

Matías Montes Huidobro, *Persona, Vida y máscara en el teatro puertorriqueño* (San Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Tinglado Puertorriqueño), 151.

Helen Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the bean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 49.

In a different essay, I problematize this point by focusing on the fact that the ss cast as Mamá Toña was white and wore blackface. See, Camilla Stevens, "The ted Puerto Rican Stage: Lucy Boscana in *Vejigantes* and *La carreta*," *Latin American re Review* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2004).

José Luis González, *El país de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos* (Río Piedras, Puerto Ediciones Huracán, 1980), 43.

Daughter of famous Martinican intellectual Aimé Césaire, Ina Césaire's (b. 1941) in ethnography has focused on collecting and analyzing Antillean folktales. vard and Miller write that in traditional male-centered folktales, Césaire is re of how much of the main character's liberation—the main character being rs male—depends on the vilification of women. In oral tales female characters up primarily as stereotypical sorceresses, mothers, or empty-headed young en," in "Ina Césaire," Christiane P. Makward and Judith G. Miller (eds. and ), *Plays by French and Francophone Women: A Critical Anthology* (Ann Arbor: Uni- y of Michigan Press, 1994), 45.

Makward and Miller, "Ina Césaire," 47.

Bridget Jones, "Theatre and Resistance? An Introduction to some French Carib- Plays," in Sam Haigh (ed.), *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing. loupe and Martinique* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 84. Jones also points out the tension en the centrality of oral traditions associated with African cultures with the asis of the French educational system on written texts and French classical dra-

Hans Thies-Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006), 127.

*The Dragon Can't Dance* is based on Lovelace's 1979 novel of the same title. Prior run in Port of Spain during Carnival in 1986, the play received readings and gs in New York, Barbados, and Connecticut.

According to the 2011 census, the two largest ethnic minorities in Trinidad and o are Indians (35.4 percent) and Africans (34.2 percent). See Camille Bethel, us: Mixed Population," *Trinidad Express*, February 20 2013, <http://www.adexpress.com/internal?st=print&id=191944721&path=/news#>. The mix of peo- f African, European, East Indian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern descent has made ity the determining factor in Trinidad's social, cultural, political, and economic tions.

Kevin A. Yelvington, "Introduction," in Kevin A. Yelvington (ed.), *Trinidad Eth-* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 13.

Hill, *A Time and a Season*, viii.

Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 143–44.

Honor Ford-Smith, *Three Jamaican Plays: A Postcolonial Anthology (1977–1987)* (ston: Paul Issa, 2011), 13.

## SIX

### Bitter Sugar

#### *Teaching the Caribbean Plantation through Art*

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert

The linguistic complexity of the Caribbean region has always represented an obstacle to the teaching of pan-Antillean literatures and cultures. The scarcity of translations and divergent critical traditions continue to stand in the way of integrative approaches to Caribbean writing and other cultural work despite a growing understanding that scholarship on the Caribbean requires a multilingual/multidisciplinary approach. Two developments during the last decade—the growing creative and critical interest in visual culture and the increasing awareness of environmental threats to the region—have opened new approaches to the integrated study of pan-Caribbean cultures. Here, I would like to propose a model for such an integrative pedagogical approach, one that centers on the history of sugar cultivation in the Caribbean and focuses on the study of art projects that chronicle the environmental impact of the plantation on the region's agricultural societies.

In the discussion that follows, I analyze, through the prism of ecocritical theory, a specific subset of recent artistic production in the Caribbean: photographs, paintings, and installations that address the islands' history of sugar cultivation as a phenomenon with profound human and environmental costs, focusing primarily (but not exclusively) on the dialogue between Cuban and Jamaican arts and literatures. The cultivation of sugar cane by slave labor is undeniably the single most important development in Caribbean history, and its human and social costs have been amply documented in the region's literature and art. With the advent of



postcolonial ecocritical theory, however, we have begun to grasp the plantation's often irreversible impact on the environment. Sugar production, which required massive deforestation to clear land for planting and for wood to feed the boilers, quickly evolved into an overwhelming ecological revolution, and event that marked "an abrupt and qualitative break with the process of environmental and social change that had developed *in situ*."<sup>1</sup> An analysis of recent artistic responses to the impact of this ecological revolution can serve as our point of entry into the richness of the expressive possibilities open to Caribbean environmental artist in the twenty-first century and into an understanding of the theoretical presuppositions that underpin these new artistic explorations (presuppositions that also inform contemporary Caribbean literature). These insights, in turn, can help us establish connections between artistic and literary approaches, enriching our teaching and allowing for a broader-based approach to what is undoubtedly a central topic in Caribbean studies.

The representation of the Caribbean plantation in art has its roots in the popular landscape-with-sugar-plantation tradition that features so prominently in the history of art in the seventeenth to nineteenth century Caribbean—produced mostly by amateur planter artists or traveling painters. This tradition, represented by the work of Frans Post (1612–1680), Agostino Brunias (1730–1796), Michel-Jean Cazabon

(1813–1888), Víctor Patricio Landaluze (1828–1889), and Eduardo Laplante (1818–1860), among others, often subsumed the realities of plantation life (which included increasingly global patterns of exchange dependent on the subjugation and exploitation of the poor labor forces of the global south) to the desire of creating consumable images of picturesque otherness, marketable to those benefitting from the profits the industry generated or wishing to associate themselves with the illusion of leisure and wealth such landscapes project. This painterly tradition had its literary counterpart in the many descriptions of colonial life produced by residents and visitors to the Caribbean islands, such as Père (Jean-Baptiste) Labat's *Nouveau Voyage aux Isles de l'Amérique* (1722) and Maria Nugent's *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*, to name just two among the many such texts.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, in the hands of Creole painters sympathetic to the abolitionist movement, this painterly tradition begins to incorporate a critique of the plantation system, especially among those familiar with new social theories (socialism, among them) or influenced by the emerging labor and pro-democracy movements in postcolonial Latin America. Most notably among these painters 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 assumed power of an established Creole plantocracy. Oller sought, as Katherine Manthorne 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."<sup>2</sup> Like the abolitionist novel in the Caribbean—Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), Cirilo Vilaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1839), and Cynric R Williams's *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827), for example—Oller's paintings address the complex issue of race relations within the sugar plantation and the problematic relationship between the plantation and the land.

As heir to Oller's attempts to move these depictions of plantation landscapes to more realistic terrain (as Katherine Manthorne has demonstrated in her excellent analysis of Oller's deconstruction of the plantation order), we can read a similar transformational power at work in the photographs of Ukrainian-born American photographer Jack Delano (1914–1997). Delano 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 and remained until the end of his life, redefining sugar cane photography in the process.

In his photographs, Delano refocuses attention away from the plantation as background and towards the workers as suffering individuals, humanized through photographs that inscribe them into a history of la-



Figure 6.1. Jack Delano, T[enant] P[urchase] borrowers? by Their House, Puerto Rico. (December 1941 or January 1942). Photographic slide. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.



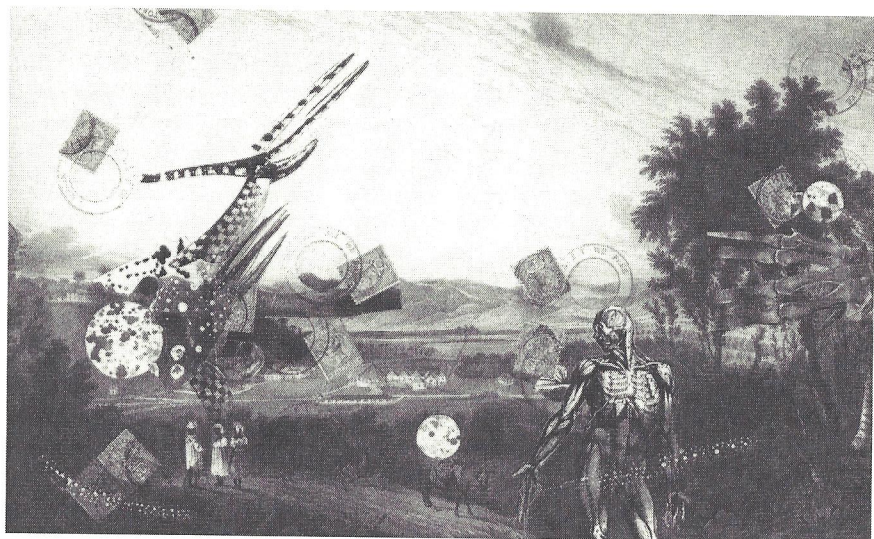


Figure 6.2. David Boxer's *Weston Favel Estate, Trelawny* (from triptych, *Memoirs of Colonization*, Kidd, s, 1838), 1994-95. 27x43 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

bor, penury, and malnutrition while accentuating their beauty and muscular strength. The central themes of Delano's photography, with their trajectory from realistic documentation to works that easily transcend the merely representational (as in his plantation landscape photographs, which underscore the storm and stress of plantation life), are echoed in Cuba's Mario Carreño's sugar worker's paintings and Jamaica's Albert Huie's plantation landscapes; these artists were committed to expressing 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. What Delano, Huie, and Carreño share is an absence of the nostalgia characteristic of previous artistic representations of the plantation as their work is inscribed in the socialist labor networks of the mid-twentieth century.

Paintings like *Crop Time* (above), which powerfully foreground the labor intensity and physical energy of sugar cultivations against the massive power of the sugar mill that dominates the upper half of the painting, can be "read" in dialogue with major literary works of the early twentieth century that capture the suffering and penury of cane workers through the plight of protagonists seeking to escape the cane lands through education, such as Enrique Laguerre's *La llamarada* (Puerto Rico, 1935), Ramón Marrero Aristy's *Over* (Dominican Republic, 1939), Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (Martinique, 1950), and Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando* (Trinidad and Tobago, 1965). It also reverberates through the strains of Pedro Mir's poetic masterpiece, *Hay un país en el*

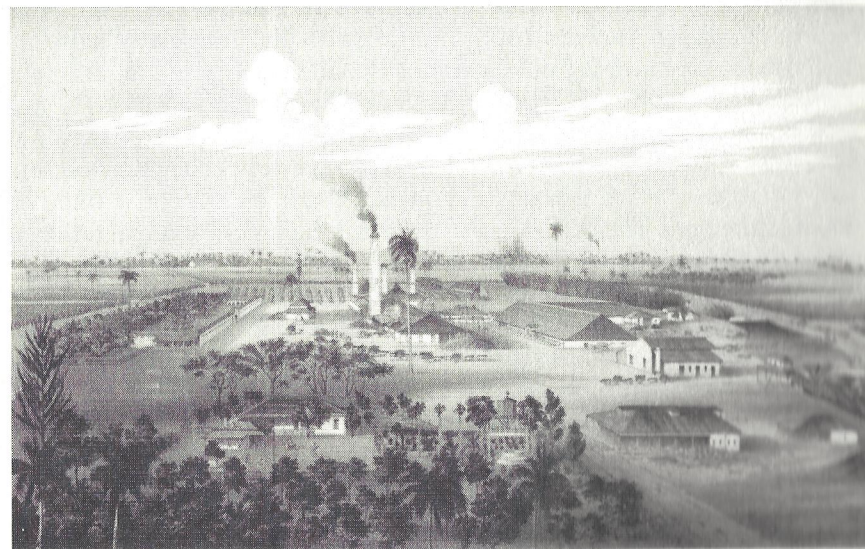


Figure 6.3. Eduardo Laplante, *Ingenio Tinguaro*, from Justo G. Cantero's *Los Ingenios: Colección de vistas de los principales ingenios de azúcar de la isla de Cuba* (1857).

*mundo* (Dominican Republic, 1949), with its repeated lament that "the peasants do not have land," and through the brief stanzas of Nicolás Guillén's "Caña" (Sugar Cane), from his 1931 collection *Sóngoro Cosong*, in which each brief stanza focuses on a different aspect of the cane field in relations to the workers (the Blacks) and the exploiters (whom Guillén calls "Yanqui").

As we enter the twenty-first century, the juxtaposition of workers' powerlessness against plantation might that we see captured so eloquently in Delano and Huie's work continues to feature prominently in Caribbean art and literature. In the half-century that has elapsed between the production of works like *Crop Time* or *Hay un país en el mundo*, the plantation has maintained its centrality in literary and artistic work. From Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces* (1962) and Rosario Ferré's *Maldito amor* (1986) through Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984) and Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988) the masterpieces of Caribbean literature have continued to feature the plantation as a contested social, economic, and racialized space. The same is true of Caribbean art, where the sugar plantation continues to appear as an unavoidable leitmotif in works as different as Rafael Tufiño's *Cortador de Caña* (Puerto Rico, 1951) and David Boxer's phantasmagoric *Weston Favel Estate, Trelawny* (Jamaica, 1994-95), where a plantation scene surrounded by cane fields offers a background for the superimposition of a variety of images (a flayed man, Victorian postage



stamps, the skeleton of a hand) that capture the enduring destructiveness of the plantation. Boxer's triptych is of particular interest because it is built on the overlapping of discordant visual elements over a nineteenth century lithograph by Scottish artist Joseph Bartholomew Kidd. The original lithograph, from Kidd's *West Indian Scenery*, a series of fifty published in 1837–1840, sought to convey a picture of bucolic order centered on the estate house. Boxer's overlaying, with its skeletal hands and blood-splattered circles, forces a different historical interpretation on Kidd's image of placid plantation serenity on the viewer, highlighting in the process the fissures in Kidd's colonial imagination. As Anne Walmley and Stanley Greaves argue in *Art in the Caribbean*, Boxer's appropriation and reinterpretation of Kidd's image suggests that "history is created by the contrasting images of old and new."<sup>3</sup>

Boxer's superimposed elements resonate particularly against recent photographic work by Atelier Morales (Cuban architect Juan Luis Morales and his wife and artistic partner Teresa Ayuso) who, in their 2004 series *Los ingenios: Patrimonio a la deriva* (*Adrift Patrimony: Sugar Refineries*) seek to capture "with a bitterly beautiful technique of digital photography and gouache the ruined remnants" of the once thriving sugar industry in Cuba.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest in our context is Atelier Morales' dialogue with 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 principales ingenios de azúcar de la isla de Cuba*. Morales discovered a

copy of the book in a Paris flea market and was inspired by Laplante's "colorful landscapes of smokestacks towering higher than royal palms and his romanticized view of life on the plantations."<sup>5</sup>

For this Laplante-inspired project, the artists returned to Cuba to photograph the sugar mills as they are today—the old machinery rusted, the wood buildings collapsed, the sites abandoned, some half-submerged in water, others covered by bush. The resulting photographs transmute Laplante's romanticized view of life in the plantation into a contemporary "tale of loss and an ode to poetic memory."<sup>6</sup> Morales and Ayuso's chief concern in this series is the loss of memory and history—particularly what they described in an interview with Fabiola Santiago as the sad deterioration of Cuba's historical patrimony: "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.<sup>7</sup>

Morales and Ayuso's note of regret for the loss of this "patrimony" is perceptible in their own romanticized approach to the photography of the ruins, as we can see from the example included here, that of the Tinguaro plantation. Emerging from the bush, the rusted machinery underscores the decaying infrastructure of an abandoned, superseded industry, while the images can also be read as illustrations of another kind of decline and obsolescence—that of nature trying to regain its ascendancy over a formerly abused terrain. The nostalgia, which 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 drive-

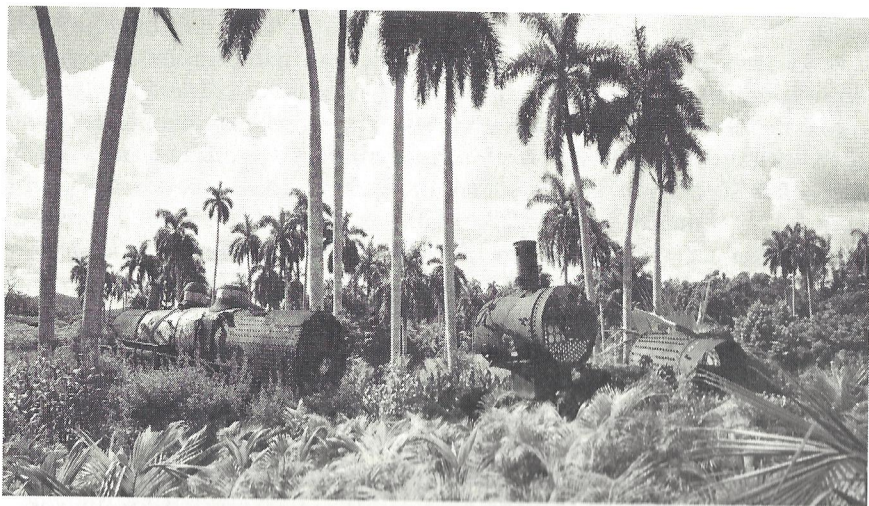


Figure 6.4. Atelier Morales, Tinguaro (from the *Adrift Patrimony: Sugar Refineries* series), photograph and gouache, 2004. Courtesy of Atelier Morales.



Figure 6.5. Atelier Morales, Recogida No.2 (From the *Bohios: Adrift Patrimony/Tribute to Quetrelles*), 2003. Courtesy of Atelier Morales.



way in *Unión* (2004) or the harmonious sequence of palm trees and rusted building posts of *Constancia* (2004), functions as a not-too-subtle critique of the Castro government for allowing this part of Cuba's historical legacy to go to ruin and is at odds with Cuba's official reinterpretation of its plantation legacy. (Although Cuba is not without its own plantation tourism industry, as the well-preserved structures of the *Valle de los Ingenios* attest.)

The prints, painted with traces of gouache, were meant, as Morales explained in the interview with Fabiola Santiago, "to rescue the romantic charge that Laplante brought to his lithographs in the nineteenth century with illumination, composition, and color. You don't see the cruel world of slavery in the plantations, and we wanted to recuperate that beautiful part. It's not a negation of the bad part of history. We wanted to show that history, good and bad, being erased, disappearing."<sup>8</sup> For Morales, this loss is linked to the deplorable loss of Cuba's art, books, and archival documents, stolen or sold by individuals to survive the penuries of the *Período Especial* that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union left Cuba in serious financial straits. (This loss of artistic and cultural patrimony has been amply documented and is the subject of Leonardo Padura's *La neblina del ayer* (2005, *Havana Fever*, 2009).

It is precisely in this *erasure* that I see 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

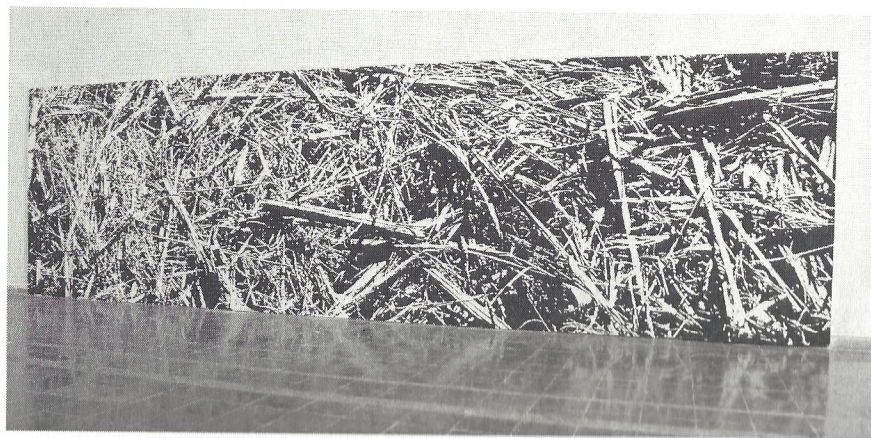


Figure 6.6. Charles Campbell, *Bagasse Cycle 1 (Bagasse)*, acrylic on canvas (2009) 550 x 220 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

been abandoned, the toll of the plantation on formerly fertile lands. 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 cultivation, civilization, by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable forest. When a landscape becomes ruinate, carefully designed aisles of cane are entwined, 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.<sup>9</sup>

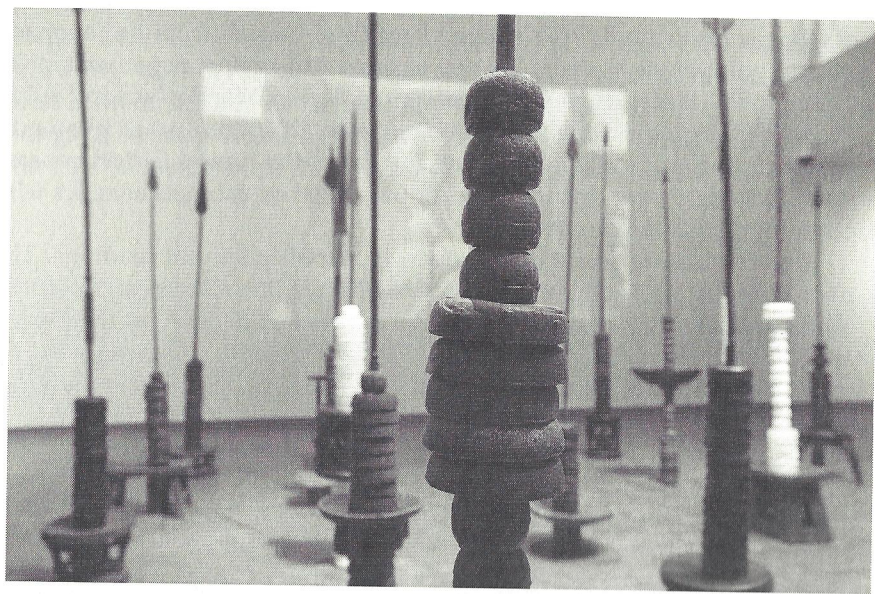
Cliff's concerns are primarily with the welcomed power of nature to obliterate the marks of colonization on the Jamaican landscape and as such are ideologically at odds with Atelier Morales' regret for the loss of these markers of history (however negative their implications) as part of a historical patrimony that marks what the nation has experienced. The concept, however, allows us to pinpoint the ways in which Atelier Morales' photographs open themselves to a multiplicity of readings, including those who see in the images a chronicle of the erasure of an uncelebrated history. (As a photograph, *Tinguaro* works both as a beautiful image of the *recovery* of the rusted machinery through art or as an equally beautiful image of the process of erasure of a historical marker about to disappear into ruinate.) This second reading—which from the environmental point of view posits the power of nature against negative historical legacies—is also open to the viewers of Atelier Morales' second *Adrift Patrimonies* series, *Bohíos/Tribute to Quetrelles* (2010), a mix of photography, painting, and collage featuring images of the typical Cuban peasant huts stacked up over drifting boats or displayed on cabinets as relics with other highly valued objects.

This fascinating series is also open to a multiplicity of readings. The photographs, particularly the subset of photos titled *Classifications*, focus on the peasant huts as a species on the verge of extinction, as these once emblematic Cuban/Caribbean dwellings are rapidly being replaced by less attractive but more durable cement structures. Architects by training, Morales and Ayuso use the photographs as a space for recovery of a patrimony literary *adrift*, most particularly in those photographs where the huts are seen either floating on rowboats or semi-submerged in rivers and lakes. This *adrift* quality of the photographs has prompted Fabiola Santiago to read the images as allusions to migration, describing the huts "as if they too were leaving the island"; but they can also be read as inscribing the artists' concern with historical loss into the fear for the loss and deterioration of Cuba's architectural landscape.<sup>10</sup> A third possible reading of the images is that of inscribing them into the losses already accrued and/or expected in Cuba as a result of rising sea levels, of which the abandonment of Puerto Casilda (founded in 1702), the seaport of the



southern Cuban town of Trinidad (a UNESCO World Heritage site) is an example. The fate of the port town links the two iterations of the *Adrift Patrimony* series (*Bohíos* and *Sugar Refineries*) and their 2004 series *It's Only Life* through their environmental components.

Casilda, now nearly abandoned (and soon to be literally adrift), is the nearest seaport to the Valley of the Sugar Mills. In the nineteenth century it served as the main port of entry for thousands of slaves, building materials and furnishings for the sugar barons' palatial homes in Trinidad. Low-lying and prone to increasingly severe flooding due to rising sea levels, in the early 1990's the Cuban government began a voluntary migration of the population to government-sponsored public housing inland, a movement that has seen increasingly large segments of the population abandon the now-forlorn town of traditional huts and wood cottages, which seems on its way to becoming the Caribbean's first environmentally-driven government-sponsored ghost town. Residents who have opted to move to the public housing describe flash floods during which the water was breast-high and belongings (mattresses, books, photographs) were lost, and praise their new housing as offering respite from changing weather conditions and regular and uninterrupted utilities and



**Figure 6.7.** María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Installation shot from exhibition: *Sugar*, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts. Copyright: María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Stephen Petegorsky photographer. 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 Art Museum, Northampton, Massachusetts. Photograph by Stephen Petegorsky.

services. The gradual and government-organized abandonment of Casilda presages what will certainly be a more dramatic exodus to come, as the town of Trinidad, a UNESCO heritage site, was listed in *Newsweek's* list of 100 special places around the world that would disappear by the mid-twenty-first century if climatologists are correct in their predictions about the impact of global climate change.

The story of Casilda—of its architectural, historical, cultural, and material losses to the encroaching sea—provides a rich environmental context to Atelier Morales' concern with the "muddling" quality of the loss of memory and patrimony that they illustrate so eloquently in their three photographic series. The poignant image of *Agua (Water)* from *No es más que la vida/It Is No More than Life Itself* (2003–2004) echoes the testimonies of the people who left Casilda as poignant refugees of climate change—their stories of lost photographs, books, family mementoes mirrored in Atelier Morales' image of a china cabinet depicted "as if slowly drowning": "On the top shelf, one can clearly see a set of dainty antique demitasse cups. But with each shelf, items get murkier, more difficult to recognize, until water completely clouds over the cabinet."<sup>11</sup>

At the center of Atelier Morales' concern with Cuba's disappearing patrimony we find a preoccupation with the integrity of the island nation that echoes Michelle Cliff's concern with ruinate. They share the same unease about how to address creatively the problematic legacy of the plantation system in Jamaica and Cuba. Both Cliff and Atelier Morales, however, extend this concern with nation-building/destruction from the cane fields to their home islands' relationships to the not-always-benign sea that has also shaped their nations' destinies. Cliff, in *The Land of Look Behind* (1985), wrote of "reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the cane fields, or gone to bush."<sup>12</sup> Atelier Morales, in an impressive entry in the *Adrift Patrimony* series *The Baths: Tribute to Federico Mialhe*, (*Los Balnearios: Tributo a Federico Mialhe*, 2006–2007), focus on haunting photos of nineteenth and early-twentieth century Cuban seaside resorts disappearing into the sea, a reflection "upon the loss of the Cuban baths as small, recreational and therapeutic havens to give place to massive and impersonal tourist complexes" (Menocal, "Los Balnearios"). This series interests me particularly because of its ability to address both Morales and Ayuso's anxieties about governmental neglect of architectural patrimony and speaks to the Cuban coast as a site of aggressive coastal erosion. (A recent Associated Press report quotes Adán Zúñiga of Cuba's Center for Coastal Ecosystems Research as having identified "some 900 coastal structures [that] have been contributing to an average 4 feet (1.2 meters) of annual coastal erosion." Inspectors and demolition crews are well on their way to razing thousands of houses, restaurants and improvised docks "in a race to restore much of the coast to something approaching its natural state."<sup>13</sup>



As environmental photographers/artists and exiled Cubans, Morales and Ayuso have created an art whose point of departure is a space of nostalgia, a space of in-betweenness 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 and the early indicators of climate change affecting Cuba. Mariana Ortega, in a study of the spatial aspects of the work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, sees the late Cuban multi-media artist, especially in her *Siluetas* Series, as occupying a similar space of "home-sickness" that takes us "both to the representational space of a work of art and also to the space which claims both presence and absence, a space perhaps fueled by the nostalgia of those who experience exile."<sup>14</sup> Ortega sees Mendieta's work as linked deeply with climate, "a climate permeated by space, time, and history"—a link that applies just as aptly to Atelier Morales's work, in which the specificities of the neglect they record in their multivalent images is also documented on the neglected objects (architecture, sugar mills, sea baths) as manifested through the ravages of Cuba's specific climate:

Here the space- and time-structure of human existence is revealed as climate and history: the inseparability of time and space is the basis of the inseparability of history and climate. No social formation could exist if it lacked all foundation in the space-structure of man, nor does time become history unless it is founded in such social being, for history is the structure of existence in society . . . it is from the union of climate with history that the latter gets its flesh and bones.<sup>15</sup>

Charles Campbell, Jamaican-born artist now based in Canada, shares Atelier Morales' commitment to creating spaces for reflection by immersing the viewer in the materiality of the historical and ecological realities of the Caribbean islands—something Campbell accomplishes primarily through "a graphic codification" that seeks to transform daily experience "into patterns and signs": in his work Dutch slave ships transform into DNA sequences, and atom-like forms become flocks of migrating birds.<sup>16</sup>

He has produced a number of installation, painting, and performance series over the last decade, of which two are of interest in our context. *Actor Boy/Bagasse* (2009–2010), the first iteration of his monumental *Bagasse* cycle (featured in *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, a 2011 exhibit at the Museum of the Americas in Washington DC) offers 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) 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."<sup>17</sup>

Both installations share the same backdrop: a large-scale black-and-white painting (see above) that reproduces the visual disarray of crushed cane and seeks to address the painful legacy of slavery and land exploitation in the Caribbean. The painting, *Bagasse*, represents a bed of milled 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, in the catalog for *Wrestling with the Image*, which she co-curated, 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 to "witness the traces of suffering that remain, stark reminders of the legacy of slavery."<sup>18</sup> 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."<sup>19</sup>

*Bagasse* shares with Campbell's earlier work, *Transformations and Meditations* (2004), a deeply ecological foundation. In *Bagasse*, the crushing of the natural world (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."<sup>20</sup> 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 in both iterations of the *Bagasse* series. 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."<sup>21</sup>

Campbell's search for historical, environmental and personal balance finds a counterpart in María Magdalena Campos-Pons' *Sugar/Bittersweet*, an 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 has spoken frequently about her personal connection to Cuba's history of sugar production. 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 (see above), 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."<sup>22</sup>

Campos-Pons conceived the site-specific multi-media *Sugar/Bittersweet* installation as a reimagining of the 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.<sup>23</sup> 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 (Muehlig). In all, the installation, which is accompanied by a video 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.<sup>24</sup> The installation included actual sugary cakes, the smell of which was "contagious, pervasive." Set against sterile white floor and walls, the work conveys 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.

Campos-Pons invokes the exploitation implicit in the production of sugar by engaging in the laborious task of hand-making many of the objects included in the installation. Cuba's sugar fields, Campos-Pons explained in a lecture she delivered at Smith, 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."<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

Campos Pons' work seems to encapsulate the concerns of this subsector of contemporary Caribbean artists whose "ephemeral installations," often so dependent on their evanescent material, underscores a collective concern 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. Her work—which underscores the vegetable nature of the Caribbean's historical trajectory—is echoed across the region through a number of paintings and installations that include Orestes Campos' 1994 series on *The Palofini Couple*, which transposes the couple from Jan Van Eyck's 1434 *Giovanni Arnolfini and his Bride* from their Renaissance time to the fields and wood and galvanized metal sheds of Cuba's sugar production; or Carlos Sobrino's early (1966) portrait of a sugar cane worker painted on one of the sacks used to carry sugar cane; or Sonia Boyce's video installations titled *Crop Over*, a 2007 pseudodocumentary rooted in the many traditions, histories, and cultural practices that inform this Barbadian festival, which directly addresses the subversive elements and inversions of traditional carnival to the sugar economy of the Caribbean and its historical dependence on slavery; or Jamaican artist Philomena Francis' installations series, which uses the unconventional method of painting with treacle to address both the historical impact of the sugar industry and the slave trade and the pervasive association of black women's bodies with brown sugar. As artists, they are working with themes and motifs that reverberate through contemporary Caribbean literature: Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), Maryse Condé's *Traversé de la mangrove* (1990), Lakshmi Persaud's *For the Love of My Name* (2000), Mayra Montenegro's *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995) and *Del rojo de tu sombra* (1992), Ismith Khan's *The Jumbie Bird* (1985), Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) among many others. All together, their work, by engaging the painful complexities of the Caribbean's agrarian past, taps into a shared know-



edge of our history and cultures—often pointing to the very core of what constitutes environmental art: to contextualize art in its historical and environmental setting, encouraging us to appreciate what is objectively “true” of our environmental condition.

Through this discussion, I have sought to underscore the rich contributions that the incorporation of art and art history can make to our study of the history of the plantation in the Caribbean. The history of art in the region, as I have attempted to demonstrate through a number of examples, has developed alongside that of our literatures, opening possibilities for curricular cross-fertilization in the examination of the dialogue between the two traditions. The history of the plantation, moreover, opens the possibility of the examination of both art and literature through an ecocritical lens, since in both art and literature the examination of the plantation moves from questions of landscape to discussions of deforestation, land misuse, erosion and loss of fertility. The richness of curricular possibilities opened by art history and environmentalism can help us transcend linguistic barriers. Art transcends language, while environmental conditions, and most especially environmental threats, unite the islands and territories of the Caribbean through links that connect beyond words.

## NOTES

1. Elinor Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12. For a detailed discussion of the literary representations of the impact of deforestation see Paravisini-Gebert's "Deforestation and the Yearning for Lost Landscapes in the Caribbean," in Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (eds.), *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 99–116.
2. Katherine Manthorne, "Plantation Pictures in the Americas, circa 1880: Land, Power and Resistance," *Neplanta: Views from South* 2.2 (2001): 317–353, 321.
3. Anne Walmsley and Stanley Greaves, *Art in the Caribbean: an Introduction* (Boston: New Beacon Books, 2010), 46.
4. Fabiola Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," *Hispanic* 18:4 (April 2005): 52–53, 52.
5. Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," 52.
6. Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," 52.
7. Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," 52.
8. Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," 52.
9. Michelle Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 3:3 (Summer 2003): 157–160.
10. Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," 52.
11. Santiago, "The Art of the Americas Is Hot," 52.
12. Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter," 14. My emphasis.
13. See Andrea Rodríguez, "Cuba Battles the Effect of Climate Change," *Voxxi*. <http://www.voxxi.com/cuba-battles-effect-of-climate-change/#ixzz2W8inO5Pa>. See also <http://repeatingislands.com/2013/06/13/cuba-battles-the-effect-of-climate-change/>. Accessed on June 13, 2013. n.p.
14. Mariana Ortega, "Exiled Space, In-Between Space: Existential Spatiality in Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* Series," *Philosophy and Geography* 7:1 (February 2004): 25–41, 26.

15. Tetsuro Watsuji, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, Geoffrey Bownas (trans.), (New York: Greenwood Press, 1961), 9–10; quoted in Ortega, "Exiled Space, In-Between Space," 38.
16. Christopher Cozier, "Notes on Wrestling with the Image," in Christopher Cozier and Tatiana Flores (eds.), *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions* (Washington DC: Art Museum of the Americas/Organization of American States, 2011), 1–15.
17. Charles Campbell, *Bagasse Cycle 1 (Bagasse)*, acrylic on canvas (2009) 550 x 220 cm.
18. Tatiana Flores, "In Defense of Palm Trees," in Christopher Cozier and Tatiana Flores (eds.), *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions* (Washington DC: Art Museum of the Americas/Organization of American States, 2011), 16–25.
19. Christopher Cozier and Tatiana Flores (eds.), *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions* (Washington DC: Art Museum of the Americas/Organization of American States, 2011), 42.
20. See "The Transporter" at <http://charlescambellart.com/artwork/projects/transporter>.
21. See "The Transporter" at <http://charlescambellart.com/artwork/projects/transporter>.
22. Lynne Bell, "History of People Who Were Not Heroes: A Conversation with María Magdalena Campos-Pons," *Third Text* 43 (Summer 1998): 33–42, 35.
23. Helen Thornham and Elke Weissmann, *Renewing Feminisms: Radical Narratives, Fantasies and Futures in Media Studies* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 96.
24. Sarah Bittenwieser, "Sweet Sugar, Salty Tears: The Introspective Art of Magdalena Campos-Pons," *HandEye Magazine*, March 17, 2011, <http://handeyemagazine.com/content/sweet-sugar-salty-tears-0>. Accessed on February 2, 2012.
25. See Bittenwieser, "Sweet Sugar, Salty Tears."
26. See Bittenwieser, "Sweet Sugar, Salty Tears."