Visionary Aponte: Art and Black Freedom
On view at NYU's King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center
February 23-May 4, 2018

José Bedia, *Júbilo de Aponte, 2017*, Mixed media on mixed paper

Visionary Aponte: Art and Black Freedom brings together over a dozen contemporary artists working across a range of media to interpret an extraordinary—and now lost—historical artifact: a so-called "Book of Paintings" created by José Antonio Aponte, a nineteenth-century Afro-Cuban revolutionary and artist. Authorities found the "Book of Paintings" in 1812 during the investigation into a major antislavery conspiracy in Havana. During the trial, Aponte was forced to describe every his book in detail. Its pages portrayed lush landscapes and Biblical stories; Roman goddesses and Spanish kings; black men as warriors, emperors, and librarians; Rome and

Ethiopia; Havana and the heavens. Shortly after testifying, Aponte was publicly executed, his head severed from his body, and placed on a pike inside a cage in a well-travelled crossraods in the city. Then, his "Book of Paintings" disappeared.

Using Aponte's trial testimony—which is all that is known to remain of the "Book of Paintings"—the artists of *Visionary Aponte* have reimagined Aponte's book for our present. They experiment with ways to mitigate the violence of the colonial archive and invite us to think about the role of art in envisioning and making social change.

The artists include: José Bedia (Miami), Leonardo Benzant (New York), Juan Roberto Diago (Havana), Édouard Duval-Carrié (Miami), Alexis Esquivel (Havana), Teresita Fernández (New York), Emilio Martínez (Miami), Nina Angela Mercer (New York), Clara Morera (North Carolina), Glexis Novoa (Miami), Vicki Pierre (Miami), Marielle Plaisir (Miami), Asser Saint-Val (Miami), Jean-Marcel Saint-Jacques (New Orleans), Renée Stout (Washington, D.C.).

The exhibition also incorporates—and the art engages—scholarly research on Aponte and his world by NYU Professor Ada Ferrer, author of the prize-winning book *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, and art historian Linda Rodríguez, curator of the digital humanities website *Digital Aponte*. A recreation of the small library Aponte had in his home—including the third volume of *Don Quixote*, guides to Havana and Rome, histories of Ethiopia published in seventeenth-century Spain, grammar handbooks, art manuals, compendiums of the history of the world—will be on view at the Tamiment Library in NYU's Bobst Library (70 Washington Square South).
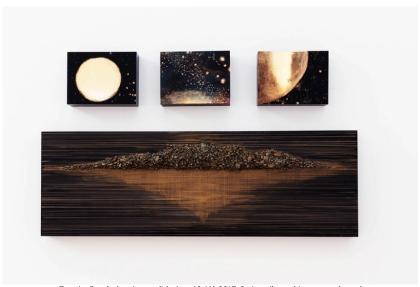

Édouard Duval Carrié, *Prester John Emissaries*, 2017.
Mixed media on paper in artist frame

The show, which originally opened in Miami's Little Haiti Cultural Center during Art Basel 2017, will be on view starting February 23 at New York University's King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center.

Twice over the course of his trial Aponte testified that he had made his "Book of Paintings" to present to the King of Spain as a gift. The venue, then, is especially fitting.

Teresita Fernández, *Aponte (Láminas 10-11)*, 2017. Pyrite, oil, graphite on wood panel

King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, New York University, 53 Washington Square South
February 23-May 4, 2018
Hours: Monday-Friday 11am-7pm
Special Saturday Openings: 12-5pm on February 24, March 31, and April 28
Opening Reception, Thursday, February 22, *by invitation only*

Visionary Aponte: A Symposium with Artists and Scholars,
Friday, February 23, 10am-5pm, NYU King Juan Carlos Center, *open to the public*.
For more information: http://as.nyu.edu/clacs/events/spring-2018/visionary-aponte--art---black-freedom.html