

**Eddy Firmin**

**THESIS EXTRACTS**

## Introduction

Contemporary art is a complex space, a dense and extremely diverse world. It is difficult, even borderline impossible, to grasp all of its movements and networks, but there is no denying that its base can be traced to the Western hemisphere, and cannot thus escape the stigma of colonization (...)

In 2006, during an international conference led by l'ACTAZÉ for the Observatory of Art and Cultures, Valérie Morignat notes that the production of Southern artists is automatically framed by the “History of Western art which serves as a reference for identification and mediation” (Morignat, 2006). Along the same lines, Nicolas Bourriaud emphasizes that the standards, history and concepts of contemporary art are proclaimed as “natural” everywhere, and thus spontaneously shareable by everyone (Bourriaud, 2009 p.14).

These voices are allies in denouncing the pressures that Southern artist face, but it is up to the artist himself to put measures in place allowing him to resist this mistreatment of his imagination and his cultural aesthetics codes, which have been invaded by a history of Western art that was not conceived for him.

In light of this coercitive context, how do I emancipate myself from an history of art that is only a part of who I am? How do I create an environment that will foster a fair dialogue and exchange? These are the questions that I would like to address in this research. *La méthode bossale* offers a plan to mend the broken imaginary and means to reappropriate codes and customs that were overcome by esthetics domination.

## EXTRACT 2

### Context and Academic Career

*No art. No poetry. Not a seed. Not a sprout. Or the hideous leprosy of forgery. In truth a barren and mute soil... But it is no longer time to leech off the world. It is rather time to save it.*

(Aimé Césaire, 1941)

Art as intended by Césaire is not just an object of pure aesthetics enjoyment, it is a tool of emancipation and self-assertion. It is a cultural warhead allowing self preservation against domination. However, it will take him forty-three years to put these words to action, at least for visual arts. From the ashes of the School of Applied Arts, created in 1943, Césaire, who was then the mayor of the capital city of Martinique, Fort-de-France, supported the creation of the first art school of the Lesser Caribbean in 1984, known today as the Regional Institute of Visual Arts of Martinique. Like many school arts, the school emphasized interdisciplinarity. I was among the first students who gradually tried his hand at a more rooted practice.

## EXTRACT 3

### Theoretical frame : decolonial studies

This research fully enters into decolonial studies, which question the subordination of models in art and knowledge production among the colonized. Derived from the post-colonial school of thought, it offers ways for the decolonized artist to rebuild his imaginary and to address the knowledge broken by the epistemic domination, “to invoke, remember, rebuild the relation with everything that was lost, separated or marginalized (...)”(Vasquez, 2015, p.178).

This act of decolonization is aimed for both the colonized and the colonizer, to create a space for mutual visibility and understanding. It is, in other words, a process that promotes equity in each side’s relationship with art and knowledge.

(...)

The decolonial process thinking was a major political mainstay in my personal journey, because it emphasizes the necessity to give birth to artistic proposals linked with an emancipated epistemology, or at the very least outside of the Western epistemological frames while highlighting a very real epistemological violence.

It also underlines a voluntary exit from the universalistic school of thought, suggesting that we can indeed achieve mutual understanding from a non-locatable universal despite our differences.

*Le pluriversalisme* (multiversalism) implies an understanding of one’s otherness, body, location, environment and even episteme. Apprehending the otherness through one’s ways to produce knowledge, allows us to initiate genuine dialogue between cultures.

## **EXTRACT 4**

### **Imaginary I-body**

Although my culture was born from the resounding clash between two irreconcilable worlds, denying one or the other is never an option. I question the legacy from Africa and the relationship it maintains with my Western side, I research beyond the wounds and the resentment to examine the fruit of their union, to interrogate the “I”. Who am I? Which daily political corpus did my culture produce and how does it further the questioning of the very young decolonial visual art world?

This very personal exercise allowed me to bring forward my vision of an alternate modernity, a culture of orality reinventing and adapting its codes and systems when faced with the fast pace of our current world. It revealed the I-body, a way of considering one’s individuality, one’s body as well as those of members of one’s community, all simultaneously. The I-body is not a concept, it is a way of being in the world.

## EXTRACT 5

### **Bossale and Atlas: poetry of a similarity**

The *bossale* is a founding figure of the Caribbean, he is the slave born in Africa. An human commodity of the slave trade, but he is also the one that fights vehemently and resists the slave system and its colonial imaginary.

Just like the Atlas Titan, the *bossale* is a figure of brute physical strength crushed by the weight of the world's violence. Atlas and the *bossale* are exiles punished by fate and condemned to carry the world, the world of others, the world of chaotic otherness. They are the expression of precarious balance and wandering, of portage. They both support an identical poetry of origins.

However, they both resist a fatal fall. They both refuse to be crushed by the insane burden created by the imaginary of a world that is not theirs. These two figures take part in the same resistance to chaos and express the same poetry of survival in a context of forced exile. Symbols of nudity and destitution, their bodies seem to both resist the chaos and transport it. Their inset faces are a portrait of the damned of the Earth, the un-earthed (with no land of their own). They are the ragged faces of social death, of the outcasts. They embody the destruction of imaginaries by the violent domination of a global world. They are a shadow in the window of the imagination of all the disenfranchised of the world. *Bossale* and Atlas are the metaphor for all the unknown slaves of our contemporary world, those whose luminous imaginary shines bright in the nights that we know nothing about. In the formless mass of our globalization, billions are compelled to support a world that would fall apart without them.

## **EXTRACT 6**

### **Emotional alphabet**

No plate, no title, no indication of materials, no date of conception and no information whatsoever on the format. Just like the verb was taken out of the previous sentence, we took out the informative core allowing the visitor to enter the piece through the agreed upon door. Deprived of the vertical reading, he is pushed to wander and his pace is determined by the pieces that catch his attention. By being spread out among several pieces, whether subtly or overtly, the alphabet offers a succession of encryption levels. The public, who I could observe on various occasions, systematically questions the emotional letters or sentences placed on the ground. Though they bear no precise meaning, they impose a sensible and rational reading. One of the main and frequently asked questions of the public to my attention was regarding the nature of the alphabet and its potential hidden meaning. Some would try their hands at interpreting it, others would enjoy the mystery of this purpose that they could not seem to decipher.

A chase of the emotional and rational meaning of the alphabet occurs, where the public is invited to interpret each exhibition a second time through the magnifying glass of the emotional alphabet, thus becoming a game of decoding emotions and meaning. For example, the emotional sentence GC placed on the ground just in front of the autoportrait in the drawer of the dresser (annex K) refers respectively to sentiments of promiscuity, isolation and order, category and storage. This sentence is not a title per se, but the expression of a certain unrest in regards to a categorization system. It signifies the refusal of being confined by a system that ranks beings by genre, race, profession