

EXPLICATION DE LA FIGURE
Le premier Cercle marque le Monde Polaire; les 14 suivants les
pays d'Amérique; les 15 en suite depuis 16 jusques a 30
ceux d'Afrique; les 15 autres jusques a 45 ceux
d'Asie; et les 18 derniers ceux d'Europe.

Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

Firelei Báez Trust Memory Over History



Booklet

Firelei Báez. Trust Memory Over History

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With generous support



The exhibition was organised in collaboration with
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark.

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Years of holding your tongue, 2018

In the work of Firelei Báez, the palm tree is a symbol of resistance because of its resiliency, flexibility, and strength. Storm-proof, it can even withstand a hurricane. Raised in an environment of strong women, Firelei Báez associates these qualities with the leading female figures of her childhood. Combined with the ciguapa, an anarchic figure from Dominican culture that is also typical of her work, her enigmatic creature in *Years of holding your tongue* is a manifesto of strength. As the title of the work suggests, it is about the unspoken, about suppressed views and needs.



Years of holding your tongue, 2018
Rennie Collection, Vancouver

Ooloi Ciguapa (mass pedigrees of masterpieces unsold), 2018

The figures in Firelei Báez's works are usually read as female but are not necessarily to be understood as such. The term "ooloi" refers to genderless beings who are said to have special abilities. In the science fiction trilogy *Xenogenesis* by the US-American author Octavia E. Butler (1947–2006), the ooloi take on the role of healers and life-givers among the alien Oankali. With the goal of optimizing future life, they intervene in their own and the human genetic material.

At the same time, Firelei Báez refers to the so-called ciguapa, a deceptive figure that has been handed down in different ways in the Dominican Republic. Traditionally, it takes on a female form, with brown skin and a hairy body or long hair. Because its feet point backwards instead of forwards, it leaves confusing traces and is almost impossible to grasp. The sounds it makes are understandable only to its natural environment, not to humans. The ciguapa is a central symbolic figure in Firelei Báez's work, functioning as a diasporic, self-determined, resistant figure that can grow and develop roots and is closely connected to nature.



Ooloi Ciguapa (mass pedigrees of masterpieces unsold), 2018
Rennie Collection, Vancouver

Encyclopedia of gestures (Jeu du monde), 2023

The title of the work refers to the background of the picture, the so-called *Jeu du monde* (Game of the World), an early geographical board game. It was developed in 1645 by the Frenchman Pierre Duval (1618–1683), who came from a family of famous cartographers and served as “king’s geographer” to Louis XIV (1638–1715). The goal of the game was to advance from the outer parts of the world to the French center by rolling the dice and moving the playing piece from circle to circle on the board. On the one hand, the game taught geographical knowledge in a playful way; on the other hand, it conveyed a hierarchical, Eurocentric view of the world. Firelei Báez’s colorful creature disrupts and overwrites this world order in a dynamic and determined way, its splendidly feathered head deliberately concealing France as the center of the picture.



Encyclopedia of gestures (Jeu du monde), 2023
Private collection

Fruta Fina, Fruta Estraña (Lee Monument), 2022

With *Fruta Fina, Fruta Estraña*, Firelei Báez explores colonial monuments in public space through an architectural plan of the Robert E. Lee Monument. This monument was erected in 1884 in New Orleans, USA, and until 2017 stood in the center of a traffic circle known as Lee Circle. For many people, General Lee (1807-1870) is a symbol of the racist past of the southern states. He led the Confederate troops that fought to preserve slavery during the American Civil War (1861–1865). As early as January 1972, when white Ku Klux Klansmen placed a Confederate flag on the Lee Monument, there were clashes between the Klan and the Black Panther Party. A student's petition (2016) to remove another Lee monument in Charlottesville, USA, became the starting point of a social debate to dismantle Confederate monuments as an expression of past and present white racist claims to power. Following the decision to dismantle the monument in Charlottesville, thousands of neo-Nazis flocked to the city in 2017 to demonstrate against the decision under the slogan “Unite the Right.” The torchlight march ended in violence.

In this sense, the title of the work refers to the song *Strange Fruit* sung by the African American singer Billie Holiday (1915–1959) in a historic performance at the jazz club Café Society in New York, USA, in 1939. The song refers to the lynchings of black people by the Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1865) in the American South, which were carried out long after the abolition of slavery (1865). The victims were disrespectfully hanged from a rope from trees like “strange fruit.” Firelei Báez also links the term “strange fruit” to the lives of women of color in the Caribbean, who are taught from childhood that they can only exist in the world if they are not themselves. Straightened hair is an important marker of assimilation.

The proliferating form of *Fruta Estraña*, as opposed to *Fruta Fina*, closes the circle by referencing the story of the African American woman Henrietta Lacks (1920–1951), from whom, without her knowledge, a tissue sample was taken from a cervical carcinoma, from which the first immortalized human cell line was cultivated. These cells, named HeLa cells after Henrietta Lack's initials, are still used in medical research today.

Untitled (New Chart of the Windward Passages), 2020

In the painting *Untitled (New Chart of the Windward Passages)*, a female figure perches on a nautical chart, partially obscuring its contents. The right foot of the purple-blue marbled figure is positioned on the island of Hispaniola, where the Dominican Republic and Haiti are located today, while her left leg extends across the entire length of the work. The map was drawn by the British cartographer John William Norie (1772–1843) in 1836 and shows various sea routes through and around the Windward Passage, a strait between Hispaniola and Cuba. With her painterly interventions, Báez points out that maps are not neutral documents, but rather objects in which power relations and worldviews are demonstrated.



Untitled (New Chart of the Windward Passages), 2020
Collection of Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins



Fruta Fina, Fruta Estraña (Lee Monument), 2022
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk,
Denmark. Donation: Deborah Beckmann &
Jacob Kotzubei

Trust Memory Over History (Seeking counsel with the Rada Loa), 2017

The installation *Trust Memory Over History (Seeking counsel with the Rada Loa)* gives the exhibition its title and refers to the gap between written history and historical maps on the one hand and oral traditions, remembered and lived experiences on the other. The former are often embellished representations of the colonizing countries, while the latter reflect the missing perspective of the colonized and enslaved people in the diaspora. Firelei Báez's work is concerned with the broad field between these two poles. To this end, she invokes the council of the Rada Loa, the "pantheon" of the benevolent and peaceful Loa (spirit beings) in Haitian Vodou, which exemplifies the healing approach in Firelei Báez's work. The Rada cult originated in the kingdom of Dahomey in West Africa and spread to the Caribbean, especially Haiti, through the Middle Passage. Although the island of Hispaniola was heavily Catholicized as a result of the occupation, voodoo practices are still widespread today.



Trust Memory Over History (Seeking counsel with the Rada Loa), 2017
Iurre Savic Collection / Lima - Lausanne

Untitled (Drexciya), 2020

Drexciya is the name of an initially anonymous electronic music duo from Detroit, USA, consisting of James Stinson (1969–2002) and Gerald Donald (b.?), who released the album *The Quest* in 1997. In the album's liner notes, the duo describes an Afrofuturistic version of Atlantis. This is an underwater world populated by the children of pregnant African women who were deemed useless during their enslavement and forced shipment and thrown overboard into the Atlantic Ocean. Their unborn children had already learned to breathe in the amniotic fluid in their mothers' wombs and became the protagonists of an alternative society below sea level. In reference to the utopia of Drexciya, various figures hide in Firelei Báez's cosmic-looking underwater world. This is a subtle reference to the countless fates of enslaved people who never reached America. At the same time, however, her visualization of history suggests freedom, hope, and beauty.



Untitled (Drexciya), 2020
Collection of Suzanne McFayden

The promise of being continuously so, 2023

Following the flow of the wind and the seas, a figure in the work *The promise of being continuously so* lies over a map of the world by the Czech physician and scientist August von Jilek (1819–1898). Created in 1880, the map shows water and air currents on the oceans and coasts at different times of the year.

While in some of her paintings Firelei Báez explores the sea as a place of death and mourning, in this work the ocean can be experienced as a place of healing and spirituality. In many Afro-diasporic communities in the Caribbean, water is seen as an independent force. In the Yoruba tradition, for example, it is associated with deities such as Yemoja, the deity of the sea and creation, and Oya, the deity of the winds. But Oṣun, the deity of love and fertility, also manifests herself in rivers and other bodies of water. They are assigned specific colors, from which Firelei Báez creates her figure. The spray of the swirling seawater spreads over the map and parts of the body. In its movement, the figure seems to release its transformative power.



The promise of being continuously so, 2023
Collection of Diana Nelson & John Atwater

Untitled (Memory Like Fire is Radiant and Immutable), 2016

The work *Untitled (Memory Like Fire is Radiant and Immutable)* consists of deaccessioned book pages that Firelei Báez has painted over with various figures and shapes. In some cases, the artist intervenes in the portraits and maps; in others, she simply draws over them. Several pages feature images of famous statesmen, some of which Báez has altered beyond recognition. For example, there are several portraits of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1891–1961), who went down in history for his arbitrary rule and the murder of thousands of Haitian migrants, among other things. His relationship with the United States is depicted in a double portrait with the then US Vice President Richard Nixon (1913–1994). By reworking the pages of the book, Báez disrupts these manifestations of power and knowledge and draws attention to perspectives that are not included in Western historiography.



Untitled (Memory Like Fire is Radiant and Immutable), 2016
Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection, Kansas City, MO

Untitled (Flow of merchandise in France on railways and waterways in the year 1856), 2020

A money tree grows from two closely entwined figures. Red threads with small, fist-shaped azabache pendants hang from its hairy leaves. The background of the painting *Untitled (Flow of merchandise in France on railways and waterways in the year 1856)* is a statistical map of France created in 1856 by the civil engineer and cartographer Charles Joseph Minard (1781–1870). The map illustrates the transportation of goods via railroads and waterways within the country. Many of the goods, such as spices and cotton, were grown in colonized countries and imported to France by sea.

While the woven tree symbolizes communal care for a better future, the azabache pendant, also known as figa, represents resistance and healing in Latin American and Caribbean cultures. Among other things, the azabache pendant is given by parents to their children as protection against evil.



Untitled (Flow of merchandise in France on railways and waterways in the year 1856), 2020
Collection of Stephanie and Timothy Ingrassia

Black quantum physicists (Duppy for Delacroix), 2023

At first glance, a blue flaming figure appears to be bending down toward the water. Underneath its translucent body is a map showing the various locations of a perfume company founded by Antoine Chiris (1748–1831) in 1768. The richly illustrated map of the world appeared in a 1935 promotional brochure for the company. It shows the main points of sale and the locations of the plantations where the plants and spices used to make the perfumes were grown. The map is accompanied by various drawings of ships and sea creatures. The depictions at the bottom of the map are particularly striking: On the left is a white man with a walking stick, while on the right are three Black women at work. Two of the women raise their arms in a gesture of veneration toward a sun in the center of the map with the year of the company's founding.

This detail is covered by a duppy looking at the women. A duppy is a spirit from Caribbean cultures that can be both good and evil. Many of the stories about duppies originated during the time of the Middle Passage and are still told today. The title of the work relates the duppy to the French painter Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), who became famous, among other things, for the motifs from his trip to Morocco and Algeria (1832). Exoticizing paintings such as Delacroix's are attributed to Orientalism as a trend in nineteenth-century art and conveyed a romanticized image of the places and people depicted.



Black quantum physicists (Duppy for Delacroix), 2023
Collection of Suzanne McFayden

How to slip out of your body quietly, 2018

In the work *How to slip out of your body quietly*, a group of ciguapas with wind-battered palm trees protruding from them become a forest. Considering that the feet of the ciguapas point backwards instead of forwards, these dynamic creatures are not moving towards each other, but rather away from each other. They are expanding their territory.

During her childhood, Firelei Báez was told all kinds of stories about the ciguapa to distract her during the long process of styling and braiding her hair. In these stories, the ciguapa increasingly became a rebel in the sense of Lilith, who, as Adam's first wife, refused to submit to her husband. But in her childish imagination, this ciguapa could be much more than a figure defined by gender. For Firelei Báez, the ciguapa is a universal creature that unites land, air, and sea. In this sense, the wind of the palm trees in *How to slip out of your body quietly* does not take hold of the figures, but rather visualizes their inherent energy. Firelei Báez presents slipping out of the body as a method of multiplication and expansion that counteracts the social urge to categorize and hierarchize.



How to slip out of your body quietly, 2018
Collection of Alyssa and Gregory Shannon, Texas

***Ciguapa Habilis*, 2010**

In the large-format work *Ciguapa Habilis*, Western systems of knowledge are deconstructed through a fictional counter-concept. The human-like body of a *ciguapa*, a figure from Caribbean culture, is created from a mixture of hair and plants. Completely at one with nature, the leaf of a *Monstera deliciosa*—literally a “delicious monster,” which appears to be both seductive and dangerous—grows on her head. The title of the work alludes to *Homo habilis*: an early member of the genus *Homo* (Latin for “human/man”), discovered in 1964. The name of the human species is based on the binary nomenclature of Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), which consists of two parts: the genus name and the species name. This is the classification of organisms in a hierarchical system that the Swedish naturalist recorded in his influential book *Systema Naturae* in 1735. With her *Ciguapa Habilis*, Firelei Báez contrasts this scientific classification of nature with a fictional female creature. From the center of the figure emerges a braided rope, like an umbilical cord, that seems to reach into infinity.



Ciguapa Habilis, 2010
Collection of Kim Manocherian

Those who would douse it (it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes you does not mean I relinquish it), 2018

For the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in 2018, Firelei Báez created an architectural fragment as an outdoor sculpture, a relief-like wall piece with a central portrait, and an installation of painted book pages. The latter was acquired by the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg.

All three works refer directly or indirectly to the Sans-Souci Palace (1810–1813) in Milot, Haiti, built by Henri Christophe I (1767–1820), the first and only king of Haiti. Unlike its model, the German palace of Sanssouci, which Frederick II (known as Frederick the Great, 1712–1786) had built in Potsdam from 1745 to 1747 for royal pleasure, it served as a place of military representation. Due to an earthquake in 1842, only the ruins of the Haitian Sans-Souci remain today.

The drawings on the pages of *Those who would douse it* are not limited to this lost chapter of Haitian history but counteract the erasure and forgetting of the insufficient contents of these books. Firelei Báez works with deaccessioned books from institutions such as the Cooper Union in New York City, one of the universities where she studied. She gives the repurposed book pages a new relevance by emphasizing what they do not address, their historical omissions, through graphic and painterly interventions. Ciguapas, Black bodies, soldiers, wind-blown hair, lush, supposedly “exotic” vegetation, wild roots, fire, clouds, and flames, as well as abstract streams of color, occupy diagrams of commercial buildings, plantations, factories, or historical maps of trade routes, geographies, and conflict zones. Firelei Báez puts her “finger” on the unhealed wounds of colonial history.



Those who would douse it (it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes you does not mean I relinquish it), 2018
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

Coqueta (history composed of ruptures), 2019

In the work *Coqueta (history composed of ruptures)*, the construction drawing of a central power plant in New Orleans, USA, built in 1897, is blown up by bright fireworks. The map is taken from the book *Some Data in Regard to Foundations in New Orleans and Vicinity*, published in 1937 by the Louisiana Works Progress Administration (WPA, after 1939 Work Projects Administration).

The title of the work challenges the idea of a linear historiography, pointing to the ruptures and gaps that permeate it.



Coqueta (history composed of ruptures), 2019
Craig and Kathryn Hall, Dallas, TX

A structure of feeling, 2023

In the work *A structure of feeling*, a seated figure covers a map from 1541 (1st edition from 1522). The map shows the Atlantic Ocean, parts of Europe and Africa, and the “Terra Nova” (the “New World” of the Americas). It is an updated version by Lorenz Fries (1489–1530) of the *Tabula Terra Nova* map of 1513, which was created by cartographer Martin Waldseemüller (1472/75–1520) based on Claudius Ptolemy’s (c. 100–c. 180) description of the world.

The picture-filling figure is depicted with a wing, under which the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, today’s Dominican Republic and Haiti, can be seen. The voyages of the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) are described in a small text panel. His voyages, which he undertook on behalf of the Kingdom of Spain, took him to Hispaniola in 1492, where one of the first Caribbean colonies was subsequently established.

The figure’s hand and legs partially conceal a vignette with a racist, stereotypical drawing of indigenous people from South America as cannibals. The depictions are inspired by the descriptions of the navigator Amerigo Vespucci (1451–1512), from whose name the term “America” is derived.



A structure of feeling, 2023
Private collection

To Study Delight (ode to Kairos, ode to Oshun), 2023

With *To Study Delight (ode to Kairos, ode to Oshun)*, Firelei Báez pays homage to Kairos and Oṣun (Oshun). Like almost all her figures, this one remains headless, as Firelei Báez avoids the depiction of faces, which were used to categorize and hierarchize people in the so-called casta paintings of the Catholic Church. Oṣun is one of the most revered deities (orishas) in the religious spectrum of Yoruba societies in West Africa and is represented by the color yellow. She is associated with love, empathy, fertility, sensuality, beauty, and water. She is considered one of the most powerful orishas, being the only female deity among the seventeen deities sent to earth by Olórun (the supreme deity) to populate the Earth. According to a tradition, when the male deities failed in this task, they turned to Oṣun for help, and she used her powerful water to bring life back to the Earth, creating humans and other species. Thus, she is generally portrayed as the protector, savior, or nourisher of humanity.

In Greek mythology, Kairos is the god of the right or critical moment. Literally translated, Kairos means “the right measure, the good opportunity,” and thus represents the favorable moment of a decision, the failure of which could be detrimental.

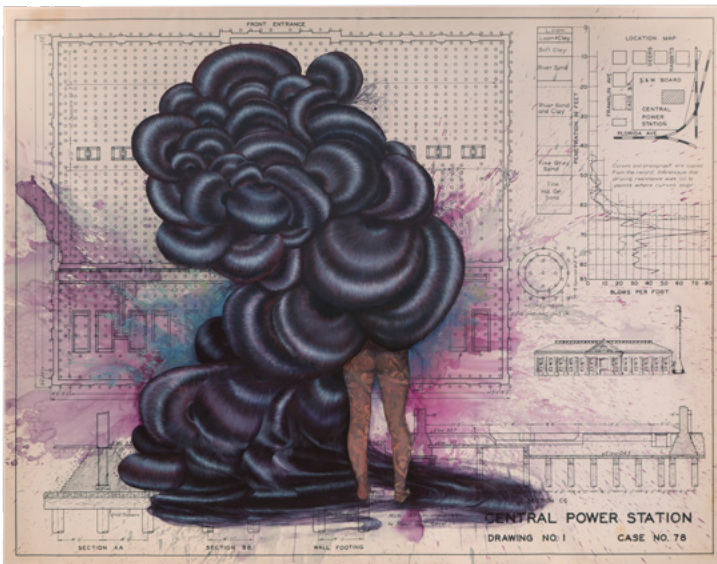


To Study Delight (ode to Kairos, ode to Oshun), 2023
Collection of Charlotte and Herbert S. Wagner III

Untitled (Central Power Station), 2019

In the works of Firelei Báez, ornaments, patterns, and tattoos are often symbols of resistance, adorning not only bodies but also architecture. In *Untitled (Central Power Station)*, ornamental plants, flowers, and foliage adorn a body but also “exoticize” it. Firelei Báez is interested in both the formal aesthetic quality of ornaments and their hidden messages and codes, which are only revealed to those who are familiar with them.

In combination with the proliferating bundles of hair, the rebellion against the imposed Western ideals of beauty, and the exoticization and discrimination of the bodies of people of color become obvious. Depicted in front of a diagram of a central power plant in New Orleans, USA, the powerful figure explodes centralized power dynamics.



Untitled (Central Power Station), 2019
Dallas Museum of Art, TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art Fund, 2019.91

I write love poems, too (The right to non-imperative clarities), 2018

Although Firelei Báez often works with archival documents, the word “archive” rarely appears in the titles of her works. This installation consists of mid-twentieth-century documents from the Works Progress Administration (WPA, after 1939 Work Projects Administration) that she found in an antiquarian bookstore in New Orleans, USA. The WPA was established in the United States in 1935 during the Great Depression under President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) to provide work for the large number of unemployed in the construction of public buildings and roads. Firelei Báez’s interventions on the pages are a reference to the human rights violations in the history of New Orleans, but also to today’s political and social authority.

In an interview, she explained that the installation deals with the moment of Venezuela’s collapse and the question of how these upheavals and crises came about. What were the historical events that led to the current situation in the country and that still affect people today?



I write love poems, too (The right to non-imperative clarities), 2018
Private collection

Convex (recalibrating a blind spot), 2019

Colors are charged with different cultural and regional meanings. Firelei Báez, for example, associates the color blue with the energy of Yemoja, the Yoruba deity of the oceans, who represents the renewal of life. The Yoruba are an ethnic group in West Africa that is divided into many subgroups and whose beliefs reached the Caribbean and the Americas through the Middle Passage. The bright blue of *Convex (recalibrating a blind spot)* evokes raging water, while the title of the picture refers to the need to recalibrate a blind spot of buried history. This applies to many chapters of colonial history that are usually recorded in history books and on historical maps from the Eurocentric perspective of the colonialists.

The image carrier of the work shows a diagram of a warehouse for raw sugar at a sugar refinery in New Orleans, USA. Firelei Báez builds a thematic bridge between the enslaved people who worked in such refineries and their fateful journey there. Not all people from Africa who were forcibly shipped reached their supposed new home. For the descendants of the countless people who died at sea, the Atlantic is therefore a politically and emotionally charged place that must be viewed historically from their perspective.



Convex (recalibrating a blind spot), 2019

The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, BMA 2019:164

re-memory (to be spoken, complete), 2018

Firelei Báez overlaid a construction drawing of the Harvey Canal in Harvey, USA, with a composition of colors and abstract forms. The circumstances under which the canal was built are not clearly known. According to some historical accounts, the d'Estrehan family, who gained early power in politics and through their plantations, probably had the canal built by enslaved people in 1737 to irrigate the surrounding land. In other accounts, they hired German settlers to build it in exchange for land. Joseph Hale Harvey (1816–1882), who married a descendant of the family d'Estrehan and gave the waterway its current name, later had the canal expanded. The title of the work refers to the act of remembering and expressing forgotten history. It is an appeal for a heightened awareness of the relics of colonial structures in the present. What stories do historical sites such as the Harvey Canal bear witness to?

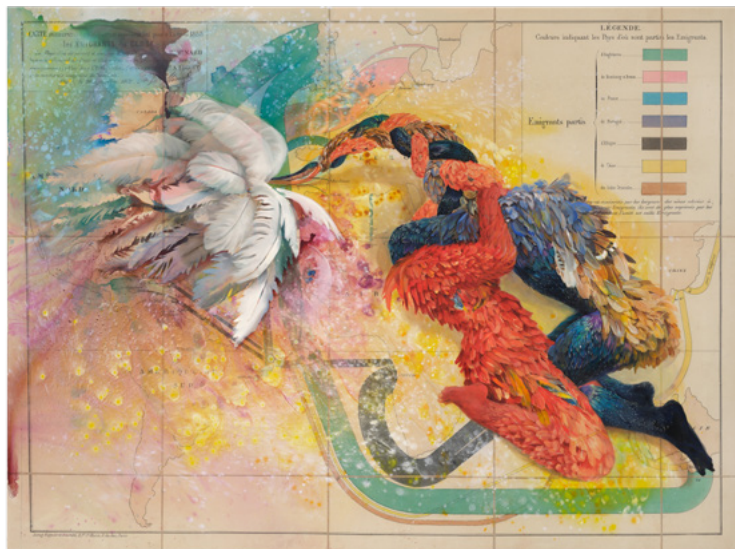


re-memory (to be spoken, complete), 2018
Collection of Yael and Eduardo Muller

A taxonomy for tenderness (Carte figurative et approximative représentant pour l'année 1858 les émigrants du globe), 2023

Closely intertwined, two feathered figures spread out across a map by Charles Joseph Minard (1781–1870). Created after the abolition of slavery in Britain (1833) and France (1848), the map depicts global migration flows in 1858.

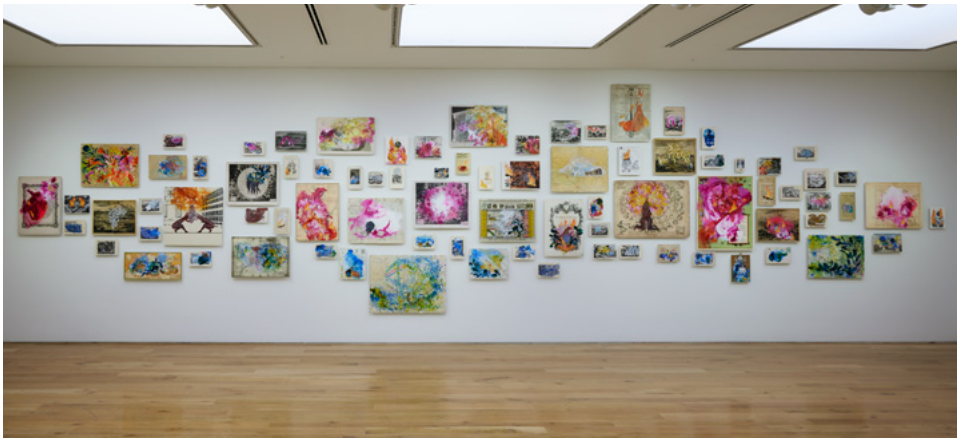
Hybrid beings with both human and animal features are a recurring motif in the work of Firelei Báez. In this painting, the figures represent the sun and the moon, the forces of nature that influence all life on Earth. They are inspired by the feathered cloaks of the Tupinambá, an Indigenous community in Brazil. By wearing these cloaks, the Tupinambá shamans embodied bird-like beings and were given the gift of mediating between the living and the dead. Many of these ritual cloaks and other objects were brought to Europe during the colonial period. Today, only eleven cloaks have been preserved, all of which are in European collections. In 2023, the National Museum of Denmark decided to restitute a cloak from its collection to the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



A taxonomy for tenderness (Carte figurative et approximative représentant pour l'année 1858 les émigrants du globe), 2023
Private collection

the soft afternoon air as you hold us all in a single death (To breathe full and Free: a declaration, a re-visioning, a correction), 2021

The point of departure for this installation is the global Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. For Firelei Báez, this formative time was supposed to be a moment of healing, but for her it was marked more by the stress of everyday life and the constant pressure to produce and deliver. Various signs of resistance can be seen in the installation, which consists of over-painted maps and book pages. These include historical materials such as pages from the book *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States* by the physician Jesse Torrey Jr. (1787–c. 1834), published in 1817, and a map that was used in US-American schools in the 1960s to teach positive perspectives on the colonization of North America. Firelei Báez painted over many of the sheets with symbols of protest, such as burning car tires and fire that seems to eat through the paper.



the soft afternoon air as you hold us all in a single death (To breathe full and Free: a declaration, a re-visioning, a correction), 2021
Collection of Stephanie und Timothy Ingrassia

Four of the sun (US Marine Hospital), 2021

Firelei Báez sees her abstract compositions as truthful and direct. Her painting process begins on the ground, and whatever emerges, such as moisture or dryness, becomes a natural part of the work. The abstract color explosion of *Four of the sun (US Marine Hospital)* overlays an architectural diagram of the power plant and nurses' home of the United States Marine Hospital in New Orleans, USA. In its long history, the hospital site was first owned by influential colonialists such as Governor Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville (1680–1767). With the first mayor of New Orleans, Jean Etienne de Boré (1741–1820), it became the first economically successful granulated sugar production site in the state of Louisiana. Later, the land and buildings were converted into a hospital complex for the care of injured and ill sailors of the United States Merchant Marines and then used for psychiatric treatment, first as an inpatient clinic and, after Hurricane Katrina (2005), also as an outpatient clinic. Today, the renovated buildings house a children's hospital.

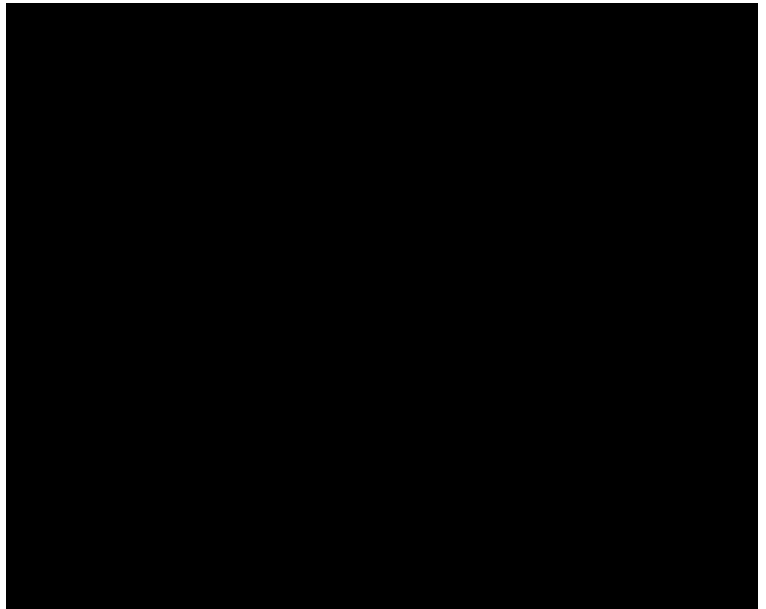
With *Four of the sun (US Marine Hospital)*, Firelei Báez responds to the long-suffering place and the traumas experienced and fought against here, which are discharged here in idiosyncratic streams of color and transformed into more positive, healing energies.



Four of the sun (US Marine Hospital), 2021
Rennie collection, Vancouver

Untitled (Le Jeu Du Monde), 2020

This work depicts a historical game that could already be seen at the beginning of the exhibition as the background for the painting *Encyclopedia of gestures (Jeu du monde)* from 2023. In *Untitled (Le Jeu Du Monde)*, a large ciguapa also occupies the center of the seventeenth-century geographical world game, covering the outlines of the colonial power France. The hierarchical views of the world that the game conveyed to its players are dissolved by the expansive figure. At the end of the exhibition, this faceless figure once again brings together the motifs typical of Firelei Báez, such as luxuriant hair, the leaves of various plants, orchids, and fruits, which seductively attract the viewer – and mediate between aesthetics and content.



Untitled (Le Jeu Du Monde), 2020
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi

Untitled (Transito de la sombra y penumbra de la Luna sobre la superficie de la Tierra), 2021

A figure shimmers in bright colors across a 1778 map by the Mexican astronomer Antonio de León y Gama (1735–1802). The map shows the trajectory of the first total solar eclipse recorded in the Americas. The eclipse was visible in Central and North America, parts of Africa, and Europe. With its back to the viewer, the figure mimics the approximate course of the astronomical event—from North Africa through Mexico to the southern United States.

Like the solar eclipse, the figure in the painting *Untitled (Transito de la sombra y penumbra de la Luna sobre la superficie de la Tierra)* lies across the world, obscuring all national borders and ideologies.



Untitled (Transito de la sombra y penumbra de la Luna sobre la superficie de la Tierra), 2021
The Fredriksen Family Collection on loan to The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Norway

Untitled (Basse partie de la Basse Saxe où sont les Duchés de Sleswick, Holsace, Meckelenbourg et Lauvenbourg, subdivisés en leurs Principales Parties), 2024

Free and uncontained, a stampede of horses dash across the rich surface of *Untitled (Basse partie de la Basse Saxe où sont les Duchés de Sleswick, Holsace, Meckelenbourg et Lauvenbourg, subdivisés en leurs Principales Parties)*. Rendered like shadows, the animals emerge from an abstract mix of colors, only to disappear again into the color gradients at the next glance. Like a Rorschach, the more one gazes into the alchemical pours of paint, the more horses become apparent.

Firelei Báez uses a 1657 map of the dukedoms and electorates in the north of the Holy Roman Empire as the backdrop for her work. The map was created during the colonial period of the 17th century. It describes the time in which Western powers such as Portugal, Spain, France and the Netherlands established colonies all over the world as part of their territorial conquests. German nobles were also part of these colonial endeavors: Among others, Frederick William of Brandenburg (1620-1688) had the Brandenburgisch-Afrikanische Compagnie (Brandenburg-African Company) founded in 1682. He pursued the goal of actively participating in the transatlantic trade in goods and enslaved people between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. One year later, the colony of Groß-Friedrichsburg was established in West Africa, which was an important trading base for the Electorate and existed until 1717. To this day, the protagonists of German colonial history are still present in museums and public spaces in the form of paintings, sculptures, and other monuments. They are often depicted on horseback as rulers over man and nature. In Firelei Báez's work the horses are not agents of battle or royal conquest, instead they are unbridled and free.



Untitled (Basse partie de la Basse Saxe où sont les Duchés de Sleswick, Holsace, Meckelenbourg et Lauvenbourg, subdivisés en leurs Principales Parties), 2024
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Glossary

BINARY / NON-BINARY

Binarity is a system in which the social gender is divided into two categories—male and female. This excludes non-binary and gender-non-confirmative people. Non-binary (often used synonymous with genderqueer) is an umbrella term used for people who do not identify with neither “male” nor “female”. The self-ascription as being non-binary can include the identification with parts of the categories of “male” and “female” or the complete rejection of them.

BIPoC

Black, Indigenous and People of Color

BIOLOGICAL SEX

In most societies the biological sex is assigned at birth by the doctor and constitutionally stated by the birth certificate. The assignment is based on the reproductive organs (genitals).

BLACK

The term is often used as a self-designation by people of African or Afro-diasporic origins as well as people with a darker skin tone, unless individual people or groups describe themselves differently. Black is always capitalized in order to mark its meaning as a political term, also in the sense of an emancipatory practice of resistance. This self-designation is often used outside the African continent, especially in the diaspora communities.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

A transnational solidary network that fights against white supremacy, police violence and racism and advocates for equality, justice, and freedom for People of Color. Black Lives Matter regularly arranges protests against the killings of People of Color by police officers and other issues like Racial Profiling, police violence and racism.

DECOLONIAL/POSTCOLONIAL

Political, activist, cultural, but also intellectual (not only academic) perspectives and movements that critically evaluate and seek the overcoming of colonialism and the continued existence of colonial relations and accompanying racist discrimination, oppression, white supremacy as well as structures of power and knowledge. The “post” in postcolonial hints towards colonial continuities, which remain in force under different conditions in the Global North as well as in the Global South even after the end of foreign rule. Post- and decolonial perspectives deconstruct dominant knowledge and history productions, which stem from the concept of “European modernism”, regarding their racist and Eurocentric foundations and hold the Global North accountable.

DIASPORA

The term “Diaspora” describes cultural, national, ethnic, or religious communities or minorities, that do not live in their country of origin or their ancestors anymore. Those are often people and groups with relations to their countries of origin, which have been maintained over generations, whose self-conception is shaped by a traumatic history of migration, expulsion, or resettlement.

ETHNICITY

The term “ethnicity” denotes to a group of people, who are define themselves through a shared origin, history, culture, traditions as well as areas of settlement. It is not important whether the members are related by blood (descent community) or have experienced a long history together (community of fate). Important are the self-perception and belief of the members to be part of such a community.

EUROCENTRISM

describes the judgement of non-European societies and cultures from the perspective of European norms and values. Europe (including North America and Australia) constitutes the non-reflective and marginalised centre of actions and thoughts. From a Eurocentric perspective Europe’s history of development is used as a benchmark for the comparison with other countries and cultures, that are being portrayed as less modern and progressive.

GENDER/SOCIAL GENDER

refers, in contrast to the biological assigned gender, to the socially constructed gender. Social gender includes gender identities and gender roles. It highlights the gender perception to the sexual feeling that is based on the educated, attributed, and juridical gender and the associated socio-cultural expectations regarding the sex. Predominant is the binary conception of what it means to be “male” and “female”. Social forms of behaviour, stereotypes and expectations determine what is male = man = masculine and female = woman = feminine. While there are people whose inner perception corresponds with those images, genderqueer people deliberately detach themselves from such systems (→ see binary/non-binary).

HEGEMONIC

means “predominant” and thereby e.g., absolutely superior in an economic, social, cultural and/or political sense. Hegemonic describes a state in which a group or party (of interest or population) holds enough power in a societal system to suppress the equality, interests, and mentalities of other parties. Thus, hegemony expresses itself through inequality. In politics it describes a supremacy of one state in comparison to one or more states. This supremacy can be military, economic and cultural.

INDIGENOUS

According to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, the term “indigenous” (from Latin *indigenus* “native”) describes demographic groups, that view themselves as descendants of the inhabitants of a specific geographical area who already lived there before the conquest, colonization or founding of a state by foreigners. They have a strong (emotional, economic and/or spiritual) relationship to their living space and a distinct ethnic-cultural identity as a community with their own socio-political and cultural traditions.

COLONIZATION

The Imperialistic expansion and occupation of non-governmental areas, often accompanied by the expulsion, enslavement, repression, and murder of the population in those areas. Colonialism began in the 15th century when European countries started to conquer and govern countries in other areas of the world. The horrible impact of those times reached into the 20th century and shape power claims, beliefs and mentalities, geographical orders, and geopolitics until today. (→ see decolonial/postcolonial)

MARGINALISATION

describes the displacement of individuals or groups by the majority society to its edge. The displacement can happen on various levels, for example, on a geographical, economic, social, or cultural one; most of the time it takes place simultaneously on multiple levels and manifests itself in the limited, more difficult or impossible equal participation in educational opportunities, specific occupational areas, etc.

MIDDLE PASSAGE

refers to the brutal abduction, enslavement and shipping of people from all parts of Africa to North and South America and the Caribbean, where they were forced to work on plantations, in factories and in the households of white European colonialists. From the 16th to the 19th century, approximately 13 million people were brought from the African continent to the American colonies under the worst conditions as part of the transatlantic human trafficking. Around 2 million people died on these crossings.

PoC

The term PoC (People of Color) is used as a social construct and has been used in North America and Great Britain for a long time as an emancipatory self-designation by people positioning themselves as non-white. It is also being used in Europe and Germany since the beginning of the 2010s. Following this idea of solidarity, marginalized communities in Germany and other countries of the Global North increasingly use the self-designation People of Color to refer to common experiences of racism.

RACE

Contrary to the German word “Rasse” the term “race” is considered as a social construct and not a biological concept. To clarify this and to point out its political dimension, the word is written in German in small letters and italics: *race*.

RACIALIZATION

Structure or process in which people are categorised, stereotyped, or devalued through racist characteristics (appearance, forms of life or imaginary characteristics).

WHITE

“White” and “whiteness”, like “blackness”, describe not biological features or real skin color, but a political and social construct. Whiteness refers to the dominant and privileged position within the power relations of racism, which usually remains unspoken and unnamed. Whiteness encompasses an unconscious concept of self and identity, that shapes white people’s self-perception and behaviour and points them towards a privileged place in society, for example, in access to resources.

Key sources on which the explanations of the terms are based on, include:

<https://www.amnesty.de/2017/3/1/glossar-fuer-diskriminierungssensible-sprache>

<https://www.bpb.de/themen/gender-diversitaet/geschlechtliche-vielfalt-trans/245426/lstbiq-lexikon/>

<https://diversity-arts-culture.berlin/diversity-arts-culture/woerterbuch>

<https://www.lsvd.de/de/3385-WAS-BEDEUTET-LSBTI-GLOSSAR-DER-SEXUELLEN-UND-GESCHLECHTLICHEN-VIELFALT>

<https://missy-magazine.de/blog/tag/glossar/>

<https://www.regenbogenportal.de/glossar>

The internet sources were last accessed on: 07/06/2024

List of Works

Years of holding your tongue, 2018

Gouache on paper
237.5 × 129.5 cm
Rennie Collection, Vancouver
p.1

Ooloi Ciguapa (mass pedigrees of masterpieces unsold), 2018

Gouache on paper
243.8 × 129.5 cm
Rennie Collection, Vancouver
p.2

Encyclopedia of gestures (Jeu du monde), 2023

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
209.3 × 263.8 cm
Private collection
p.3

Fruta Fina, Fruta Estraña (Lee Monument), 2022

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
224.2 × 281.9 cm
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art,
Humlebæk, Denmark. Donation:
Deborah Beckmann & Jacob Kotzubei
p.4

Untitled (New Chart of the Windward Passages), 2020

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
167.6 × 219.1 cm
Collection of Miyoung Lee und Neil
Simpkins
p.5

Trust Memory Over History (Seeking counsel with the Rada Loa), 2017

Gouache, ink, gold foil, chine-collé on 140
deaccessioned book pages
244 × 457.2 cm
Irurre Savic Collection / Lima – Lausanne
p.6

Untitled (Drexciya), 2020

Oil and acrylic on canvas
228.6 × 291.5 cm
Collection of Suzanne McFayden
p.7

The promise of being continuously so, 2023

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
146.2 × 291.1 cm
Collection of Diana Nelson & John
Atwater
p.8

Untitled (Flow of merchandise in France on railways and waterways in the year 1856), 2020

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
198.1 × 154 cm
Collection of Stephanie and Timothy
Ingrassia
p.9

Untitled (Memory Like Fire is Radiant and Immutable), 2016

Gouache, ink and chine-collé on 28
deaccessioned book pages
248.9 × 182.9 cm
Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection,
Kansas City, MO
p.10

Black quantum physicists (Duppy for Delacroix), 2023

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
180.7 × 180.7 cm
Collection of Suzanne McFayden
p. 11

How to slip out of your body quietly, 2018

Acrylic and oil on paper
177.8 × 299.7 cm
Collection of Alyssa and Gregory Shannon, Texas
p. 12

Ciguapa Habilis, 2010

Gouache and ink on paper
184.8 × 304.2 cm
Collection of Kim Manocherian
p. 13

Those who would douse it (it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes you does not mean I relinquish it), 2018

Acrylic, ink and chine-collé on 58 deaccessioned book pages
244 × 569 cm (dimensions variable)
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
p. 14

Coqueta (history composed of ruptures), 2019

Oil and acrylic on canvas
228.6 × 289.6 cm
Craig and Kathryn Hall, Dallas, TX
p. 15

A structure of feeling, 2023

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
229.2 × 293.4 cm
Private collection
p. 16

To Study Delight (ode to Kairos, ode to Oshun), 2023

Oil and acrylic on canvas
174 × 96.5 cm
Collection of Charlotte und Herbert S. Wagner III
p. 17

Untitled (Central Power Station), 2019

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
246.1 × 316.5 cm
Dallas Museum of Art, TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art Fund, 2019.91
p. 18

I write love poems, too (The right to non-imperative clarities), 2018

Acrylic, ink and chine-collé on 113 deaccessioned book pages
262.9 × 528.3 cm
Private collection
p. 19

Convex (recalibrating a blind spot), 2019

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
246.1 × 316.5 cm
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; BMA 2019:164
p. 20

***re-memory (to be spoken, complete),
2018***

Oil, oil stick and graphite over canvas
236.2 × 288.3 cm
Collection of Yael and Eduardo Muller
p. 21

***A taxonomy for tenderness (Carte
figurative et approximative représentant
pour l'année 1858 les émigrants du
globe), 2023***

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
248.3 × 332.6 cm
Private collection
p. 22

***the soft afternoon air as you hold us all in
a single death (To breathe full and Free: a
declaration, a re-visioning, a correction),
2021***

Acrylic, gouache and chine-collé on 81
deaccessioned book pages
266 × 823 cm
Collection of Stephanie und Timothy
Ingrassia
p. 23

***Four of the sun (US Marine Hospital),
2021***

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
248.3 × 319.4 cm
Rennie Collection, Vancouver
p. 24

Untitled (Le Jeu du Monde), 2020

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
266.7 × 334.5 cm
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi
p. 25

***Untitled (Transito de la sombra y
penumbra de la Luna sobre la superficie
de la Tierra), 2021***

Oil and acrylic on archival printed canvas
199.4 × 290.4 cm
The Fredriksen Family Collection on
loan to The National Museum of Art,
Architecture and Design, Norway
p. 26

***Untitled (Basse partie de la Basse
Saxe où sont les Duchés de
Sleswick, Holsace, Meckelenbourg
et Lauvenbourg, subdivisés en leurs
Principales Parties), 2024***

Mixed media
520 × 676 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth
p. 27

Colophon

The booklet is published on the occasion of the exhibition
Firelei Báez. Trust Memory Over History

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