

Nairy Baghramian,
Chin Up, 2015.
leather, epoxy
resin, chromed
steel, silicone,
9' 3 3/4" x 14' x 2'.
Installation view.
Photo: Diego Pérez.



indoors, with an artistic tradition in which abstraction runs strong. Baghramian has said that her affinity with Surrealism reflects the distortions produced by historical and social limitations. And so the proverbial juxtaposition of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table becomes a soft lung, a chromed rib, and a white shell scattered around a museum, eliciting a change in perspective, a shift in posture—ours and even the institution's—as the inside is made public on its walls.

—Gabriela Jauregui

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI
4th Ghetto Biennale 2015
 VARIOUS VENUES

Cofounded in 2009 by artist-curators Leah Gordon (UK) and André Eugene (Haiti) and sited in the Grand Rue neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, the Ghetto Biennale brings together a cadre of international artists with Atis Rezistans, a group of Haitian artists who live on Grand Rue and incorporate the detritus of that dense urban center into their work in a creative process they call *récupération*. Positing a curatorial ethic distinct from socially engaged practices emblemized by artists like Theaster Gates and Thomas Hirschhorn, the exhibition embodies a number of conflicting aims, as its ostensibly contradictory moniker suggests. The Atis Rezistans practitioners seek to enter an art market from which they have been largely excluded. Their foreign colleagues, in contrast, articulate their projects and enfold their own presence in the neighborhood as a conceptual encounter with Haitian history and culture as well as a critique of the occidental art complex with its white cubes and global art fairs.

Inviting artists to engage with the theme of “Kreyòl, Vodou and the Lakou: Forms of Resistance,” the Fourth Ghetto Biennale 2015 offered new approaches to these incongruities. However, its curatorial strategies unintentionally continued to perpetuate a binary relationship between local and international artists that was made manifest when one navigated the dense corridors of the neighborhood. While many of the foreign participants exhibited their works and performances on exterior walls or more explicitly communal spaces, the vast majority of Haitian works remained tucked away in the *lakous*—extended familial dwellings—of individual artists that often remained difficult to locate, even with a map.

Individually, however, many of the installations and performances worked to dissolve these divisions between center and periphery through an acute attention to creolized relationality, a concept devel-

oped by Édouard Glissant to account for the distinct syncretism of Caribbean cultures. Omani artist Radhika Khimji's *Safely Standing* (all works 2015)—an installation of three walls of concrete blocks on a tile floor, arranged at angles and topped with shards of broken glass—used local building materials to thoughtfully braid together a Minimalist sculptural encounter with the complex relationship to space within the lakou. *Safely Standing* also served as the site around which a group of Haitian and American dancers—Dasha Chapman, Yonel Charles, Jean-Sebastien Duvalaire, and Ann Mazzocca—performed their *Activating Petwo's Kinesthetic Imagination: Dancing Revolution and Forging Lakou in the Gran Rue*. Synthesizing modern and voodoo dance aesthetics, the ensemble eloquently embodied the political potential of a relational approach to the Ghetto Biennale. Their performance posited resistance as an assemblage that creates a new whole instead of maintaining divisions, whether national, spiritual, or ontological. Duvalaire articulated this performative interrogation of the biennale itself when he exclaimed, “What the fuck is the opposite of a ghetto?” By drawing out the false dichotomy between “ghetto” and “biennale,” the performance asserted the inextricable inclusion of Haiti in a globalized contemporaneity.

Performed one afternoon in a heavily trafficked courtyard, Canadian artist Jamie Ross's *A Script of Desire* drew a crowd of intrigued bystanders and artists alike. He used autohypnosis to initiate a process of automatic writing, reactivating an alphabet he invented during his childhood to conceal his early sexual and magical experimentation. An assistant distributed water and coffee to the audience and, with Ross and a translator, described the performance in English, French, and Kreyòl in order to engage a wider community. Speaking and performing his own practice in the vernacular of voodoo and the complex spatial relationships of the lakou, Ross deftly grappled with the complexities of his own white, queer, and foreign position in the exhibition. Queerness—as it is differently articulated in Haitian and occidental cultures—became a vehicle through which nondialectical relationships could be



Dasha Chapman,
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Imagination: Dancing
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the Gran Rue, 2015*.
Performance view,
Lakou Twoket,
Port-au-Prince,
Haiti, December 19,
2015. From the
4th Ghetto Biennale.
Photo: Lazaros.

formed. Given such discrepancies between curatorial and artistic production, it seems imperative that the Ghetto Biennale continue to explore a mutually informed and reciprocal approach in which this diverse group of local and international artists can continue to coalesce as a generative assemblage, rather than as bifurcated parts or the fiction of a unified whole.

—C.C. McKee

CORRECTION: In the January issue, in a Media column about Videobrasil, the term “artistic bridge,” used to describe the nature of the proposed relationship between Kassel and Athens as cohorts for the forthcoming Documenta 14, was mistakenly attributed to the event's artistic director Adam Szymczyk instead of German minister of foreign affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier. *Artforum* regrets the error.