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- 1 Laura Facey was born in 1945 in Kingston, Jamaica. She graduated from the Jamaica School of Art with a Diploma in Sculpture in 1975. She also attended West Surrey College of Art and Design in England and Rhode Island School of Design in the United States. Although she is principally known as a sculptor, Facey also works in other media such as drawing, painting and print-making. In recent years her focus has been on large-scale meditative pieces which explore the symbolic and cultural potential of the natural forms of wood, and of man-made tools and instruments. She has shown work in numerous local and international exhibitions; it has been showcased in important publications such as the journal *Small Axe*, and her many commissions include the well-known statue entitled *Redemption Song* (2003) in Emancipation Park in Kingston. She was awarded the Musgrave Silver Medal (2006), and the Aaron Matalon Prize for her contribution to the 2010 Jamaica Biennial. In 2014 the Jamaican Government conferred on her the Order of Distinction (Commander). Facey lives in St Ann, Jamaica.

ANNA SEIDERER [AS]: You were trained at the Jamaica School of Art as well as at the West Surrey College of Art and Design in England and the Rhode Island School of Design in the US in the seventies. Were historical themes such as the transatlantic slave trade, slavery and colonization addressed in those settings?

LAURA FACEY [LF]: NO! For my foundation year at art school in England I received a traditional 'hands on' course of learning — life drawing, lithography, etching, block printing, painting, carving in plaster, clay and photography. There was no art history to speak of and certainly no discussion about slavery or colonization. I lived in Surrey with a family. What was magical was getting on a train to London, spending my weekends there and visiting every art gallery and museum that my legs and mind could manage — the Hayward, the British Museum, The Royal College of Surgeons

and so on. My summer course in Rhode Island was contemporary. I made a time sculpture, a wind sculpture, a strange costume and addressed other unusual themes. It was refreshing and a great balance to my 'traditional' year in the UK. At the Jamaica School of Art there was no art history but there was the freedom to work under tutors who were practicing artists and, experience their exhibitions that happened regularly during my school years. I worked full time at sculpting in wood, clay, block printing, painting and drawing for several years.

Fig. 1. *Violet*, 1972, bronze, sculpted at the West Surrey College of Art and Design, UK, life-size.

Photo © Laura Facey.

AS: Could you describe the creative context and artistic focuses developed in the 70s in those schools? Were there any important encounters for you at that time? It would be great if you could share your memories of art students in the different schools and how it influenced — or not — your artistic practices.

LF: At the West Surrey College there was one fellow artist who was as zealous about life drawing as I was. Together, with our coincidentally Jamaican model, we drew most days and evenings. Our drawing sessions were intense. At the Jamaican School of Art, there were 13 students in 'my year'. We were close and even saved and fundraised for a group trip to Mexico. That experience alone was extraordinary. We travelled on planes, trains, buses! We visited the pyramids in Merida, also, the beautifully textured and colorful town of San Cristóbal de las Casas way up in the mountains where the Mexican people wore exquisite traditional handwoven garments and drank hot steaming white corn porridge from tall glasses. One day, while sitting on a bench, a Mexican boldly came forward to pat the afro (hair) and skin of one of our team, exclaiming 'muy bonito' (very beautiful). Mexico City was a feast of sculpture, murals, ancient artwork, all accessible in friendly public spaces —

we'd never experienced the latter — some of us had not travelled — we felt welcomed in Mexico and changed forever.

Our tutors at the School of Art were remarkable and inspiring artists. Winston Patrick taught wood carving and Osmond Watson and Colin Garland taught painting. Also, at that time, I was exposed to the carvings and exhibitions of Edna Manley, the 'mother' of Jamaican art. Her work, shown in our National Gallery, was powerful and moving. I knew Mrs. Manley personally, visited her studio occasionally and assisted her with casting a large relief work for the Little Theatre in Jamaica. David Boxer, another exceptional artist and chief curator for our National Gallery, was my mentor for many years. He had an exhibition of installations at our Institute of Jamaica that completely opened my mind to mixed media and the use of found objects.

AS: What led you to become a sculptor, and how do you link it to your deep attraction for trees, and more generally, to your daily surroundings?

LF: I'm not exactly sure. I love working with my hands, I love the feel of things, their tactility. Wood, clay, found weathered rusted implements and objects; people, nature, healing and all that life has to offer inspires me. I live on a farm surrounded by trees. It's completely natural and logical to carve wood. Wood is easily available, plus my exposure to woodcarving at art school. Also, it's what we do here in the Caribbean — wood carvings are everywhere!

AS: Looking at your work, I had the feeling of a very site-specific process. That the history and memory of the places and materials are part of your creative process... It would be great if you could expound on the transformations you initiate by working on materials/elements such as trees, so they become a sculpture. There is also a collective and ritualistic dimension: can you tell me more about it? Maybe with the examples of *Heart Of A Man* (2019) and *Phibbah* (2012)?

LF: My work is very site specific in that I live on a slavery plantation on the island of Jamaica where slavery is our main history. Ninety eight percent of our people are of African descent with their ancestors captured from Africa between 1655-1834. My artwork comes from this history combined with my personal experiences. My Mother, passionate about our family history and the history of where we live, unearthed the slave inventory that I use in *62 Men and 63 Women*. When exhibiting this piece for the first time, dancers from our community performed nine-night songs for carrying the spirit 'over' and Jonkanoo dances for the celebration of life.

Fig. 2. *62 Men And 63 Women*, 2015, cottonwood canoe 14 ft, 125 resin miniatures of the *Redemption Song* Monument, stone wall, 18 x 6 ft, nine-night singers, Mt Plenty, Jamaica.

Photo © Kent Reid.

Fig. 3. *62 Men And 63 Women*, 2015, cottonwood canoe 14 ft, 125 resin miniatures of the *Redemption Song* Monument, stone wall, 18 x 6 ft, Jonkanoo dancers, Mt Plenty, Jamaica.

Photo © Kent Reid.

While working, each piece has its own rhythm, there is an unfolding, sometimes slow, sometimes fast — a piece of wood is delivered to my studio by the help of my husband and assistants, sometimes chosen by me sometimes not, sometimes the wood sits for years waiting or sometimes immediately I pounce, throwing bark and sap in every direction. It depends on what's on my mind, what needs to be said, sometimes current events are the trigger — *Heart Of A Man* was a counter response to the *Me Too* movement — men have their own buried pain from being shackled on a ship, not

being able to protect their families, their hearts metaphorically ripped from their chests. That pain pervades their lives today. Another example of history, memory and trees coming together was *De Hangin of Phibbah an Her Private Parts an De Bone Yard*. I used the hurtful experiences of other women and my own traumatic past to illustrate a commission from the *Small Axe Caribbean Journal of Criticism* for a project entitled *The Visual Life Of Catastrophic History*. Both *Heart Of A Man* and *Phibbah* were inspired by William Blake's drawing of a *Negro Hung By The Ribs* done in 1792 that was used to help with the emancipation from slavery.

Fig. 4. *Heart Of A Man*, 2019, wood and fiberglass canoe, cedar and mahogany hearts, rope, hook, 18 x 18 ft.

Photo © Ishack Wilmot.

Fig. 5. *De Hangin Of Phibbah An Her Private Parts An De Bone Yard*, 2012, cedar, mahogany, rope, iron, 15 x 19 ft.

Photo © Laura Facey.

Fig. 6. *De Hangin Of Phibbah*, printed on Kitikata paper, 2012, 10 x 8.5 inches.

Commissioned by *Small Axe*, Caribbean Journal of Criticism for a project entitled *The Visual Life of Catastrophic History*, with funding from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Paddle For The Boat of Souls was in process when Haiti experienced an earthquake in 2010, two hundred thousand people died and my carving was symbolic of paddling their souls to 'heaven', to the other side. Also, the 'paddle' is symbolic of propelling spirit and vital force into my life expressing the complete joy of me awakening to 'spirit' within me!

AS: You introduce the *Radiant Earth* book by stressing your strong connection between your father's death and the felling of a cedar which you turned into the sculpture *Walking tree* (2013). Would you consider life and death as a process of transformation which nourishes your entire work?

LF: Yes, I accept that life and death 'are'. All of life nourishes my work — our histories, our present lives, the known and the unknown.

AS: Looking at the sculptures *Broken Open* (1986) and *Moonshine Baby* (1986) it seems to me that your art works are moved by submarine currents that reveal you, your personal biography, and help you to pull through its traumatic experience.

LF: Yes, works like *Broken Open* and *Moonshine Baby* were cathartic. My first twenty years of artwork were personally introspective, thus, healing for me. My following twenty-six years have been prayerful — for example, *Redemption Song*, a monument to Emancipation, is a prayer. My prayer is for healing from the unmitigated cruelty of slavery which has had lasting effects intergenerationally. This overarching horror legacy has affected the collective consciousness of everything in Jamaica — its economics, education, health, its wholeness.

Fig. 7. *Broken Open*, 1986, satin wood, 8 inches.

Photo © Franz Marzouca.

Fig. 8. *Moonshine Baby*, 1986, purple heart wood, yarn, gouache, 30 x 23 inches.

Photo © Laura Facey.

Fig. 9. *Redemption Song*, 2003, bronze, Monument to Emancipation, Emancipation Park, Kingston, Jamaica, 14 ft.

Photo © Franz Marzouca.

AS: José Manuel Noceda mentions that you're working with 'the memory of ancient materials', which has deep geographical and historical links to the Taíno people and to enslaved African people who have lived on your farm. Can you explain those entangled histories that are materialized in your place?

LF: We have pottery remains of the gentle Taíno and we have inventories, graves and stones walls built by the enslaved African people on our farm and, though those two groups of people were not 'entangled', their remains and presence inspire my work. By nature, I'm not a mentalist, my work moves through me, as do the forbears of this landscape.

AS: You've mentioned that *Redemption Song* (2003) 'felt completely right to you' at the time you were creating it; how did the public protest and today's appropriations of it by tourists transform your link to the Monument?

LF: *Redemption Song* still feels 'right'. If every person in the world was asked to give an opinion of the monument, each would have a different thought, so I was not stressed by negative comments. However, I'm thrilled that the work is now popular and creates a lot of interest and that it is doing its work as a prayer.

AS: In *Their Spirits Gone Before Them* (2006), miniature replicas of *Redemption Song* are installed in a fisherman's canoe of a type still in use in Jamaica. Can you describe the dialogue between those monumental figures and the multiple miniatures of them? How does the call for freedom and liberty resist mass reproduction?

LF: After making the monument for Emancipation Park in Kingston Jamaica, the Government of Jamaica asked me to make miniatures of the Monument to be sold as souvenirs. Part way through this project, the Government changed their mind and stopped supporting the initiative. I sold some of the souvenirs but quickly became bored — I started to 'see' the miniatures in a traditional Jamaican fishing canoe and a deliberation began inside of me — *how can I put my 'freed' people back into a canoe that immediately suggests the Transatlantic crossing?* My husband, sensing my inner turmoil, read to me, a few lines from Margaret Cezair-Thompsons' book entitled *A True History Of Paradise* — *'Is a spirit thing. The slave ships had their bodies for a little while, but their spirits were already waitin' for them in these mountains guiding them here.'* This was my permission as it is my belief, we are eternal!

Fig. 10. *Their Spirits Gone Before Them*, 2006, cottonwood canoe 16 feet long installed with 1,357 resin miniatures of the *Redemption Song* monument floating on a wave of sugar cane, 72 x 240 x 33 inches.

Photo © Donnette Zacca.

ABSTRACTS

In this interview, Jamaican artist Laura Facey presents her background and the biographical elements that led her to make the question of slavery and the slave trade a central element of her practice. Her family was established on a former plantation whose registers, found by her mother, attest to the presence of 63 enslaved women and 67 men. This tragic past is the starting point for a violence that still punctuates the daily life of her society. Facey invests her works with a memorial charge that she hopes will be cathartic.

Dans cet entretien, l'artiste jamaïcaine Laura Facey présente son parcours et les éléments biographiques qui l'ont conduite à faire de la question de l'esclavage et de la traite un élément central de sa pratique. Sa famille est établie dans une ancienne plantation dont les registres, retrouvés par sa mère, attestent de la présence de 63 femmes et de 67 hommes esclavisé·e·s. Ce passé tragique constitue le point de départ d'une violence qui rythme encore la vie quotidienne de sa société. Facey investit ses œuvres d'une charge mémorielle qu'elle souhaite cathartique.

En esta entrevista, la artista jamaicana Laura Facey presenta su trayectoria y los elementos biográficos que la llevaron a hacer de la cuestión de la esclavitud y de la trata un elemento

central de su práctica. Su familia establecida en una antigua plantación cuyos registros fueron encontrados por su madre, dan cuenta de la presencia de 63 mujeres y de 67 hombres esclavizados. Este pasado trágico constituye el punto de partida de una violencia que todavía marca el ritmo de la vida cotidiana de su sociedad. Las obras de Facey tienen una carga memorial que desea catártica.

Nesta entrevista, a artista jamaicana Laura Facey apresenta sua trajetória e os elementos biográficos que a levaram a colocar a questão da escravidão e do tráfico negreiro no centro de sua prática artística. Sua família vive numa antiga *plantation*, cujos registros foram encontrados pela sua mãe, revelando a presença de 63 mulheres e 67 homens escravizados/as. Este passado trágico constitui o ponto de partida de uma violência que continua a ritmar o dia a dia de sua sociedade. Facey envolve nas suas obras uma carga memorial que deve ser entendida como uma catarse.

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Mots-clés: esclavage, sculpture, monuments, mémoire, plantation, Jamaïque

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