David Frohnapfel, *Alleviative Objects: Intersectional Entanglement and Progressive Racism in Caribbean Art*. Berlin: De Gruyter/Transcript, 2020. cccxvi + 316 pp. (US\$ 49.99)

Alleviative Objects began as a dissertation in History and Cultural Studies (Freie Universität Berlin) devoted to the intersectional conflicts within the Port-au-Prince artists' collective Atis Rezistans and its foreign visitors, whether artists or curators. It fits within current approaches to the study of curatorial practices and the "decolonial turn," part of a decentering and changing episteme.

Rarely has Haitian art been the subject of such a precise field investigation and, if it has benefited from numerous analyses, some of which have remained famous because of their authors (André Breton, André Malraux), it is here the subject of a study that goes beyond the strict framework of art as an aesthetic practice. Based on his experience of cocuration, interviews, and participant observation, David Frohnapfel endeavors to "describe hierarchical interactions between actors of different socioeconomic strata, nationalities, and races" (p. 30) in the context of studio visits, exhibitions, and the "Ghetto Biennale," an event organized by the collective since 2009.

With their English manager, the founding members of the collective have chosen to put forward an aesthetic and a discourse that emphasize their class position within Haitian society, that of a popular neighborhood in which they occupy a block reconfigured as a "museum of art." According to their manifesto, published online, their works embody the response of the entire country to the Western world: they return the "garbage" that the Western world sends to it, sending it back in the sublimated and revalorized form of provocative artworks. Thus the Ghetto Biennale, with its strong international media success and the welcoming of young foreign artists for in situ creation, offers the ideal ground for direct observation of the "classed, racialized, and gendered entanglements" (p. 18) of these interactions. By focusing on the various strategies deployed by Haitian artists in positions of subalternity to secure and maintain control over their relationship to the art world as well as to other artists, both local and visiting, Frohnapfel reframes the question of the Caribbean "ethnic slot" that had already impacted the lives of Haitian artists working in the past. He speaks explicitly of "artistic poverty tourism," in which visiting artists experience a measured but exciting risk-taking and guilt that pushes them into an ambiguous politics of pity, while some local artists find in these exchanges, rather, the opportunity to break into international galleries and museums. "Art as a survivalist strategy" (p. 50) thus appears here as a form of resistance from below, through "strategic marginality and dramatized curated poverty" (p. 266).

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In viewing the exhibitions as what curator Bruce Ferguson (in a 1996 edited book called *Thinking about Exhibitions*) calls “strategic systems of representations,” they assert their singularity by dissociating themselves from the naive art at the origin of Haiti’s artistic reputation, creating aggressive, monumental works more adapted to galleries than to private homes, and adopting the codes of the globalized contemporary art world, including installations, large-scale sculptures, and the use of industrial materials.

In the midst of these well-oiled narratives and this postindustrial mythology, which speaks so forcefully to Westerners, Frohnäpfel makes two essential points: the existence of interclass collaboration (and even real support) and curatorial supervision of the new artists from popular backgrounds by artists categorized as contemporary and bourgeois. Thus for him, the classist prism through which the members of *Atis Rezistans* are apprehended would implicitly reconcile a reading deemed “progressive racist” linking Haiti and poverty in an ontological manner. Moreover, the art of recuperation, even if it is pushed to the extreme here, is an old phenomenon, since it dates back to the international embargo of the 1990s, which forced artists to look for alternative local materials.

As for Vodou, it reveals itself as occupying an ambiguous place, between a political tool of resistance and an essentializing trap given that it is often an expected, even required, category for foreign buyers or institutions. If the artists of the collective adopt varied, even opposed positions on the place of Vodou in their productions, they have nevertheless massively assumed recourse to it—this in a figuration of the wild closer to Western squats than to the ancestral cult, caught as they are between “‘auto-orientalist’ mechanisms” (p. 50) and application of the “de-exoticizing paradigm” (p. 40). It is through their “difference,” at once culturally and socioeconomically fetishized, that they are registered in the circuit of international art, and Frohnäpfel deplores the “conditional hospitality” of which they are the object, “merely inscribed into white pedagogies as alleviate objects that perform emotional labor for white audiences” (p. 55). He pleads for “disobedient musealities” based on the sharing of authority and the decolonization of minds and institutions inscribed in the larger program of “reparative justice” for the Caribbean.

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