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UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

The Ringer Irreconcilable

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Studio Art

by

Tarik Garrett

Thesis Committee:
Professor Simon Leung, Chair
Associate Professor Rhea Anastas
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Ringer Irreconcilable

Tarik Garrett Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

University of California, Irvine, 2022

Professor Simon Leung, Chair

This text is admittedly not a thesis. I write here within the prescribed format of the institution I am poised to leave, about the show, The Ringer Irreconcilable, that I considered the main body of work to be presented. As such this is more of a short artist book containing my thoughts and expansion of ideas that surround my work in the essay form. In many ways, this "abstract", an institutional requirement to have this text added to a database never to be read again, has little to do with the content of my art or the essay. It frames what is about to follow but reveals almost nothing but vague ideas about what the content is. This is because here I make an attempt to illustrate rather than tell. Of course, this is an impulse that as a visual artist I must indulge and the content of this abstract will hopefully become more clear once you've reached the end. Thanks for reading

THE RINGER IRRECONCILABLE

Our social relationships have always been mediated by something, an elaboration on that trite statement would be to say that objects have always and contain some symbolic value. Such objects form a symbolism that has long been utilized to demarcate ideas around identity or as mediators between us and transcendent spiritual realms. In capitalism, the objects produced, exchanged, and used facilitate our social interactions acting as stand-ins for our social interactions in the marketplace¹. When we see exchanges made between parties on the market the commodities do the talking for them and these relationships are acted out through the medium that over time begins to mask the values of the social interaction taking place. This anthropomorphization process known as commodity fetishism brings on a form of mystification.² From production to exchange this fetishism has further developed to influence how we understand ourselves and others as subjects through the objects that we surround ourselves with in ways that are at once novel and familiar. It has perniciously muddied the waters between subject and object and the object commodities. For working people, the only valuable commodity is essentially the energy generated from our substantial being and capacity to produce³

A process of reification around selling one's labor happens both physiologically and materially when workers are the only means of surviving in the totalism system of capitalism is

¹ Marx, Karl, and Ben Fowkes. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vintage Books, 1977.

² Ibid., 165

³ Ibid., Chapter 7: The Labour Process and the Valorization Process

to engage it as labor .⁴ This coercion is obfuscated by the popular notion that we are free individuals making a consensual social agreement to sell our productive capacity. Some of the labor politics that center on the concept of the sex worker who needs protection from the law and their labor treated like any other can sometimes feel like a veil of positivity for the smallholdings class with petty bourgeoisie aspirations when confronted with the sobering realizations of the scale and brutality of the sex trafficking industry. In all industries, many are forced into labor but all working people are available to coercion. It may be, as what can be some of the most radical Republicans of the 19th century developed, that slavery and wage labor is on a spectrum. American political thinkers like abolitionist and early socialist Wendel Philips would “no sooner the enfranchisement of the negro complete than... see in the condition of the laboring classes the work for a new organization, and in the Eight-hour law the object of a fresh agitation ...perhaps, it would be fairer to say that he has returned to an old one”.⁵

In this Marxist schema, the working class is the first subject-object of history.⁶ Also, provides us with a way out of alienation theorizing the proletariat class, in a revolutionary event, act and know exactly what it is it is doing. This way they would end history and humanity would become masters of our own destiny. However, this wasn't the result, and when confronted with the losses suffered by the left throughout the 20th century the notion of reconciling alienation breaks down. And the same repeated actions result in unexpected losses and catastrophes. To

⁴ Lukács Georg, and Rodney Livingstone. *History and Class Consciousness Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. MIT Press, 2013.

⁵ “Wendell Phillips and the Labor Question.” *New York Times*, 24 May 1870, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

Lukacs here sets out to discuss Marx’s critique of *the Philosophy of Right* and draws insight to the understanding of the ideal of proletariat class truly capable in revolution. “The self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class aims it simultaneously achieves the conscious realization of the-objective-aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for this conscious intervention.”

have the ability to act collectively without alienation in the present is perhaps the most that is possible. The future can only remain unseen or unfulfilled for what drives us cannot be obtained.

The artworks I contributed to *The Ringer, Irreconcilable*, are all created primarily using objects that could be called property acquired as abandoned, resale, or seized and appropriated. They are in a state of decay in relation to their value as commodities. They have been produced brought to market and consumed. Only those placed towards the bottom of class strata now interact or extract value from them on any sort of largescale. They survive by collecting and repurposing the materials left behind. Forms of wreckage and discarded everyday objects make up the urban landscape of industrial centers, many of which, in the U.S, capitalists abandoned decades ago. Not just the objects themselves shape this landscape. They are the result of the social relations that flow through them. As the garbage wreckage pile up in areas where the lumpen unemployed class of surplus labor inhabits. Cheryl Harris's *Whiteness as Property* proved to be an invaluable text in helping to articulate these relationships in the concept of how racism plays a supporting role in the Americas from the colonial to capitalist period.

Harris sees whiteness as a “foundational property” or ground that dictates whether are not on is included in the lofty ideals espoused by the framers of the United States constitution. Her writing exposes the legal realities that sanctioned and made racialized domination and conquest possible in the American context. Her seminal work of Critical race theory also explicates how structures that support white supremacy are central to the law and are veiled universal truths created to give universal freedom to a white subject created by colonists and merchants from Europe. Whiteness is a deciding factor of being subject to this frame or deprived of place and agency. She explains how, in America, property law and rights of exclusion help to codify and rationalize the violence of settler colonialism. This frame was further solidified by the Marshal

court in the foundational case of property law *M'Intosh v Johnson*, all that exists outside of its understanding, or perhaps more importantly, outside of its interest or desires⁷. Because we are aware that there are foundational ideological structures to identity and subjectivity, we can see how a society's laws exist to help establish the dominance of lawmakers' interests. Marshal was already standing on the shoulders of precedent when solidifying white supremacy in the US legal system. English elites like John Locke, a shareholder in the Royal African Company involved in American colonial policy in Carolina, established English common law across the Atlantic.⁸ He helped uphold this myth of a new world and rationalized the position of supporting slavery while heralding universal rights by limiting to Europeans.⁹ Cheryl Harris helps to expose how those who exist outside this framework of subjecthood can see the shape and contours of institutions and the aesthetics of judgments made by the law with greater ease and more clearly than those within.¹⁰

By exposing foundational ideological structures, we can see how a society's laws are created to help establish a dominance of the lawmakers, from the laws to help elites of European descent dominate the Americas. From their position, the law is neutral and objective, a tendency that has limited liberalism since the Enlightenment. Normalizing a form of abstraction, that seeks to objectify the subjective, isolate parts from the whole, as the universal. What is the scaffolding that creates the myth that art isn't like other forms of endeavor? That it is not contingent upon the real historical world. Like art, the law is both a reflection and a supporting structure of power. It

⁷ 21 U.S Supreme Court. *Johnson v. M'Intosh*. L.Ed. 681, 1823.

⁸ Buck-Morss, Susan. "Hegel and Haiti." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2000, pp. 827 JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344332>. Accessed March 2022.

⁹ Buck-Morss, Susan. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

¹⁰ Harris, Cheryl I. "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 106, no. 8, 1993, p. 1707.

is the veins through which the blood of ideology thrush. Each respectively provides us with the practical rules and iconography and re-presents material reality. There is an implied grid for every frame to conform to or be consumed by. Once a forested wetland, the island of Manhattan was leveled and superimposed with a grid to be filled from the river to the sea. On the island, another, almost invisible, a matrix is supporting not just the actions that take place city grid but also the acceptance of the grid itself. This matrix is the rule of law in all of its self-proclaimed objective universality.

While gathering the copies of the documents of Harris's bibliography, I began a parallel study of family history articulated through public documents like birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, and wills available through the National Archive's Vital Records that brought, for me, the particular into the universal. Particulars that changed or gave perspective to everything else around it. Tracing a kinship lineage back to the 1730s to a figure known as "Baba Moses" and back up through the history that reshaped the world through colonialism, imperialism, Industrialization, and capital into what it is today.¹¹ The deep wounds of struggle and melancholic attachments began to arise and spurred investigations of how distinct or different moments reverberate together. An essential aspect of this search was centering it on symbolic kinship ties rather than an attempt to trace a lineage based on the massively proliferating forms of DNA tests. The idea of this sort of approach upholds a notion in relation to blood ties that supports the system of racism¹².

During a later stage in this investigation, a speech given by Andrew Johnson in October of 1864 while serving as a wartime Governor of Union captured Tennessee called "Moses of the

¹¹Horne, Gerald. *The Dawning of the Apocalypse: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, Settler Colonialism, and Capitalism in the Long Sixteenth Century*. Monthly Review Press, 2020.

¹² Fields, Karen E., and Barbara Jeanne Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Verso, 2022.

Colored Man”. This name alone spurred infuriating ironies . In the account, while speaking to a “vast crowd of colored people, and reflecting through what a storm of persecution and obloquy they are compelled to pass” Johnson “with no reference to the president or anyone else,[extends ‘emancipation’]... to every man in Tennessee.¹³ Knowing it was impossible for Johnson to announce his own proclamation without any coordination with his running mate and commander in chief, Abraham Lincoln, it was a coordinated effort to cement his position as the Vice President in the election coming just a month after the speech. In addition to the apparent discrepancies between the energy he attempted to capture and his later actions, Johnson makes other claims that feel just as hollow. Bringing Johnson into the Republican lead government was proved by history as a futile attempt to bring unity. An effort to bridge parties who only months ago engaged in direct mortal struggle seems naive when in the face of how much American society would have to change to make it possible.

Instead of bringing the country together, Johnson’s ascent to the vice presidency ultimately leads to the weakening and premature death of Reconstruction by placing a reactionary at the seat of power. Aligned with ideas still held by liberals today, Lincoln and the Republican’s aversion to the conflict necessary to enact the progressive changes they act in ways that undermine their own positions. Welding power gained through popular support not to defeat their opposition but look to compromise. This sort of politics could ride the tide of history and changing material conditions that allowed the North to win The Civil war and end the chattel form of slavery that was waning internationally. However, it could never have the power to make the changes that could bring the United States to realize its stated values of freedom and democracy. To this day, popular sovereignty and social equality are still allusive.

¹³ Graf, L. P., Johnson, A., Haskins, R. W. (1986). *The Papers of Andrew Johnson: 1864-1865*. United States: University of Tennessee Press. 251.

Johnson stood against the secession of the confederacy not on moral principles but believing that the profit-driving institution of slavery would be safer in the Union.¹⁴ Correctly predicting that war would force the North's hand and succession was an abduction of real power or legislative influence. We also see a political actor without deep-held beliefs but a pragmatic drive towards power. This duplicity is apparent in his hollow exclamation supporting "negro equality." Even without the knowledge of his position on slavery, the nature of his appeals to the black community of Nashville revealed themselves disingenuous. In the speech, Johnson claims that although growing up in the antebellum south where the material existence of those deemed to be black had a much more enormous gulf than social position between those understood to be white. At the time, "in the presence of that other element of a degraded black race, [were] all differences between white men disappear; they really become brethren, and a true democratic feeling springs up".¹⁵ The class position of his upbringing to show a common disdain for wealthy agrarians to those enslaved is an insulting stretch. It would not be long before these brethren, who composed the upper echelons of southern society and held positions in the government of the disbanded confederacy, would be pardoned and allowed to regain social and legislative powers. Despite this landscape of white solidarity, Johnson utilizes his impoverished upbringing to separate himself from his elite Jeffersonian neighbors and position himself in closer relation to "honest" black labor by making sure the crowd knows he is "no agrarian".

Johnson's unique path to office did not set him apart from previous leaders as much as his lack of formal education or distinguished military record. His lack of elite social position makes it no wonder he is considered an essential progenitor of American anti-elitism and 'bootstrap'¹⁶

¹⁴ Wineapple, Brenda. *The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson*. Random House, 2019.

¹⁵ O. Everett, *The North American Review*, 1865, pp. 568

¹⁶ 30 September 1834, New-York (NY) *American*, pg. 2, col. 4:

politics of the right. Although uneducated, Johnson was like every successful politician, rigorously studied language and the emotional impact one could have when speaking to the public. As a self-taught student of oratory of the time, he may have come to cross the work of English romantic poet William Wordsworth. Not much of a stretch to use his words to describe aspects of the image that Johnson so shrewdly and opportunistically cultivated.

*A few strong instincts and a few plain rules,
Among the herdsmen of the Alps, have wrought
More for mankind at this unhappy day
Then all the pride of intellect and thought.*¹⁷

Translating the transcription found from a local newspaper of into audio using my voice in place of the former president's and taken out of its original context, Johnson's faults become an indication of the characteristic feature of ruling class politics shared by both of the US's parties. In contrast to a robust performative voice, I speak the words but don't get consciously involved in attempts to sway emotions. The speech is also restaged alone and delivered to no one. Reading the speech as clearly as possible attempting to counteract the recantation of unverifiable grandeur found in the report. However, this effort to negate resulted in emphasizing the theatrical game of imbuing words with emotion while responding to the audience's reactions

KNOW YE, that I, NIMROD MURPHREE, of the city of Nashville, and state of Tennessee, have discovered perpetual motion.

N. MURPHREE.

"Nashville, Aug. 27, 1834.—We clip the above from the last number of the Nashville (Tenn.) Banner, where it appears as an advertisement, without note or comment. Probably Mr. Murphree has succeeded in handing himself over the Cumberland river, or a barn yard fence, by the straps of his boots. We advise him to send his pretensions on the next Congress by Col. Crockett himself, whose motto is 'go ahead!'."

¹⁷ "Alas! What Boots the Long Laborious Quest? ." *The Political Works of William Wordsworth*, by William Wordsworth, Vol. 2 , Forgotten Books, 2017. Classic Reprint.

Johnson needed to gain influence. To point towards anything is to also emphasize what it is not. .On top of this strange and upsetting speech, I recorded a performance of music with a group of friends on saxophone, trombone, and Hammond organ. This composition was created to act as a second voice in response to the words said and the history of the black experience thereafter. In this musical track, I'm reacting to Johnson with the type of "passionate utterance, horn-voice-horn over percussion, a protest, an objection, it is because it is more than another violent scene of subjection too terrible to pass on; it is the ongoing performance, the prefigurative scene of a (re)appropriation—the deconstruction and reconstruction, the improvisational recording and revaluation—of value, of the theory of value, of the theories of value" associated with the tradition of black music in American.¹⁸ Looking through the lens of a continental tradition, we rediscover a different conception between spirit and matter that is becoming but without the duality prevalent in European thought.¹⁹ More precisely way of thinking lends itself to the oral tradition and the hieroglyph, saying it is better shown than told. A way of holding two truths at once that we can have been expressed in the vocal performance of enslaved, Jazz, soul music of the early and mid-twentieth century a. I see continuity both formally and theoretically in the words and music of Sun Ra, the type of speaking John Coltrane did with his saxophone, and their relationship to movements to establish a black agency in a world dominated by European and settler-colonial culture and economics. As Fredrick Douglas so elegantly observed describing his life and the cultural expressions of the enslaved:

¹⁸ Moten, F. (2003). *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁹ Here the 'continent' is Africa, of course.

*They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. . . . I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.*²⁰

There is something being grasped at by using audio alone. It is not looking to remove a sense of mediation and looks for an expression of some sort of vital human essence. An essence that, if it exists, can only be expressed through mediated means. Thus there is the imperative to work with how the form of meditation can create different effects and how the presence in space can relate to sculpture. Sound is practically created by the displacement of air, and recorded or not is in motion were ever heard. Because of the diffuse physical presence and the fact that hearing is a generally more acute sense than our vision, the language heard can generate meanings beyond the text using the tone and structure of how it is spoken. This approach to language is similar to the approach to music, allowing for pathways to relate to the text and, more importantly, to think contradiction.

In languages where there are words that can both be nouns and verbs, there isn't a postfix for the changing of a word, freeing the noun to be used limberly. This is a technique used by many poets and philosophical and spiritual thinkers of China.²¹ Because of this nimble use of words and context, thinking contradiction becomes a much more natural endeavor. In slipping noun and verb, subject and object, it is easier to see that objects are also events, and the universe is constituent processes rather than a Newtonian cause and effect. With this 'pool table' view of

²⁰ Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Penguin Group, 1991.

²¹ "A Short History of Chinese Philosophy. by Fung Yu-Lan. Edited by Derk Bodde. New York: Macmillan. 1948.: Philosophy." *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 25 Feb. 2009.

reality, we are not simply doing what we are doing now. The "I" is also what I have done, and the conventionally edited version of the past, in this way of thinking, seems almost more real than what is present at the moment. For the "I" of the moment is so fleeting and intangible, this fixed and final view of the past. It becomes the basis for predictions of what will be in the future. The imagined "I" breaks down when we see how closely identified with what no longer exists than with what is. The present is something we move through using past experience and knowledge while grasping for a future that is too far to wholly know. The moment we are existing in(now is not now), becomes what is closest and also difficult to define. In this way, we are compelled to repeat actions even when what exists continues to develop. What is this thing that cannot be grasped or uttered? The moon reflected in the water doesn't wait for the water to reflect it, the water does not wait for the moon to shine its light on it. The branch appears bent not because the water reflects it so but because we see it as such. This might destroy an understanding of the world but only in ways that bring us closer to what already is.²² The present is inhabited when the future is not grasped for and the past is forgotten in favor of the moment.

Learning western music is done by using a limited number of fixed intervals. This system ignores a range of tones and rhythms in musical forms outside of it. For example, Chinese musicians maintain rough notations, which they refer to as cues for melody. In this way, listening to a teacher and feeling her performance is the best way to learn music. Studying notes is only a way to get the melody. Learning music by getting the feel in order to go beyond the basics is a way of playing and singing that also exists across Africa and the diaspora. Inspired by

²² Here I am combing a common image of Chinese philosophical tradition from Taoism to Zen Buddhism. Perhaps beginning in the 8th century with Li Bai (701-762) whose death was made legend when the poet leaped into the Yangtze River to embrace the moon reflected in the water. And the image of the twig's bent reflection in water used by Hegel in the introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

this kind of tonal sophistication, American classical composers Harry Partch and then Ben Johnston wrote using a system called just intonation as a way to interpret American spirituals and folk music.²³ Although using the 12-tone scale of European classical music, every good jazz artist uses the same approach as that of many generations of Asian and African musicians to compose and perform.²⁴

Hegel was most certainly a racist, and in ways similar to the Jacobins of the French Revolution, their word exceeded their deeds.²⁵ He, like the Jacobins, sought the universal, but for Hegel, the truth of the universal did not mean the kind of flattening that happens in what he would call Idealism. The universe is not waiting for us to understand it we must reconcile ourselves to it and understand ourselves and our own understanding as a part of what is generally regarded as an external world. That is to say, a universal that gains distance for the particular but doesn't abandon the particular. Racism can only be acceptable alongside the interpretations of the Hegelian dialectic that include synthesis²⁶. This is a position that avowed white supremacists and the post-racial liberals to share. Rejecting synthesis presented by many interpretations of Hegel might be heterodoxy for some but actually more closely aligned with him as a philosopher of contradiction. The conflicts between our ways of thinking and what is are only surmountable to the degree that we reconcile and understand our preconceived nations and mythologies.²⁷ In

²³ Shinn, Randall. "Ben Johnston's Fourth String Quartet." *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1977, p. 145., doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/832817>.

²⁴ Watts, Alan. *The Way of Zen*. Penguin Books, 1983.

²⁵ Fowkes, Ben. "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte ." *The Political Writings*, by Karl Marx et al., vol. 1, Verso, 2019, pp. 143–250.

²⁶ McGowan, Todd. "THE PATH TO CONTRADICTION: Redefining Emancipation." *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution*, Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 11–36

²⁷ Barthes, Roland, and Annette Lavers. *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang, 1994.

this schema, an attempt to overcome the contradiction as such is to completely destroy and dominate the other, as per the position of the white supremacist or the position of the post-racial liberal seeking to eradicate the possibility of the other. This post-racial position benefits from the societal scaffolding that is racism while working to make it invisible.

At the time of the writing of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the position to overcome was and still is, that of white European mastery. Determined to set right his Enlightenment predecessors and contemporaries, Hegel's thought exposed no one can even be truly a master when subjectivity is split, actualizing only through self-negation in relationship to the other²⁸. This circuit of self-negation is always at work and constitutes a subject as such. In the lordship and bondage section of *The Phenomenology*, or as Kojève aptly called it, master-slave, there is a relation between two subjects, thinking through their confrontation. Hegel sees these subjects coming together and seeking "being -for-self," resulting in the drive to negate the other totally through death. However, this act can never achieve meaningful recognition of self since it was gained from the existence of the other who has been murdered in the act of absolute negation. Here the master, not reconciled with self-negation, seeks actualization through domination of the enslaved. However, through dread of internal negation and labor or external negation, the enslaved can achieve "a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude" that the master can't achieve²⁹. While the master remains locked in the individuality of desire, the enslaved attains an ability to abstract.³⁰ Able to think non dualistically and reveal the illusory stability of their masters, enslaved Haitians collectivized this "independence of thought" in their revolution.

²⁸ Friedrich, Hegel Georg Wilhelm, et al. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009.

²⁹ Ibid.,149

³⁰ Stern, Robert. *The Routledge Guidebook to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Routledge, 2013.

Some have said that they borrowed the ideas of the French revolution; Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. However they actually already had a more complete picture of the universal and used a readily available rhetorical framework of the French revolution to define their project.

In the aftermath of the execution of the monarchy in 1793, the great powers of Europe sensed that their way of life and social orders were coming to an end resulting in the Vande and the launched the many Coalition wars. Eventually, this led to massive conflicts of the Napoleonic wars. Altogether a death toll dwarfing the Terror. The values of the French revolution didn't find their true articulation until the language of Communism. The republic was created by the French and utilized ideas of the Enlightenment but political forms borrowed from antiquity, in this way they could only truly remake Europe in their image through the imperialism established by the rule of Napoleon.

This road however is not destiny and to act as the force of history is only possible if we truly understand our place in it. A stack of tires hangs down coming out of the ceiling and reaching towards the floor in a form resembling stalactites one might see in a cave.³¹ When walking underneath this work there is a speaker built into the open orifice of the bottom tire, it speaks. Reciting the lyrics of Le Marseilles translated from the French in a word by word naïveté of a linguistic outsider. Breaking the lyrical structure in translation results in a harsh and poetic English monolog:

³¹ See fig.3

<i>Tremble, tyrants and traitors,</i>	<i>Tremble, tyrants, and you perfidious</i>
<i>The shame of all good men</i>	<i>The reproach of all parties,</i>
<i>Tremble! Your parricidal schemes</i>	<i>Tremble! your patricidal projects</i>
<i>Will receive their just reward</i>	<i>Will finally receive their prizes!</i>
<i>Against you we are all soldiers</i>	<i>Everything is a soldier to fight you,</i>
<i>If they fall, our young heroes</i>	<i>If they fall, our young heroes,</i>
<i>France will bear new ones</i>	<i>The earth produces new ones,</i>
<i>Ready to join the fight against you</i>	<i>Against you all ready to fight!</i>

The revolutionary song was written by composer Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle in Strasbourg and called *War Song for the Army of the Rhine* it was printed in Paris and became famous when sung by the volunteers from Marseille partaking in the uprising at the Tuileries on 10 August 1792 and eventually was declared as the national anthem on 14 July 1795. From the French Revolution onward, for the radical, the idea of the future was always something to be invented³². The symbols were raised and desecrated until the resistance and massacre of the communard's defeat cemented the bourgeois revolution and gave way to the Third Republic of 1879. Clearly, the radical project of communism had taken up in its lineage not just in drawing their theoretical ideas from the Enlightenment and their party structures from the Jacobins. Ready to invent their own futures these revolutionary agitators felt they were on a teleological march towards emancipation. In January 1919, Rosa Luxemburg wrote, "the road to socialism is paved with defeats... from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power, and

³² Traverso, Enzo. *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*. Columbia University Press, 2021. p2.

idealism" in her last writing before being executed by the Weimar republic in 1919.³³ Che Guevara told his killers led by operatives of the United States republic in October 1967: "We have lost, but the revolution is immortal".³⁴ Other revolutionary leaders held utopian horizons and made more pragmatic dealings. Everyday people who had gone through World War I and the revolutionary upheavals in Russia didn't want the permanent revolution of Trotsky and in a simplistic way opted for the stability being offered by Stalin although history had other plans. Alexander Kolenti's sexual revolution of the 1920s gave way to her and many others' capitulation to a life or death realpolitik. Then the setbacks began to mount through continued conflict, and the Soviet Union weakened at its core, its leadership no longer believed in its own avowed aspirations. After 1989, there was no longer a future to invent for the left and the future is something that those who believed in the possibility of mass unfettering desperately seek to excavate out of the past. Many others seek, paradoxically, to define their opposition to ideology through their consumption. More generally there is a remaining attachment to the object of the past that can never fulfill their present. The tires are spent and the vehicle can't move, the working engine and all can no longer follow the road. To invoke Lindsey's Law "when the draft of your vessel exceeds the depth of the water you are most assuredly aground".³⁵

In 1816 the French naval frigate *Méduse*, the lead ship of a convoy en route to the colony Saint-Louis in Senegal a British handover as a result of the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Under the influence of the newly appointed colonial governor and the inept command of Hugues Duroy

³³ Ibid.,35

³⁴ Ibid.,37

³⁵ *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee*, by William R. Staples and Richard M. Deasy, Published Jointly by the Rhode Island Publications Society, The Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, and the Rhode Island Supreme Court Historical Society, 1990, p. 13.

de Chaumareys, a man who had not sailed for 20 years and never captained a ship, appointed by Louis XVII was the product of political appointments of royalists necessary to secure the Bourbon Restoration of 1814, the ship was led off course. First stopping at the Canary Islands and then sailing along the shoreline the *Méduse* hit a sandbar in the treacherous region known then as the Arguin off the coast of what is now Mauritania.³⁶ The events that led to the catastrophe and the actions that followed laid bare for many the life and death significance of social class. The evacuation to reach shore saw the aristocratic passengers and officers aboard sturdy boats and the one with Chaumareys on board being far less overloaded than the others, and at least 150 people, mostly the ship's crew, soldiers, and civilians, on a raft constructed from spars and masts stripped from the marooned vessel.³⁷ This raft began to sink under the weight of the passengers who boarded it. They were to be towed by the lifeboats, however, they were overwhelmed by those left on the raft as supplies would surely begin to dwindle. The line was cut and the raft set adrift condemning its passengers to death and despair. After 13 days 15 out of the 150 people on the raft remained when discovered by the *Argus* which was sent to drop supplies for the people who had made it ashore and to salvage supplies from the *Méduse* but not to find the raft. The story of this doomed raft and its passengers are the makings of a monumental painting by Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Méduse*.³⁸ Géricault depicts the ship's survivors in the desperate moments before being discovered by the *Argus*, depicted as a small mass in the distance. A ship so far away that the people aboard on the raft are surely invisible to them at the

³⁶ Savigny, Jean Baptiste Henri, and Corréard Alexandre. *Narrative of a Voyage to Senegal in 1816: Undertaken by Order of the French Government*. Marlboro Press, 1986.

³⁷ See fig.5

³⁸ Géricault, Théodore. *The Raft of the Méduse*. 1818, Louvre Museum, Paris. See fig.4

moment and they potentially could be overlooked One figure in the painting stands out in particular, a black man reaches out waving a red flag of distress.



Figure 1

“His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm

is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress.”³⁹

A collection of beer cans cut, unraveled, flattened, and attached to each other in a quilt-like grid formation.⁴⁰ They are arranged sorted by color and label then printed with a resist and etched in an acid bath inscribing the image into the substrate of recycled material with traces of photographic halftone print. These traces are all that remain from the original photograph taken in Los Angeles during one of the many protests that broke out in 2020 against the murderous acts of white supremacists and sought to capture and utilize an ultimately unsuccessful will to end the structure of racism. In the original photo, the foreground is taken up mostly by a burning LAPD vehicle and clouds of smoke around which the crowd moved to march down Beverly boulevard. The wake of the destruction of property was the only act in hindsight that could not be fully recuperated as the slogans of Black Live Matter became corporate slogans used in advertising faining at solidarity. The true core of the conflict is one in which we see the structure of racism as part of a permanent scaffolding that helped build and now helps to uphold capital. When far enough back from the wall to see all three panels that make up the artwork, the three colors of the tricolor flag of the French Revolution referenced in the title become clear. The symbol of Enlightenment values appears as wretched discarded products and is damaged in ways that remind how the Revolutionary flag was flown and torn down for almost one hundred years of republics monarchies, empires 1789-1879. Throughout

³⁹ Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt. “Theses on the Philosophy of History .” *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 1988, pp. 243–264.

⁴⁰ See fig.2

the barricades and the battles on the streets continue to repeat themselves. Revolution and reactions clothed in the language of the past drawing philosophical lineage from antiquity⁴¹ as the Carolingians hundreds of years before them laid claim to bloodlines.⁴²The tricolor flag arose out of republics formed during the liberal revolutions and France formed Europe in its own image. There is a way in this work that one can miss the forest for the trees but also the tree for the forest. Elements are not grasped spatially by trying to grasp the whole and others are missed by examining the particulars of the etched surface. The image is abstracted and degraded along with the substrate beyond recognition and in this state what is signified; the colors blue, white, red, France, USA, the tricolor flag, the revolutionary uprising, the person digging through the garbage collecting cans, all the connotations of identity we associate with to what brand of commodities people consume, Budweiser, Bud Light, Modelo, all have room to slide in and away but never to reach completion. The work is called tricolor to point in the direction of the flag each panel sits on the wall as its own work and every beer is a unit that can be put together into an 'all' but a whole will never be achieved. The landscape produced is incoherent and still a closer sort of consistency to the event, beyond the photograph. The burns and the trash of the street are not pointed to but present the image is lost but an atmosphere not obtained by the photograph is what remains.

Salvaging material from the wreckage of the past to reconcile with the irreconcilable. the trauma of loss and melancholic attachments to past struggles with emancipatory aspirations. To mourn the struggles of the future that feels doomed to fail. The show was created by drawing from and responding to a collection of historical fragments. Using the formation of the Estates

⁴¹ Fowkes, Ben. "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte ." *The Political Writings*, by Karl Marx et al., vol. 1, Verso, 2019, pp. 143–250.

⁴² Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*. Penguin Books, 2020.

general in 1789 and the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as signposts to an aspirational era that has passed. A critique of teleological notions of progress can emerge. That is to say the unexpected results and failures of a class acting as a self-avowed subject-object of history, as in the case of Chinese and Soviet communism, make the inevitable progress towards a notion of liberation much less of a given. But if the idea of the loss benign just as a step in the road is rejected there is space for the moment to reflect and gain retroactive insights that can only happen after an 'end'. The dates 1789 and 1989 define a connection between the ideals of the Enlightenment and communism or the ideals of the Enlightenment have the end in communism. In the case of the Enlightenment, "the words go beyond the deeds". Since it spurred revolutions led by the bourgeois the ultimate horizon of their own revolution is not possible without the dissolution of their own class and exclusive rights. We must wade through the wreckage to mourn and redeem. In *The Ringer Irreconcilable*, discarded everyday objects and audio works present themselves with abject grandeur and present a position of a dialectical pessimism that can present a seemingly hopeless vision of our world and at the same time embrace possibilities, the present affords.

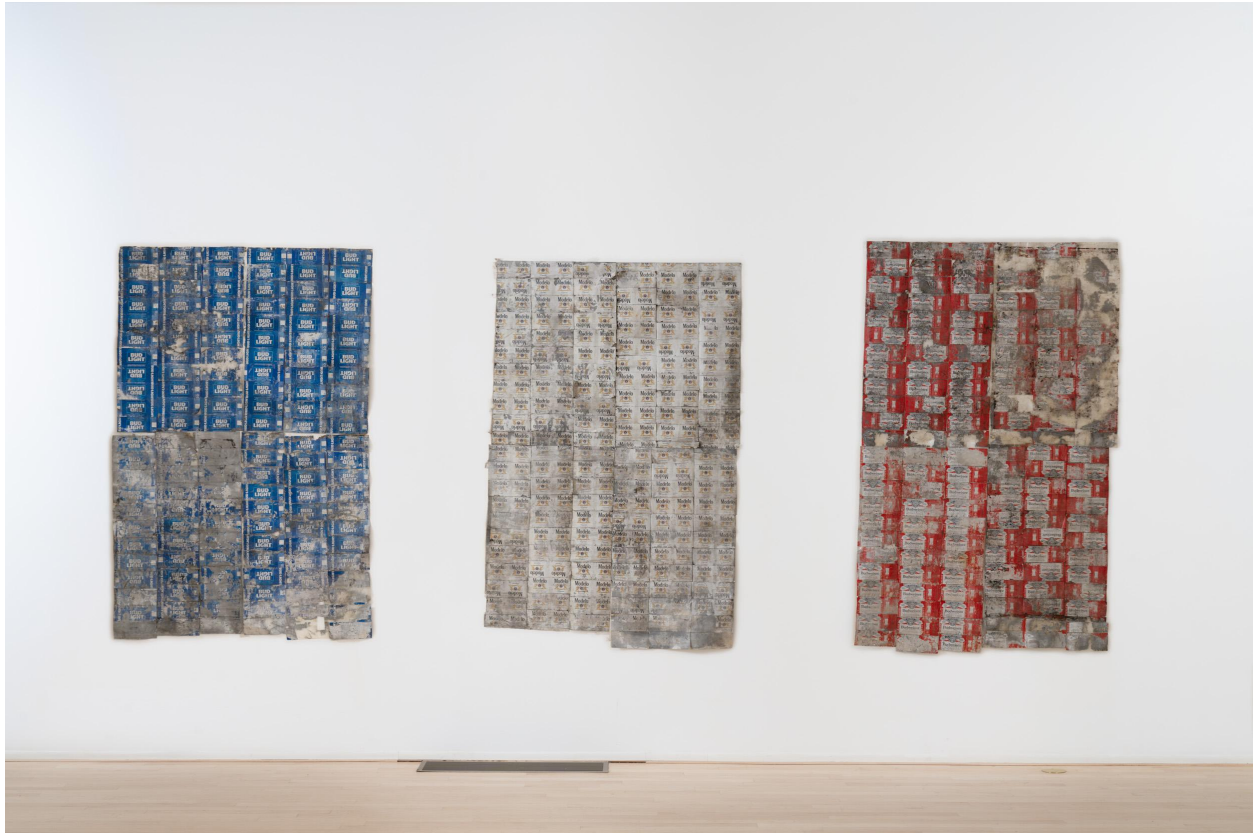


Figure 2



Figure 3



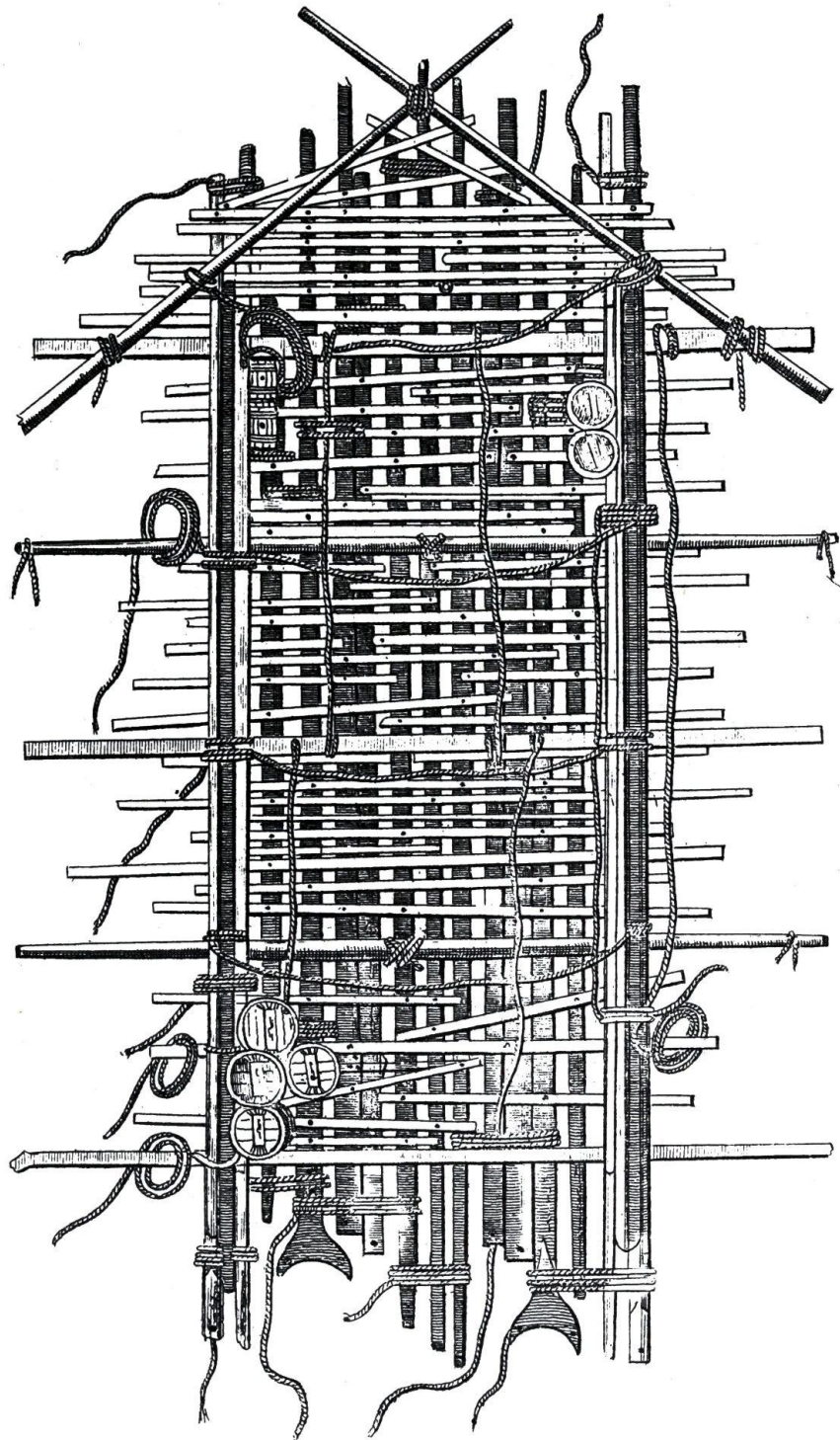


Figure 5

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