open your eyes on a disaster/the peasants have no land" (Mir 1949, 12, my translation). The works discussed above channel the spirit of Mir's passionate poem of dispossession as articulated through the landscape, bringing to museum audiences (local and international) powerful visual invitations to reconsider the legacy of the plantation as still holding sway over the islands' ecologies and peoples. I value in them, above all, their commitment to the recreation of the experience of the cane field—its heat, intense labor and crushing fatigue in return for impoverished lives—in ways that turn personal histories into emblematic visual narratives of the specificities of imperial ruination. Following Glissant's exhortation to "dig deep" in order to recover traces of ancestral memories, they have found in their close familial connections to the plantation a point of departure for the recreation of conflicted and vexed historical landscape.

NOTES

1. The environmental impact of the sugar plantation can be measured primarily through deforestation and the resulting soil erosion, loss of fertility and desertification (See Paravisini-Gebert 2011). A secondary impact has been that of species extinctions and loss of biodiversity (see Paravisini-Gebert 2014).
2. This includes, most particularly, *Caribbean Literatures and the Environment* (2005), edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson and George Handley, and *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011), edited by DeLoughrey and Handley.
3. This definition is drawn from guidelines for environmental art on the website of Greenmuseum (http://greenmuseum.org), an online museum for the global environmental art movement. Their list is based, according to the website, on guidelines suggested by the artist Lynne Hull. See http://greenmuseum.org/what_is_ea.php).
4. See also Thompson (2006) and Mitchell (1994).

5. For more on the impact of Delano's photographs see Rivera (1997), Benítez (1988), Goldman (1988), and Jack Delano (1997).
6. See Buttenwieser, "Sweet Sugar." This olfactory element, also true of Beuze's bagasse-filled island silhouettes, is one of the most salient featured of Tania Bruguera's work on sugar production for the 2000 Havana Biennial. The work was installed in a tunnel at la Fortaleza, a small colonial Havana fortress formerly used as a penitentiary cell and visitors entered the exhibit at one end of a guarded, cave-like space whose floor was covered by a thick bed of bagasse that kept fermenting in the heat at an increasing pace as the exhibit unfolded and which made walking through the exhibit somewhat hazardous. The first impression, as a result, was of the powerful and pervasive odor of fermentation. Disoriented by the darkness, the smell, and the effort required for walking over the bagasse, the viewer was drawn toward a blue light emanating from the distance that turned out to be a television screen silently projecting looped video images of Fidel Castro in his best "líder máximo" stance. A number of naked men were to be met during the trajectory. They made a series of repetitive gestures: one bowed rhythmically, another rubbed himself as if trying frantically to remove a stain, and so on. It was, in the opinion of one critic, and I quote, "as though Bruguera were presenting a philosophy of (national) history, in which people journey through a collective experience that can only be comprehended once they've reached its end, whereupon 'the past' reveals itself as having consisted of repeated rituals and empty gestures" (Israel 2001,148).

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