



PROGRAMMED BY  
TRIANGLE - ASTÉRIDES,  
CENTRE D'ART  
CONTEMPORAIN  
D'INTÉRÊT NATIONAL

Dominique  
White

Cinders of  
the Wreck

Exhibition  
March 12 to  
June 5, 2022

SOLO EXHIBITION

CURATED BY  
CÉLINE KOPP

YOU COULD  
BURN  
EVERYTHING  
TO THE  
GROUND  
AND IT  
STILL  
WOULDN'T  
BE ENOUGH

---

# A conversation between

# Dominique White and Céline Kopp

---

Dominique White's works are inhabited by her research on Afro-pessimistic and Afro-futuristic theories stemming from the writings of Fred Moten, Alexis Pauline Gumbs or Saidiya Hartman. They are also swayed by the nautical myths of Black Diaspora developed in the depiction of an underwater nation produced by the Detroit techno scene and groups such as Drexciya or Underground Resistance, whose music punctuate and accompany her production time in her studio. Her sculptures are born of an exhaustion of the materials used, which implies a full physical commitment at the time of their creation. The visual vocabulary that the artist develops in her work directly echoes the sea, and more particularly the deep waters and the political narratives that surround them and which she puts into dialogue with the black condition. Dominique White explores the evocative power of "The Shipwreck" and abandoned ships through the use of destroyed sails, harpoon-like shapes, tired ropes, and materials such as kaolin, mahogany, iron, water and fire, as the main components of her sculptures. She resonates these elements with a past, a present and a future history of struggle, resilience and protest that is formed in the destruction, debris, battles and remnants they leave. As powerful as they are fragile, the bodies of works exhibited in *Cinders of the Wreck* have their own autonomy, whose evolution is materialised in their slow and gradual deterioration. It is also a continuity of Dominique White's previous exhibition "Hydra Decapita" (VEDA Florence, 2021), in which the artist inverts the theories developed by Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh in their book *The Many-Headed Hydra*, and depicts the State (in all its capitalist, colonialist and racist forms) as the mythological beast to be beheaded and slain.

---

*The following conversation between Dominique White and Céline Kopp took place in March 2022 during the preparation of the exhibition “Cinders of the Wreck” at Triangle – Astérides centre d’art contemporain d’intérêt national in Marseille, France.*

---

[CK] Dominique, let’s start this in a simple way: what are we in the presence of when entering the exhibition “Cinder of the Wreck”?

---

[DW] We are facing four large bodies of work functioning individually as well as one entity filling the space with a ghostly yet actively destructive presence. Their form is the result of quartered conglomerates of sisal, raffia, and kaolin, targeted by harpoon-like shapes made in mahogany and iron. I think you would describe it as you are witnessing a battle in action... something that has happened – or is happening. This is actually how I would like to see all the work: so that it has room to transform. With previous works I often saw their presence in-between a capture or an escape. Here the work is very active, the visitors are going to be in contact with movements taking up and disrupting the space.

---

[CK] This “disruption” is also visible with the materials that you exhaust in the studio, and during the installation of the exhibition. It relates to the idea of “the Shipwreck”, a term present in the title of this exhibition that you also use to define your entire practice. Can you speak a little bit about the idea of the Ship in your work? (Here I should probably add to the attention of the French audience, that Black Studies – an academic field which is not so present in France – , traces the construction of race in the 16th century with the Atlantic Slave trade, and situates the birth of Blackness, as a concept, on the boat.)

---

[DW] Yes it’s important to start with the Ship. I am not referring to one ship in particular or to one specific period in time. My work talks about all the Ships. But I can name three different ships to give you examples of how the same narrative occurs repetitively across time. It is the same thing that mutates. The first would be the British slave ship Zong, which departed the coast of Africa in 1781 with 470 slaves. There is speculation behind the captain and the crew’s true motives, but at some point in the voyage, he captain decided to “offload” some of the cargo – meaning mass murder around 130 enslaved people – allegedly in order to save the ship and provide the owners the opportunity to claim for the loss on their insurance. But then, upon arriving in Jamaica, the claim was rejected leading to a series of court cases that triggered the abolitionist movement in Great Britain. I’m not so much interested in slavery being the sole origin story of Blackness, but I am drawn to the description of Blackness as cargo or as a fungible object.

---

[CK] More recent occurrences would bring the subject of migration, false promises of better lives, labor, and flight from wars and weather related disasters...

---

[DW] The second Ship I would mention in relation to my practice is the MV Empire Windrush, which was a WWII war trophy. This ship is also this representation of blackness as potential cargo: in this case exploitative, disposable labor. It first docked in the UK in 1948 and spelled the beginning of this migration scheme that continued until 1971, bringing

thousands of people from its colonies; Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other islands, to help fill post-war UK labor shortages. They arrived with the promise of streets filled with gold, a wealth of jobs and citizenship in the 'motherland' and instead were faced with segregation, violence and eventual disenfranchisement. It was then revealed in the 2010s that the UK had actively destroyed any trace of these individuals arriving, thus destroying the livelihoods of whole families overnight, leading to deportation, homelessness and death. For me, it very much broke this image of "legal" immigration, stability or even this notion of nationality. I'm a Windrush descendant who originally used this as a site of questioning in relation to Statelessness, security and the mutations of the State and Empire.

I also think that it is important to talk about the ongoing demonisation of the migrant boat, and specifically the 'left to die' case of 2011, where three nations (Malta, France and Italy) surveilled a dinghy crossing the Mediterranean for a matter of weeks. The few survivors of this voyage stated that their surveillants were sometimes so close that they could almost see the characteristics of the surveillant's face, yet they were left to die at sea. Again I view this as an incarnation of the ship as this container for the Blackness, as this vessel that is always designated for death and in fact a container that always needs to be contained. Despite each movement of the ship being closely tracked in such minute detail, there were only nine survivors who washed up on the shore of Tripoli who were quickly imprisoned. They began their voyage with seventy nine people on board.

---

[CK] Therefore the idea of the Wreck, materially visible in your work, calls for the destruction of the system that keeps denying people the status of Humans...?

---

[DW] What I am proposing with my work and with what I call "The Shipwreck" is to abolish the idea of the boat as the vessel of Blackness. My work does not convey an idea of reform, it proposes a total destruction of this container. A complete decategorisation.

---

[CK] In that regard, the title brings up the presence of cinders. It is the first time we can see this much burnt wood in your work? Can you say a word about this and how it relates to your current artistic research about the Hydra?

---

[DW] This exhibition is the second part of a research that has to do with the Hydra, a serpentine water monster in Greek and Roman mythology. In the canonical myth, the monster is killed by Hercules as the second of his Twelve Labors to reach immortality. My interest in this myth comes from a book that was written twenty years ago by Markus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh called "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic". In this book he talks about the early formation of capitalism which he identifies with the figure of Hercules. The Hydra's many regenerating heads are the slaves, pirates and rebels who resisted the global commercial order and disrupted the slave trade for decades. Here, with this new research I inverted these characters and

proposed to look at the Hydra as the system – or the State – we need to destroy.

The first exhibition at Veda in Florence was called "Hydra Decapita". It was about cutting the heads of the beast. Here I wanted to focus on its regenerative power, its constant adaptation and regrowth. The myth recounts that Hercules defeated the Hydra by cauterizing the decapitated heads with a sword and fire, but in some accounts one head remains immortal. The pessimist in me is looking at it as something that never dies.

---

[CK] You were talking about decategorisation earlier, it is interesting to see how each material that you physically engage with, such as mahogany, iron, sails...has such a strong symbolic content.

---

[DW] Mahogany is a material that emerged in my work last year. Like iron, I see it as a fungible replacement for Blackness. Its presence in Europe, and the rise of furniture made in mahogany, was linked with the Atlantic trade. It has a complex history linked with wealth, deforestation, control of fugitives, and riots...because it was so exploited it almost disappeared from the Caribbean. It is extremely stubborn, therefore it only grows in certain places and is now heavily protected, thus creating an extended family of mahoganies to fill the global demand.. For a while, mahogany was the indication of emancipation as freed slaves used mahogany furniture as a symbol of a new era, a new status. However, as the State started to re-write history and mutate, it became a symbol of exploitation and false promises of emancipation. I often wonder if true liberation is ever possible under this system and tend to doubt it completely with the constant cycle of State violence.

---

[CK] The bent mahogany poles evoking the Hydra's heads are not deeply burnt. Only on the surface. It surely brings up a pessimistic take on the possibility of destroying the beast, and therefore about emancipation...

---

[DW] Materially speaking when you burn something it always leaves ashes. Many people try to overthrow the State, but it always readapts -as Kimberly Latrice Jones states in her viral video 'How Can We Win', "... as far as I'm concerned, we could burn this bitch to the ground and it still wouldn't be enough...". I have also been reading Rinaldo Walcott's last book whilst producing, which not only reaffirmed some pessimist/nihilist beliefs, but also argued that wherever Black people have been emancipated from whatever constraints, a potential freedom has always been thwarted through the mutation of said constraints. This then positions this need for the outside, for the beyond – an imagination of something completely new.

---

[CK] Beyond fire, you were also telling me the other day that you realized that every single material here had been soaked or exposed to water at some point of the process... let's speak about this "beyond" and about the importance of the underwater world in your work...

---

[DW] The mahogany poles are soaked for days, sometimes weeks before being able to bend (or in this case fracture) with the extra help of hours of extremely hot steam. These fractured casts of buoys are cast using a blend of kaolin and water, before everything is again soaked in this mixture. Even the cast and forged iron aspects are submerged in water to achieve this layer of rust and deterioration.. This fascination with iron stemmed from Kathryn Yussof's depiction of iron being used in the hold of the Ship and beyond through its many iterations. Did you know that its the quickest way to identify a Slave Ship through its ruins? The harpoon heads are bent and distorted, as if they have also been extracted from a shipwreck lost to time and have become useless after being eroded by the sea. Likewise, with the mooring springs, they've been reimagined beyond their initial use and material, rendering them useless. Instead of being produced in steel, they are reimagined in iron, thus loosing their flexibility and ability to absorb shock from the waves. They stop protecting the boat and therefore brings instability to the work, just like the tired ropes and the rafia nets. I like the idea that everything could potentially snap and fall, and maybe ultimately be dragged back into water – almost as a means of escaping.

---

[CK] This is also why kaolin has been a constant in your work, because it is water soluble?

---

[DW] Kaolin has been constant in my work for seven years now. It is very ephemeral and unstable. You can find it in pretty much everything you touch in daily life, from paper to paint to cosmetics and sometimes even food. I also like the fact that it bleeds into everything you touch. People in the exhibition will carry it with them under their shoes, leaving traces throughout the space and even further. I actually see the moment I paint the work with kaolin as a moment where the work becomes alive, as if we are bearing witness to this moment that is frozen in time... for how long? Who knows?

---

[CK] Earlier I used a word that I actually borrowed from you. This potential "beyond" that can be felt by looking at the ghostly materiality of your work. Can you also talk about how it also brings up notions of time and futurity?

---

[DW] The idea of beyond or the imaginings of another world in this stage of capitalism can seem impossible. The pessimist or perhaps the nihilist in me ponders whether there is even the need for imagination if the Hydra is waiting to respawn its many heads and mutate each generation? But that would negate the need for other histories, relics and storytelling. It would also deny those before me who have dreamed of shaking this container. I tend to reference Detroit Techno a lot for this reason, as I see them as the current-day afro-futurists imagining realms underwater, Outer Space or... in fact anywhere beyond this current incarnation of land and borders. Of course, there were predecessors who imagined a Black Planet, who imagined Statelessness aboard the Pirate ship, who imagined life in the rocky hills away from the plantation. To even dream of these futures, is to flatten time akin to the timelessness experienced at sea. There's a quote

by Christina Sharpe that will live forever in my mind in which she states that "Nobody dies of old age at sea" and that those of us who are "thrown, jumped and dumped overboard... are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time." (Sharpe, 2016)

---

[CK] Let's end this conversation with this beautiful idea that energy never dies below the waves?

---

[DW] And that time is not linear. My work opens up a space of limbo. Shipwreck(ing) is about reinstating the lost rutters that move beyond a single "home", geographical place or time. It is about a place where land can become irrelevant, and where the living and dead intertwine. Since there is no guarantee of emancipation, a new world must rise from the ashes.

# About Dominique White

Dominique White (b. 1993, UK) lives in Marseille (FR) and works nomadically. Recent exhibitions include “Hydra Decapita” at VEDA Firenze, Florence; “Techno Worlds” at Art Quarter Budapest and “Blackness in Democracy’s Graveyard” at UKS, Oslo (all 2021). White was awarded the ad occhi chiusi... prize by Fondazione Merz in 2021 and the Roger Pailhas Prize in 2019 in conjunction with her solo presentations with VEDA Firenze and has received awards from Artangel (UK) and the Henry Moore Foundation (UK)

in 2020. White was in residency at Sagrada Mercancía (CL) member of the Triangle Network, and La Becque (CH) in 2020 and 2021. She was in residency at Triangle – Astérides in 2020, again in 2021 in conjunction with Goethe-Institut Marseille and Goethe-Institut Munich, and currently from December 2021 until the end of April 2022 in the context of the commission and production of “Cinder of the Wreck”. Dominique White is represented by VEDA Firenze, Florence.

## About Triangle – Astérides, centre d’art contemporain d’intérêt national

Triangle – Astérides is a 28 years old non-profit contemporary visual art organization based in “Friche la Belle de Mai”, a former tobacco factory in the center of Marseille, where it supports artists and serves diverse and expanding audiences. Triangle – Astérides develops a yearly program of exhibitions, public events, and new commissions, as well as highly respected residencies and studio programs dedicated to Marseille-based, French, and international artists; supporting artistic research, experimentation and production. Since its founding in 1994, it has established itself as one of France’s most innovative organizations supporting French and international artists who have not yet had wide public exposure or critical acceptance from a broader public, by establishing long-term relationships with them to collaborate in the development, production and presentation of significant new projects. In 28 years, the organization has hosted

more than 664 artists in residence and produced more than 133 exhibitions, with a focus on equal representation, open debate, and multiple viewpoints regardless of gender, race, class, or creed.

Triangle – Astérides is supported by Ministère de la culture – DRAC Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Ville de Marseille, la Région Sud and Département des Bouches-du-Rhône.

Triangle – Astérides is member of Triangle Network, d.c.a. / association française de développement des centres d’art contemporain, Arts en Résidence, Plein Sud and Provence Art Contemporain. Founding and cooperating member of the SCIC Friche la Belle de Mai

Dominique White	<i>Cinders of the Wreck</i> Solo Exhibition
Curated by	Céline Kopp
Commissioned and produced by	Triangle – Astérides, centre d’art contemporain d’intérêt national
Coproduction	Friche la Belle de Mai et Fluxus Art Projects
Private sponsors	PICTO Méditerranée, Hôtel La Résidence du Vieux Port and Localanque

Warm thanks to – Triangle – Astérides and its team: Frédéric Blancart (former communication & residency coordinator), Marie de Gaulejac (curator & residency coordinator), Florence Gosset (administrator), Céline Kopp (former director), Camille Ramanana Rahary (curatorial assistant), Adélie de Soumagnat (communication & residency coordinator) – SCIC Friche la Belle de Mai and its team – Christophe, Laurent, Rider, Sara Shantelle, Veda Firenze, and Wilfrid