Shifting Spaces Outside of Time:
Constructing Counter-Narratives Through Collage

by

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Abstract

This paper explores how the methodology of collage refuses notions of linear temporality through the production of counter-narratives. As a framework for analysis, counter-narrative becomes a useful lens to understand the types of critiques that collage can engender by examining the power and privilege that art history, mass media, and constructions of identity hold in a multiracial world. By focusing specifically on the potential of collage to visualize non-linear approaches to piecing the world together through objects of material culture, this research fills a gap between collage as practice, social critique, and pedagogical methodology by weaving these notions together to expose a dynamic interplay between storytelling, history and pedagogy. Engaging the multidisciplinary artistic practices of three emerging contemporary artists working with collage in Canada, Jasmine Cardenas, Aaron Jones, and Anna Binta Diallo provide generative insight to challenge monolithic visual culture to reconcile histories of erasure, oppression, and colonization. Questioning and reconstructing these notions through the production of counter-narratives become a crucial method of resistance to situate radical imaginings in their histories. Ultimately, their work with collage is a direct assurance that another world is possible.

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The Critical Capacities of Collage: An Introduction

As both an act of intervention and invitation for dialogue, the process of remixing, reframing, and reconceptualizing history through collage holds distinct epistemological power in this contemporary moment. By pushing up against hegemonic socio-political structures represented in visual culture by mass media, material processes of fragmentation and juxtaposition become emblems of a reality re-thought. Necessarily deviant, the artist's act of cut and paste wields agency over objects of material culture, capturing a world made up of diverse and at times incommensurable pieces that are anything but neutral. Extending the possibilities of representation, the process of collage offers the opportunity to adapt and reclaim historical knowledge and narratives that have been suppressed or erased by the multifaceted violence of white supremacy. This research asks why contemporary artists have turned to collage in this context, and in particular, what does the context of Canada contribute to collage's effectiveness?

Counter-narrative becomes a useful lens to understand the types of critiques that collage can engender by examining the power and privilege that art history, mass media, and constructions of identity hold in a multiracial world. In doing so, counter-narratives become a way of displacing and moving aside what has been deemed the ideological 'centre,' such as the canon of art history. Questioning and reconstructing these popular notions, counter-narratives shift this 'centre' as a form of resistance against traditional modes of domination to situate radical imaginings in their histories. Counter-narratives fill a need for stories that match one's own experiences of self, particularly those that are at odds with socially constrained dominant narratives

(Godrej). Specifically defined, ‘counter-narrative’ refers to narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized, and for this reason, scholars in different fields of art and social sciences (see Braynen; Lyle; Miller) have embraced the potential of counter-narratives as a crucial part of their research methodologies. As a focus of several contemporary artists in Canada, counter-narrative serves to critique dominant knowledge and linear temporality to instead visualize other models for recounting history outside of both temporal and spatial norms. In rethinking pasts through contemporary discourses, I am particularly interested in what counter-narratives allow the artist and viewer to see as we collectively move through history and shape the present and future.

Exploring the work of three emerging contemporary artists working with collage in Canada, this thesis highlights specifically how collage refuses notions of linear temporality. Jasmine Cardenas (Hamilton, Ontario), Aaron Jones (Tkaronto/Toronto, Ontario), and Anna Binta Diallo (Tiohtià:ke/Montreal, Quebec) work beyond the bounds of contemporary art, deploying distinct methodologies grounded in personal epistemologies that respond to cultural and archival silences throughout history. Providing generative insight into other fields such as anthropology, post-colonial studies, critical theory, and psychology, each artist challenges monolithic visual culture to reconcile histories of erasure, oppression, and colonization. By reframing the visual archive as both a tool and site of resistance, collage exposes the dynamic interplay between storytelling, history and pedagogy to demonstrate how meaningful ruptures to a monolithic visual code are also crucial opportunities for innovation, transformation, and even revolution.

By focusing specifically on the potential of collage to visualize non-linear approaches to piecing the world together through objects of material culture, this research fills a gap between collage as practice, social critique, and pedagogical methodology by weaving these notions together to expose a dynamic interplay between storytelling, history and pedagogy. Inherently a gesture of intervention, the dialectical tension of collage offers Cardenas, Jones, and Diallo unique critical potential to 'break' and re-make the past and present as a way to respond to, intervene in, or situate themselves within the process of imagining a different world. As a methodology that encourages processes of critique and and re-framing, collage produces counter-narratives that challenge the legacy of the colonial and institutional archive in the context of art history, pop culture and activism.

Importantly, in thinking about what is prioritized, historicized, and canonized by archives, there is a distinct sense of control, manipulation, and symbolic erasure based on what has been prioritized by those in power. Because most colonial and institutional archives are created by (and serve the purposes and biases of) white people in power, it becomes crucial to expand the possibilities of what an archive can be and seek alternative representations that re-write or expand on the dominant narrative of history. As a passageway to understanding the past, the archival process has a distinct social and political impact that must be reclaimed, diversified, and decolonized to reflect cultural, rather than institutional, values and hold space for untold stories and counter-narratives. In this way, collage provides an opportunity to produce and manipulate cultural or domestic archives that are community-bound and exist in conscious opposition to traditional hierarchies that are embedded in institutional archives.

This contemporary moment is defined by irony, fragmentation, and an increasing awareness that late capitalism is doomed and many of the things deemed valuable must be reoriented toward another future. Such a recognition may be traced back to the idea that parts of the world could be senselessly severed at the seams four hundred years ago with the Atlantic slave trade and the colonial conquests of domination by figures such as Christoper Columbus. This unforgettable history — and foundation — of violence must never be forgotten as the present moves forward. And yet, these histories have been rewritten, specifically in the western world, and force-fed as their own propaganda that have entrenched racism and heteronormativity as unquestioned conditions of a version of reality that has been unraveled and re-written by scholars and activists over the past few decades. I am a settler, I am a cisgendered woman, and I am white: a triangulation of identity that holds an enormous amount of power. I am also a part of a generation that has watched where power has taken humanity (the term mutually assured destruction particularly comes to mind) and watched as many generations also try to address these issues, only to exacerbate them further. Because I was educated from an overwhelmingly western and settler perspective, there are the rampant gaps in the way I have come to understand the world and the production of knowledge. Through this research, my work became oriented toward the physical ‘cut’ of collage as representative of a larger condition of rupture that is deeply rooted in feminist practices of dismantling patriarchal index and authority within the history of revolution. This opens up an entirely new network of thinking and engagement with visual culture at large, but specifically history as of recent, such as the spread of alternative information. I argue that this way of thinking is

akin to the process of collage as a methodology that is accessible by virtue of all that it encompasses.

As conditions of reality are constantly being broken down into smaller, 'bite sized' pieces, I have come to realize that fragmentation is a defining quality of my thinking. Collage is my practice, and while conducting this research I began to retrace my steps through critical theory and decolonial texts, finding semblances of this interest in breaking down monolithic structures, be them institutional, theoretical, or otherwise socially pervasive. It is here that collage becomes political in the sense of being oriented toward people. While there will always be resistance to engaging with the dark sides of history, the attempt to understand and potentially reconcile where the gaps, fissures, and erasures exist is crucial to moving forward into a future that is equitable and makes space for many truths, histories, and mythologies to exist at once.

Unforgettably, collage is profoundly rooted in material. The most accessible part of the process of collage is that anything can be contained in its midst. So many artists working with collage using material from scraps, debris, or what is otherwise left over or left behind as vibrant and insightful components of their work. These types of cultural objects have been important to dissect and deconstruct in the wake of an ever-pervasive culture of spectacle that has begun to shatter. With these pieces we are given the opportunity to create counter-narratives that are informed not only by chance and environment but also desire and perspective. A collage can often be many things at once, but I would like to find out what collage tells us about being human right now: how models of communication and history can be created and relationships with

material culture can be mended through the embrace of fragmentation and juxtaposition as pathways to more vibrant and encompassing futures.

In considering the moments in which collage rose up as a predominant medium, there are important contexts to uncover. Chapter one will recount the methodology that guides this study of collage as a form of counter-narrative production. Importantly, this research expands beyond writing specifically about art toward other disciplines of cultural analysis that speak either implicitly or explicitly to the significance that collage holds as an epistemological tool. Drawing on textual analyses of post-colonial and critical theory, an interdisciplinary approach becomes a crucial guide for interrogating the affects, efficacies, and values associated with the production, circulation, deployment, and manipulation of images as cultural objects. Chapter two outlines the literature informing my analysis in greater detail to lay the groundwork for reconfiguring cultural notions such as linearity and authority that speak to the production of counter-narratives that works of collage demonstrate. Chapter three pivots to focus specifically on the lineage of collage throughout history, tracing the patterns, shifts, and moments of innovation throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. Beginning with Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and the Harlem Renaissance, collage has a storied history of rebellion and innovation that has been employed to diverse ends. Understanding the conditions that collage repeatedly arose out of is essential to the analysis of collage in this contemporary moment, particularly in reconciling with the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and capitalism that plague contemporary life across the globe.

The theoretical analysis of collage as a medium for expressing cultural dissent and counter-narratives is grounded in the analysis of artworks by Cardenas, Jones, and

Diallo in three separate chapters. Collectively, their work extends beyond dominant epistemologies to imagine alternative worlds. By embracing processes of fragmentation and juxtaposition to reparative ends, they construct visual narratives out of personal histories to challenge and resist the monolithic values of material culture that include whiteness, heteronormativity and financial capital and are exclusionary and appropriative. Connected by their distinct challenges to linear readings of history and selfhood, the selected artworks for this thesis are grounded by the stories they tell — namely, the stories of a generation defined by social, cultural, economic, and ecological upheaval. Ultimately, their artwork is a direct assurance that another world is possible: one that is compassionate, reflective, and reflexive by honouring the erasures and silences that Canada's history of oppression must reconcile with.

Methodology

My research consisted primarily of textual analyses of books, journal articles, and other studies on the methodology of collage within the context of art history and social practice. The inherent criticality of collage became particularly compelling in conversation with post-colonial and critical theory in the context of articulating counter-narratives intended to address the deeply entrenched violence and oppressive histories that inform contemporary multicultural societies. The pairing of these two streams of research is an attempt to explore and potentially reconcile the deeply colonial and capitalist histories that the Americas were built upon through the lens of visual culture. In this way, the history of collage is still being written, and this research is an attempt to mend such gaps through the contemporary re-framing of narratives around who and what is represented in these coded images and materials that inform and reinforce broader cultural values.

I chose to explore collage through an interdisciplinary perspective to reflect the fluidity of the methodology itself. Many contemporary theorists have noted that collage freely transgresses not only genres but also the semiotics of representation. Challenging qualities of aesthetic realism through the fragmentation, layering, and juxtaposition of disparate images and mediums, the reading of a collage requires an expansive perspective that understands the artwork to be, fundamentally, a dialogue. Because the materials of a collage are often distinct and diverse, this multidisciplinary approach introduces new forms of engagement with images, ideas, and objects that have been included or contextualized within the art historical canon. Collage therefore introduces a whole new array of material and conceptual considerations both within

and outside of the context of art. In particular, the psychological, sociological, and political perspectives on collage, particular those informed by critical race theory, post-colonial theory, and feminist theory speak to a similarly fragmented and non-linear understanding of identity and relations that collage has the demonstrated capacity to illustrate.

Importantly, the radical capacity of collage is informed by the perspectives that produce them. The artists selected for this research are each multidisciplinary artists who experiment with many mediums at once and employ collage as a way to bring diverse skills and mediums into the same framework or context. Furthermore, each artist works with collage in ways that directly addresses the complexities embedded in their identity. Navigating her Ecuadorian-Canadian heritage, Cardenas recuperates lost histories through her abstract collages to shift the way memory is represented. Jones, who is Jamaican-Canadian, searches innumerable magazines and objects of pop culture to produce a counter-archive that is representative of his own worldview in conversation with western tropes and heritages that consider images as capable of constructing and undoing subjectivities. Diallo similarly uses collage to reconcile the nuances of her Senegalese-Métis identity, addressing the complexities of representing many histories at once. Her use of collage becomes simultaneously anthropological and mythological, folding several times, places, and ecologies into a silhouette. In this way, these three artists employ the power of counter-narratives to challenge traditional notions of visual culture and spark new dialogues. As a means of putting the world back together, collage dissolves boundaries between medium to accommodate the crucial space to explore alternative forms of storytelling and history-making.

Literature Review

The discourse on collage has played a critical role in the development of art history throughout the past century. In this section I will outline the many texts that address collage as both an artistic and social practice. These texts inform the overall analysis of collage as a methodology that is specifically instrumental in the construction of counter-narratives that re-map history and posit possible futures through material explorations of visual culture. Ultimately, the practice of collage has been critically engaged from many diverse perspectives that extend beyond the realm of art criticism to be in conversation with other psychological and socio-political fields of inquiry.

A connecting thread among many of the texts consulted for this research frame the medium and methodology of collage (referenced earliest as 'photomontage') as a means of aesthetic resistance and critique. In the earliest texts on collage from European Dada artists, the object of critique was often some form of media, advertising, or pop cultural element as representative of larger issues and structures of violence and oppression. The focus on materiality here is crucial, as the tearing of objects that represent mass media and culture (such as magazines, newspapers, and other culturally-saturated visual ephemera) became a way to speak back directly to violent and inequitable conditions of society through the objects perpetuating these notions. Artists were the first theorists of collage, who often framed their work as a tool of satire, political protest and cultural criticism (Hausmann 652, Keményi 653; see also Adkins). Photomontage represented a deliberate critique of art being used for propaganda and advertising.

Shifting from direct critiques of mass media, mid-century artists and critics turned toward a broader questioning of representation and realism in western art. Art critic Clement Greenberg, for instance, explores the monumental impact of collage throughout the twentieth century on patterns of thought and creation throughout Europe, critically analyzing the shift in materiality as indicative of a larger paradigm shift within the art-historical canon (see also Poggi). The context of the cultural rupture of World War I led to ways in which collage critiqued social phenomena articulated to mass audiences (Leighten). Similarly, collage was linked to counter-cultural motivations and those of collaboration and desire (Taylor; Lydenberg). Ultimately, collage quickly became a complimentary medium for the re-calculations of culture that took place over the course of the twentieth century to address the spaces between lived reality and its documentation through the production of visual counter-narratives.

These ideas presented through collage have expanded outside of purely formal or aesthetic considerations to critique notions of formalism, authorship, and linearity that aim to dictate collective understandings of history and culture. The influx of visual popular culture as the raw materials for collage introduce the opportunity to depict reality as something segmentable, revisable, and re-readable (Banash; Green). By gathering materials from different ‘worlds' into a single composition, collage challenges the often rigid boundaries between art and life, offering the opportunity to surprise and shift perspectives beyond the dictations of traditional aesthetics (Vaughan; Iliescu). A key tool for understanding history in the context of contemporary culture and politics, collage offers a rhetoric of invention, intervention, and resistance that reads histories in relation to one another (Polkinorn; Seliq). As disjunctive forms reach beyond

themselves, collage ultimately represents an ever-evolving and decidedly non-linear sense of time.

Contemporary theorizations on collage outside of art history have expanded the practice toward pedagogical orientations that consider the consequences of such critiques of formalism, authorship, and linearity in broader socio-political contexts. Implicit in this expansion of collage theory is the notion that collages are storytelling mechanisms that are radical by way of the inherent mixing of processes of citation, modification, and juxtaposition. Because collage refuses typical decoding practices, it lends well to feminist historiographies and avant-garde priorities that emphasize a turn away from tradition and encourage thinking outside of popularized methods of knowledge production (Harding). Looking across disciplines, collage practices may be applied to a multiplicity of creative practices that extend outside of art history toward other mediums of analysis (Cran; White). As a way to produce new types of knowledge and narratives, collage has therefore been co-opted by many practices that share a common goal of both structural critique and the desire to visualize alternatives to the issues and conditions of contemporary life.

In rethinking the dominant discursive and representational forces pedagogy, collage becomes a significant tool to critique and reconcile the production of knowledge from multiple perspectives, often to therapeutic ends. Framed as a decolonizing methodology, collage has been used as a method of inquiry and platform for healing and social justice by community researchers working throughout Canada. Namely, scholars and educators Felice Yuen and Lianne Charlie engage and embrace Indigenous epistemologies and temporalities, offering collage as an organizing

methodological strategy that extends pedagogically to hold educational, therapeutic, and recreational significance (see Yuen; Charlie). The revolutionary significance of these studies include the reveal of new access points into seemingly incommensurable political, social, and cultural divides. By removing the practice of collage from the context of fine art production, these studies reveal the necessity for space to visually and conceptually navigate socio-political divides with freedom and imagination as a way to nurture empowered futures.

As a methodology that allows counter-narratives to emerge, collage speaks to the possibility for critical, creative, and even revolutionary accounts of history and culture to come to the fore. This emphasis on counter-narratives begins with collage extending beyond the narrative of western art history itself, expanding to other psychological, social, and pedagogical fields of inquiry. In this context, counter-narratives are formed from feminist, queer, racialized, and marginalized perspectives that intend to fill in the gaps, silences, and erasures of non-dominant articulations of history as well as re-construct these histories in the present. These reconstructions are crucial to a more diverse and comprehensive understanding of social relations that may be conceptually or materially executed through collage. Because narrative construction is crucial to the examination of power and privilege, the production of counter-narratives advocates for a rethinking of the structural integrity that informs how we come to learn about world events and histories (Chappell). In visual artworks, as well as fiction and poetry, disobeying notions of chronology and linear time helps to unpack intuitive and embodied cultural experiences on their own terms (Agosin). As a way to unsettle both art and cultural practices, the presentation of counter-narratives through

collage challenges the oppressive social codes and political realities that have dominated westernized pedagogical spaces (Hanawalt). By taking a critical lens to the incompletion of history and inherited biases, collage draws attention to other forms of knowledge production.

Importantly, the development of visual counter-narratives through collage is inextricably bound up with the history of archival work that has come to represent one linear version of history. Taking into consideration the power dynamics informing what has been left behind and what remains unarchived, collage offers alternative modes of engagement. Informed by feminist, queer and critical race theory, the archive in settler-colonial contexts such as Canada becomes a deeply socio-political issue linked to traumatic and oppressive legacies that inform present realities (Luker; Campt). As a way to engage with lost archives through what is left behind, collage presents an opportunity to re-frame history through culturally sensitive lenses, repurposing tools of colonialism and suppression toward broader goals of transformative action, such as reparations of land and wealth and repatriation of cultural objects.

By focusing specifically on the capacity of collage to mend, my research fills a gap between collage as practice, social critique, and educational methodology by weaving these notions together, rather than keeping them separate. Through the production of counter-narratives, the discourse of collage presents radical new ways to conceptualize relations between past, present, and future on a flat plane. By embracing a multitude of materials and temporalities, collage expands and radicalizes discourses on art history, socio-political activism, media and pop culture, as a contribution to the ongoing development of decolonial pedagogies.

Charting an Incomplete History of Collage

In this section I will outline the history of collage and the social contexts and movements that collage artists have been in conversation with. A Eurocentric perspective has largely dominated the history of collage, with Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism as the three modernist movements that challenged the status quo of art-making. These movements continue be regarded as vital forces in contemporary culture that helped to catalyze modernist tendencies, opening up new ways of seeing and understanding contemporary life from the early twentieth century onwards. At the same time in North America, artists throughout the Harlem Renaissance similarly adopted the form and sensibilities of collage to articulate cultural nationalism and international modernism to demonstrate how analogies, juxtapositions, and other aesthetic frictions have historical and political implications (Farebrother). Acknowledging these overlaps and folds in western history help to inform the view that collage has been expansively present and enriched cultural commentary in ways that are remarkably contemporary. Ultimately, the task of this project is to open up and unsettle the way that collage as a practice and politic is understood: namely, as an expansive and critically analytical tool that has the capacity to not only take stock of, but create something new from complex and multifaceted experiences of fragmentation.

The twentieth century was a period of tumultuous change that profoundly altered collective worldviews. Very briefly, psychoanalytic theories from scholars such as Sigmund Freud opened up the human mind for deeper study while scientific theories from figures such as Albert Einstein shattered popular notions of time and

space. With two world wars and an ongoing Civil Rights fight for freedom, the impulse that drove the creation of collage as a combinatory technique arrived through multiple points of entry into a hybrid and multiracial world. Over the course of the century, artists such as Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann in Germany in the 1920s, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in Paris at the dawn of the twentieth century, and Romare Bearden and Faith Ringgold in New York throughout the Harlem Renaissance, are united in their pursuit to address social conditions as subject matter. The turn to collage therefore speaks to the capacity to address personal, social, and political experiences and critiques at once. In this context, collage offered new opportunities — with regard to content and form — for uncovering relationships, oppositions, transitions, and intersections of social reality, using accessible material dictations of that reality as the tools by which to make their critique.

Processes of fragmentation, layering, and juxtaposition became emblems of a reality re-thought, capturing how communities navigated a world made up of diverse and incommensurable pieces. Poet and essayist Pierre Joris argues that “there isn’t a twentieth century art that was not touched, rethought, or merely revamped by the use of these techniques” (Joris 4-5). Art historian Elza Adamowicz echoes and updates this sentiment, stating that “the collage principle has been considered by some critics as the fundamental structural model of the twentieth century, not only in the field of aesthetics but more generally in the social, scientific and philosophical thought” (Adamowicz 13). As a pedagogical tool and a strategy of resistance, collage is unprecedented as a medium that is directly informed by politics and social structures that govern and oppress, as these are the systems that inform many of the most

popular distributions of media on a widespread scale. The radical act of cutting these material objects and the ideas they represent reinstates the artist with a degree of agency over cultural narratives, creating the space for critique and setting the record 'straight' through purposeful juxtaposition.

Cubism is generally considered to be the first instance of collage methodologies in western art history, representing one articulation of the conceptual ambition to represent all possible viewpoints of a person or an object simultaneously. European artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque are often credited with the first deliberate execution of a collage intended to break with traditional artistic conventions and representations of reality. Historian Rachel Farebrother states that between 1912 and 1914, Picasso "produced a large number of 'papier collés' by gluing wallpapers, hand-made and mass-produced coloured papers, newspaper, magazine illustrations, pieces of string and alcohol labels onto his canvases," and "through this bold mixing of high art with the bric-à-brac of everyday reality, he questioned assumptions about the role of the artist and what art should be" (Farebrother 6). The impulse to bring found objects into the frame sets a precedent for more radical experimentations with found object sculptures from modernist artists such as Marcel Duchamp, who further revolutionized the vibrant conceptual quality of everyday objects within an art context. In typical Cubist fashion, Picasso's collages made during the early twentieth century challenge the viewer "to imagine images that never can be organically whole; which shimmer forever as fragments, but evoke and suggest a series of unnamable wholes" (Farebrother 8).

While Cubism has been credited with introducing collage to the art world, it was the Dadaists who expanded the potential for collage in the context of revolution. To properly understand the concerns and stakes of Dadaism, it is necessary to understand the contexts to which this group felt compelled to respond. As a European intellectual movement, Dada artists rejected the logic, reason, and aesthetic of their contemporary society. In response, Dadaism relished in nonsense and irrationality, fundamentally driven by anti-bourgeois protest as a response to the horrors of the first world war. Revelling in the new awareness of the fragmented quality of modern life, Dadaism is further defined by an iconoclastic and confrontational attitude toward art institutions as well broader social conditions of inequality at large. Dada artists were prolific for a short period of the movement and contributed an extensive body of revolutionary texts that reflect specifically on the practice of collage as a revolutionary methodology. According to art critic Charlotte Jansen, “from its very inception in 1915, the Dada movement took place in many different countries and was heavily influenced by non-European cultures” (Jansen). However, despite nomadic embrace of cultural objects outside of westernized art practices and markets, Dadaism itself remained driven almost exclusively by European worldviews.

Nonetheless, Dadaism took place in many cities, and was articulated differently depending on the location. In Berlin, artists such as Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann were responding to the immediate conditions of war. Höch in particular is credited with developing and popularizing the method of photomontage, and the technique would become her signature for works created with both political and aesthetic intentions. As a polemical instrument, photomontage could combine graphic

and pictorial elements and iconographic motifs as an accessible socio-political statement addressed to the masses. The seamless merging of disparate cultural elements to critique ideals of beauty and cultural hierarchies brought forth art and activism outside of disciplinary frameworks. By taking contemporary and historical images out of linear space and time, Höch articulated many of the core values of a Dadaist revolution. Particularly in Berlin, the methodology of photomontage was especially politicized, with the very act of cutting up and recombining imagery from newspapers and magazines bearing connotations to cutting the fabric of social reality. Despite the complicated political implications of Höch's collages, they continue to function as striking and rebellious commentaries on a time of immense social turmoil.

Surrealism similarly sought to forge a new relationship to its audience, taking some of the main tenets of Dadaism, such as irrationality and the desire to dream of another world, and turning them inward toward deeper psychoanalytic, rather than overtly political, ends. According to writer and essayist David Hopkins, both movements "tended to share the belief that modern art needed to forge a new relationship with its audience, producing uncompromising new forms to parallel shifts in social experience" (Hopkins 2). Less concerned with politics, surrealist artists turned their focus toward the inner workings and drives of the human mind to explore how politics and all other social interactions were conducted from 'behind the scenes'. While Dadaism revelled in the chaotic and fragmented condition of social reality, surrealism had a much more restorative mission. Much of Surrealist discourse has been filtered through the perspective of artist André Breton, who initiated critical discourse surrounding surrealist methodologies such as collage. Specifically for

Breton, collage was a dialectical structure that is geared toward a re-orientation of avant-garde priorities to ‘create’ new realities. Intensely personal, surrealism stretched further the capacity for imagination throughout art history, but risked self-indulgence in its political aspirations as they were rarely grounded in direct action, as Dadaism had been.

At the same time in the early twentieth century, the Harlem Renaissance was taking place in the United States as an intellectual and cultural revival of African American music, dance, art, fashion, literature, theatre and politics. In response to the end of the Civil War but the continued enforcement of white supremacy by those in power, a cultural event called The Great Migration drew racialized individuals from the south most notably to Harlem, New York City and other metropolitan city centres such as Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia. Artists across disciplines contributed to one of the most prolific instances of creative production in art history. Romare Bearden, a Black American artist, author, and songwriter, most famously worked with collage. Inspired by Cubism as well as African sculpture and the work of his contemporaries in South America, his work explored the desire to articulate the experience of being Black in America within the context of universal or archetypal themes. In so doing, Bearden paved the way for countless artists to honour their distinct personal history, especially if not properly represented by social structures governed by white colonial powers.

The history of collage took place most fervently at the beginning of the twentieth century, however the impulse to re-imagine the past through material culture and archives has not gone away. The contemporary emerging artists selected for this project carry on the legacies left by Cubist, Dadaist, Surrealist, and Harlem

Renaissance artists, similarly responding to contemporary conditions outside of the art world to socio-political ends. With the Cubist expansion of representation in tandem with the revolutionary refusal of Dadaism, the process of breaking and re-making the past and present extends the work of Cardenas, Jones, and Diallo toward counter-narratives that speak to a broader desire for radical futures that shatter restrictive impositions on identity and heritage.

Artist Case Studies

In the subsequent chapters, I will turn my attention toward three contemporary Canadian artists who are working toward the production of counter-narratives through collage methodologies. There is a particular specificity that each of the selected artists bring to the practice of collage that comes from the ongoing reconciliation of histories that complicate what it means to be a an immigrant living in what is now Canada. Collage introduces aggregate subjectivities that rewrite histories to challenge conditions of reality and construct new visions of the future. The three artists selected for this study fold in the radical implications of counter-narratives to mend restructure cultural narratives, challenge the inherent supremacy of the archive, and mend the detected gaps in the history and production of visual culture. This type of representation plays an important role in the construction and navigation of identity, and is completed through a relational process informed by social contexts and interactions.

By employing and updating methodologies presented by Dada, Surrealist, Cubist, and Harlem Renaissance artists, Jasmine Cardenas, Aaron Jones, and Anna Binta Diallo build on an ever-expanding definition of collage. By localizing my research to contemporary artists living and working in Canadian metropolitan cities, I hope to demonstrate how these artists are uniquely engaging with the practice of collage in such a way that goes beyond critique, and instead folds critique in on itself to mend perceived gaps in cultural knowledge and find other ways to perpetuate narratives that do not rely on linear notions of time or western frameworks of history.

The theoretical anchors for these analyses also represent an intentional shift away from the willful ignorance of counter-linear sources of knowledge to instead propose alternative strategies for reading a collage that are inherently multimodal, intertextual and trans-medial. Much of the theory that informs this project is deeply indebted to Black, feminist, Indigenous, and BIPOC discourse, scholarship, and embodied work that advocates for the disruption of a monolithic visual optic to create space for artists and practices to speak out against violence, exclusion, and tokenism. There are many nuances, vulnerabilities and possibilities in these perspectives that must be explored and nurtured with care and consideration of what remains left unsaid. These issues map on to the work of Jasmine Cardenas, Aaron Jones, and Anna Binta Diallo in unique ways that are informed by what motivates each artist to employ collage as a counter-narrative and reparative device. Broadly geared toward impulses to re-tell history, re-frame identity, or otherwise re-orient perspectives on the present and future, their practices involve plumbing the flood of images and cultural objects found in western culture to question the narratives they come to represent. Creating something new out of these objects that have been shaped by a multitude of forces and structures becomes profoundly political in the matter of cut and paste, as each artist takes back agency over how they would like to assemble and represent reality, often in ways that are antithetical to the original intent.

Using distinct techniques and strategies, Jasmine Cardenas, Aaron Jones, and Anna Binta Diallo produce visual explorations that document contemporary experience through cultural materials such as magazines, photographs, newspapers, maps, and other objects representative of western socio-political zeitgeists. Layering fragmented

images to juxtapose particular narratives or semiotic representations offers the possibility to see other worlds come into being that refuse or critique notions of linear temporality. While art itself can only motivate a viewer to act, these chapters explore different potentialities of collage that critique and even defy a westernized art historical canon embalmed in white supremacy to produce counter-narratives that push toward a counter-canon of contemporary art production in Canada. In challenging and dismantling the expansive lineage of colonial, cultural, and capitalist oppression, Cardenas, Jones, and Diallo reconcile archival erasures and historical propaganda by mining their own personal and cultural histories to produce collages that function simultaneously as art objects and sites of resistance. Exposing a dynamic interplay between storytelling, history, and pedagogy, the selected artworks probe the transformative capacities of counter-narratives through collage.

The Abstract Re-Worldings of Jasmine Cardenas

Jasmine Cardenas develops a striking language of layering as a key tool in the production of counter-narratives though collage. As a first generation Ecuadorian-Canadian artist currently based in Hamilton, Ontario, Cardenas works with sculptural paintings, collage and installation to explore themes of cultural hybridity and storytelling. Playful and tactile, Cardenas' practice materializes lived experiences through the collection of images and objects influenced by her personal history ("Jasmine Cardenas"). Producing counter-narratives to conceptions of history and culture, Cardenas navigates the complexities of two countries as deeply colonial spaces that perform acts of violence on the land and the bodies that tend to it through the process of mining for raw materials resources. Using material abstraction, Cardenas navigates the rooted intertwining of economic capital and environmental destruction while building on the non-representational history of Cubism to re-imagine construct personal critiques through collaged counter-narratives.

The selected artworks for this research are each untitled, existing as a part of a larger series of collage studies from 2016. The artworks consist of several mediums on one plane, and the combination of elements offers multifaceted avenues of engagement by way of their abstraction. Implementing collage as a site of intervention, Cardenas is specifically communicative through her paint and pastels, guiding how the other elements of the collage are read. The non-representational quality of these interventions instead feels much more emotive, alluding to notions of colour theory and the therapeutic qualities of doodling. In conversation with photographs and fragments of text that anchor the collages in particular spatial-temporal moments, Cardenas

defies tropes of a unified or cohesive image, instead positing these artworks as responses, or re-writings, of the shimmering irreplaceability of memory.

Reading these artworks is akin to a scavenger hunt in search of the recuperation of disoriented histories. The juxtaposition of forests and plant life in lush vitality with torn cardboard and whimsical strokes of paint coheres in assemblages that are both delicate and worldly. Read carefully, each layer of the collage shifts away from pure abstraction and toward meticulous narrative detail. The first artwork I will discuss, referenced here as *Untitled 1* (Fig. 1), depicts foliage that is relatively indistinguishable in exactitude, but evocative of an idyllic wild garden found in an overgrown forest, dotted with blue petals. Amidst the fragmented vegetation, accents of peach, teal, fuchsia, and brown and grey cardboard are layered, as a wash of light blue covers the top half of the composition. As mediums dissolve into one another, there is a distinct conversation occurring between fragmented elements.

The collage is unique as the only collage in the selected series that contains text. In the top left corner, the viewer may locate a small word, “seeds,” that was presumably taken from the same page of larger segment of text that appears as a background in the bottom half of the composition. Many of the visible words are also legible, reading like a haiku. The collage conceptually anchors itself in the Amazonian rainforest, making reference to *seringueiros*, which are Brazilian rubber gatherers, and *lianas,* a type of climbing vine found throughout tropical rainforests. Both words represent different engagements with forest regeneration: while the *seringueiros* are historically the first grassroots forest conservation initiative to come out of Amazônia, *lianas* play an important role in forest dynamics as food sources and canopied linkage

for aboreal animals (Schwartzman). Together, these two fragmented notions tie together distinct notions of place in relation to nature and culture — particularly in reference to Ecuador's history as told by plants rather than European settlers. By emphasizing regenerative and ecologically sustainable practices from different but interconnected points of reference, Cardenas works to visually recalibrate a counter-narrative to Amazonian destruction.

The subsequent collage selected for analysis, *Untitled 2* (Fig. 2), features a similarly striking colour palette. Bright red, turquoise, and cobalt blue accent a dark green background with visible brushstrokes. Here too a lush forest is a key anchor of the collage, this time oriented upside-down and fragmented by a long, rectangular expanse of blue. The forest is viewed from above and interspersed with fog. In direct juxtaposition, a black and white photograph of a desert fills the entire right side of the composition. Notably oriented right-side-up, the desert is a stark contrast to the otherwise vibrant colours, layered and connected by turbulent strokes of pastel. Implying distinct worldviews, the documentary-style black and white image assumes a fictitious neutrality of a barren landscape. Connected by an erratic scribble of red pastel, an eye-catching final layer draws attention to the juxtaposition of forest and desert using the colour red, notably the only warm tone, provoking associations to fiery passion and blood. When put in conversation with the fragmented forest and unbroken desert, it alludes to a process of draining the colour of life into a black and white, desolate world. The sense of disorientation conveyed by the undulating images of forest met with the stillness of a desert becomes ironically temporal, as though before-and-after snapshots of destruction. Paired with the flooding of blue, Cardenas' paint

and pastel interferes once again in this narrative, as a way to quench the thirst of a forest turned to dust.

As a return to analog practices, Cardenas' embrace of decidedly un-precious materials, such as ripped magazine clippings and cardboard, implies a celebration of that which has been left behind. With delicacy and precise nuance, the process of analysis is decidedly not linear but rather a simultaneous experience of colour, texture, and form. Anchoring an impression of idyllic dreaminess, torn images of lush natural spaces are met with accents of colour, and most notably, cardboard. The consistent use of cardboard throughout the series alludes to the Cubist legacy of experimentation and disobedience through the reorientation of what is understood as aesthetic material. Ultimately, the simplicity of the gesture is also why it is so radical. Ephemeral, cheap, and readily available, cardboard is utilitarian and close at hand for many, suggesting a visual challenge to sterilized high art and contemporary consumerist culture. Often discarded, recycled or considered junk, the choice to work with cardboard is a compelling gesture that challenges the possibilities of readily available materials not previously explored. An interest in the possibilities of unconventional materials ultimately speaks to a pivotal shift and expansion of artist materials that is significantly resonant throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Ultimately, expanding the notion of what artistic material could be in turn helps to re-define and broaden the scope of art-making practices.

For this reason, abstraction provides a space for experiences that exist in-between histories as a way to contribute to a different form of knowledge production that is much more personal, emotional, and agentic. Through collage, Cardenas offers

a visual experience that speaks to the now-canonized notion of critical theorist Homi Bhabha's "third space," distinguishing where histories and cultural practices intersect and confront one another in a shared space and time (Bhabha). This idea developed from the study of ongoing consequences of colonization and ways to resist the power of the colonizer, illustrating "the dynamic nature of culture, and flimsy consistency of historical narratives that cultures rely upon to draw boundaries and define themselves" (Yazdiha 32). By subverting the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures, hybridity is particularly relevant to the study of collage by way of the thoughtful and purposeful juxtaposition of fragmented elements to form a space outside of linear temporality.

With the potential to extend beyond the colonial binaries that inform social imaginaries, hybridity becomes a tool that draws attention to the ways in which cultural bodies, signs, and practices construct culture while simultaneously deconstructing how these factors contribute to social inequities. Hybridity can therefore be seen as a counter-narrative (Beya). Understood in this way, culture and cultural production becomes fluid and unbound, moving between spaces of meaning to create fissures within the very structures that sustain it (Yazdiha 31). Acknowledging this space between cultures as a blended, patch-worked, and layered landscape, Cardenas questions systems of value that circulate in the production of culture by tearing, painting over, and using unconventional artistic materials. In the context of construction, Cardenas' collages use processes of blending, weaving, and layering to interrupt the viewer's gaze and shift the context of material objects.

While Bhabha argues that hybridity itself is unrepresentable, I argue that Cardenas activates its representation through the process of fragmentation and abstraction, collapsing her personal perspective with histories of space and place that, in turn, inform how counter-narratives are constructed outside of traditional modes of representation. By re-imagining alternative relationships to power, politics, and cultural knowledge, Cardenas paradoxically communicates the deeply nuanced and personal experience of diasporic longing through abstraction. Art writer Melina Mehr further articulates this process of connecting the dots and recalibrating one's own memory. In a review, she states that "perhaps the benefit of an impermanent memory is the ability to extend imagination to the real world, to create an archive that has been pressed together by both physical truths and emotional sensations" (Mehr 2). Cardenas' emphasis on colour throughout the collages is similarly affective, unbound and fluid, demonstrating how culture is constructed by continually shifting its own signifiers as a way to deconstruct the rigid labels that maintain social inequities.

Material abstraction therefore becomes a key strategy in the ongoing process of re-worlding through counter-narratives. Through the methodology of collage, Cardenas leans in to the deep history of abstract mark-making as a practice tied to emotions and intuition that quite literally draw out what may not exist in the colonial or institutional accounts of history. The use of colour through pastels and paint becomes indicative of an emotional register for the collage as an act of both uncovering and covering-over. This process implicates Cardenas' agency in the collages as a way to re-imagine her own knowledge and memories in conversation with collective histories and contemporary realities. Reconciling with the unavailability of representations that depict

the value and resilience of the ecological environment outside of structures of colonial violence and capitalist greed, Cardenas takes it upon herself to forage for unconventional artistic materials. Working directly with what is available to her, such as magazines, cardboard, and text from books, Cardenas re-structures these materials through processes of layering and juxtaposition to inform new ways of representing cultural hybridity. By expanding the material context of the collages, Cardenas's collages lean into the difficulties of depicting hybridity from a subjective lens, instead using strategies to articulate the experience of such ‘in-betweenness’ through abstraction.

Aaron Jones' Archival Reconstructions

The archive becomes a malleable entity in the hands of Aaron Jones. As a Jamaican-Canadian multi-disciplinary artist, Jones turned to collage from his initial photographic practice as a fulfilling methodology that offered the possibility to create space and produce new kinds of images (Lee). Working among different temporal moments, Jones likens the methodology of collage to archival work, collecting images from print media provided by his community that develop counter-narratives to an overwhelmingly white and colonial archive. As both a refraction and critique of the print industry and the social structures that define it, Jones employs collage as a distinct space where characters and elements from different places of origin can gather in the timelessness of the present. In this way, the methodology of collage reorients how historical time and archival practices operate to complicate and critique what an archive can represent. Specifically seeking representations of dark skin, Jones creates a counter-archive of abundance that brings the past, present, and future into fluid conversation, thereby producing an ever-expanding visual ecosystem that propels these important multifaceted representations into the future.

The selected collages are poignant examples of Jones's extended investigation of the construction and undoing of Black subjectivity throughout an era that so predominantly revolves around visual culture. In an interview with *Canadian Art* in 2019, Jones recalls how he grew up with magazines such as *Ebony Essence* alongside educational texts such as encyclopedias, and books on space, nature, exotic birds (Lee). Remixing these photographic materials and acknowledging the power of the cultural archive as an inexhaustible amount of images, Jones sets out to reconfigure

the nebulous mass according to a perspective informed by memory, history, and community. As objects typically found in the middle-class home, they speak to a cultural zeitgeist that resists and responds to the erasures and silences that an archive must always account for as a result of racial bias, colonial framing, and linear temporality that have been inherent to euro-centric codes of representation.

Importantly, the production of a counter-narrative makes way for the development of counter-archives. Looking both within a colonial archive and outside of it, Jones unearths representations of Blackness while holding space for the irony and tensions of being conspicuously unseen by art history and dominant media outside of appropriation and tokenization. Such strategic readings of the archive produce counter-narratives that re-adjust the understanding of the colonial past as unrepresentative of the oppressed and unarchived, and carve out distinct space to acknowledge these histories on their own terms. Of Black archival practices, art writer Maandeeq Mohamed states “we know that the archive will never be sufficient – if we are accounted for, it is via the violence of fact: scientific racism, and catalogues listing enslaved people as property. […] Perhaps not knowing can be useful, insofar as it allows for a recognition of the fact that what is or isn’t archived is but one of many fictions that constitute Blackness in public life” (Mohamed). In this way, Jones creates connections, interpretations, and counter-narratives that make sense of his worldview while paying homage the sublime multiplicity and vast silences of the archive entangled with the unforgettable histories of racism and colonialism that inform the material culture left behind for future generations.

Deliberately extending beyond the implied frame, *Energy Restoration* (2018) (Fig. 3) bursts outward in all directions, as though grasping for something out of reach. Sleek blue windowpanes of skyscrapers dominate the composition, refracting reality inward and outward simultaneously. Layered atop a background of red and yellow, a skeletal construction site emerges amidst fragments of skyscraper buildings that it will someday become, as though collapsing time. To the right, a disembodied hand grasping a cloaked shoulder disappears into the dark void of a torso anchored by two more clasped hands. More sets of hands appear amidst this darkness in various states — a gentle caress, a confident handshake — contributing to a taxonomy of touch that extends throughout the composition. At the heart of the collage, refracted mechanical forms, such as solar panels and the interface of an unknown machine, merge with the words ‘ENERGI' and ‘Restoration’ (Moser). As though in mid-collapse, emblems of a cityscape become contorted, as though ready to be restructured but devoid of a new form. Here the deliberate emphasis on restoration is key: understood as the action of returning something to a former owner, place, or condition, restoration looks back in order to move forward. As a future-oriented methodology that employs processes of repair to revive, rebuild, and reorient, this collage captures the process of breaking down both material and symbolic structures that inform this contemporary moment.

In deliberate resistance to the canon of western art history, Jones’ *Untitled, 2017* (Fig. 4) re-frames a modernist portrait (identified as *Bust of a Young female Nude* by Edouard Manet, from 1875) to critique and disorient the aesthetic power it holds as representative of the western art historical canon. The painting is entirely whole apart from a long, tubular oval that removes the portrait’s eyes. In replacement, three sets of

eyes stare down the viewer: a white person wearing square classes and a Santa hat is absorbed by the face of the painting, producing the cheeky and uncanny effect of a drag performance. On either side, the eyes of two Black children also meet the viewer's gaze, although their stares remain disembodied, floating above the shoulders of the portrait. In their isolation, they are the most commanding. The image insinuates a westernized experience of 'sitting on Santa's lap', a commonplace occurrence in malls throughout North America during the holiday season. This social practice speaks to inherent drives of capitalism during the Christian holiday; an entanglement that is further complicated by the colonial context of a historical European painting. With razor sharp intention, Jones locates the crux of his critique with unmistakable clarity: by replacing the eyes, and therefore perspective(s), of the portrait, he demonstrates how the perception of the artwork also shifts, producing a contemporary counter-archive that challenges what Manet's painting represents while employing it as a host.

As demonstrated by Jones, collage invites the process of unsettling, dismantling, and reconfiguring conditions of existence and offering alternative methods of knowledge production to empower viewers to think beyond a fixed and rigid reality. In *Want* (Fig. 5), Jones masterfully encompasses simultaneous realities as a way to draw attention to socio-political inequities that have persisted for centuries as a result of the deeply colonial ideology of 'wanting' and subsequently 'taking'. The collage is anchored in part by a painted portrait, once again by by Manet (namely *Absinthe Drinker* from 1859), that depicts a white man cloaked with a top hat whose body is wholly intact apart from the face, which is covered in entirety by a single word: 'want.' The disembodied face is shifted to the left of the figure, displaced in time and space. In

juxtaposition, a concrete space emerges devoid of human figures, the only evidence of life from graffiti on the shadowed walls. The tones of colour expose a sharp juxtaposition that indicates different temporalities: the sepia-toned past and contemporary concrete blues. Jumbled between temporalities is a disorienting assemblage of the straight, repetitive shapes of city buildings and natural foliage that takes up the bottom left corner of the composition. The images have ripped edges and are championed a single set of lips and chin with feminine features. Unmistakably, shades of red, white, and blue overlay the fractured face, possibly a subtle allusion to oppressive nationalistic practices and politics that serve to distance the individual from their environment, represented by the jumbled collage of buildings and trees that must be visually waded through.

Importantly, the fragmentation of experience illustrated in this assemblage is a direct result of the actions and decisions made by the wants of those who represent European colonialism and western capitalism — typically white European men who have no consideration for the people whose lives are disproportionality affected by their destructive choices. It is not hyperbolic to state that capitalism and corporate greed have ravaged the natural environment to fragments while simultaneously trapping minds and lives in frustratingly repetitive spaces and cycles. Furthermore, the chaos of the bottom left corner, in contrast to the overt spaciousness of the above two images, speaks to the containment of oppression by systems built to work against marginalized communities, evidenced by the history of destroying neighbourhoods across North America for profit and then deeming them “slums” or “ghettos” where, in most cases, basic social needs were not met. In these spaces, a deep reliance on

community care and mutual aid is necessary, particularly when outside forces of oppression and domination from government and law enforcement contribute far more harm than good. Furthermore, the fragmentation also emphasizes the distinct emptiness around the European "wanting" man above, perhaps speaking metaphorically to the privilege of empty space and hollow moral code of ethics represented by the disproportionate distribution of space that is purposefully geared away from the needs of human communities.

The theoretical work of critical theorists Frantz Fanon and Sara Ahmed offer compelling arguments for the notion of disorientation as a challenge to the underpinnings of white supremacy and heteronormativity entrenched in western culture. As a tool in the construction of counter-narratives, disorientation is a strategy that Ahmed reflects on, particularly in the context of the work of Fanon, in her seminal text *Queer Phenomenology,* explaining "from Fanon we learn about the experience of disorientation as the experience of being an object among other objects, of being shattered, of being cut into pieces by the hostility of the white gaze" (Ahmed 160). Shifting how objects are gathered, this sense of disorientation speaks to the process of collage as a deliberate disturbance of a particular established order in pursuit of other relations. Elaborating on this, Ahmed argues "a queer phenomenology would function as a disorientation device; it would not overcome the 'disalignment' of the horizontal and vertical axes, allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world" (Ahmed 172). Importantly, this choice not to overcome disorientation but revel in the familiar as it becomes strange, is a worthwhile point of consideration in the context of Jones' collages. The overlay of several narratives at once speaks to the inherent multiplicity of

counter-narratives, and the embrace of the disorientation becomes a guiding light for visual analysis. Reading memories and lineages in relation to one another, Jones' collages create a space that welcomes the dedicated act of slow looking. As realities converge from shimmering fragments, Jones' collages unfold into masterful critiques of historical chronologies and contemporary pop culture at once.

Anna Binta Diallo: Archetypal Silhouettes as Narrative Resistance

The art of imagining beyond, and toward other futures, through the framework of narrative-based mythologies can be read as a resistance to a prevailing historical record that has been used as a tool to subjugate, erase, and control communities for centuries. Anna Biota Diallo's practice reconciles the histories that inform both her own identity and the land she is situated on, using collage as a critical tool for these explorations. As a multidisciplinary artist working at the intersection of photography, painting, video, drawing, and installation, Diallo constructs counter-narratives by re-imagining mythologies that reject linear temporalities and colonial geographies to instead envision possible histories beyond the reality of imperial conquest and domination. Bringing these mythologies into the present is therefore significant as a future-driven historical critique that lives on in many ways. Floating freely in expansive space, the selected collages from Diallo's ongoing *Wanderings* series take shape as recognizable silhouettes of humans and other forms of life, brought together by multilayered images from maps, books, and other visual ephemera to produce new representations of multifaceted identities.

As a recurrent symbol or motif, archetypes have the effect of flattening an identity or experience in the broadest of contexts in an effort to contain many variations at once. Diallo's use of silhouettes to articulate familiar forms, both human and animal, alludes to the Victorian practice of shadow-portraiture meant to depict individuals devoid of identifying features. This coupling of specificity and anonymity continues throughout Diallo's artwork but is deliberately reversed. While silhouettes typically feature a solid black foreground, Diallo's silhouettes gain dimensionality through the

collaged images contained within them. The shift in how a silhouette functions also becomes a form of archetypal reconstruction that invites interpretation from both within and outside the silhouette, producing multifaceted counter-narratives that defy traditional functions of the technique. As the silhouettes become populated with imagery, the viewer is given a sense of 'x-ray' vision that provides access to the visual information that forms, and also complicates, an archetype. As key tools in the production of counter-narratives, Diallo's collages ultimately complicate how mythologies function in the present.

The selected collages investigate themes of migration, displacement, and geographic boundaries more broadly as a way to both pay tribute to the many lands that comprise the artist's identity and question the colonial processes that inform the way such experiences are socially read. As part of a larger, roving series entitled *Wanderings,* Diallo's collages re-imagine how communities are shaped by traditions and folk stories outside of colonial contexts. Conceptually grounded in Diallo's personal history, her work demonstrates thoughtful and creative negotiations of identity in ways that are lateral, rather than linear. Instead, these characters reflect a migratory worldview that reframe and repair personal mythologies to contextualize them in this contemporary moment. Exploring social imaginaries, her project engages with the legacies of colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade as well as the problematic definition of geographical borders in relation to various histories, loss, nostalgia, and diaspora. Collecting visual materials, folktales, and histories, Diallo visually responds and repairs through collage from an expansive transcultural lens. Both conceptually and contextually complex, Diallo's work plays with the conflation of time in order to re-

remember the past. By disrupting visual space through the combination of fragmentation and juxtaposition, her work resists linear definition to instead reveal affinities and tensions that exist between disparate objects and identities.

The precise technique of layering is a primary guide toward the multidimensionality of narratives. As a testament to what is sacred within the physical world, *Freshwater Constellations,* (Fig. 6) alludes to land-based epistemologies that have deep roots in the Americas and have been suppressed by ongoing colonial and state-sanctioned violence. The foregrounded layer of the composition functions as a double-exposure of two individuals holding objects in a position of prayer. Spliced between long, silhouetted hair is an image of an individual looking downwards and holding a bouquet of wild flowers. The juxtaposition between what is held by the silhouette — a large, oblong object — and the flowers, results in the conflation of both objects as emblems of worship. A blue map of a constellation stands in for water, emphasizing the sacred quality of both.

Collage invites the process of unsettling, dismantling, and reconfiguring conditions of existence, offering tools to empower counter-narratives that critique the inequities of reality in deliberate and material ways. Scholar, artist, and activist Lianne Charlie illustrates this point further in her study of collage as a space “where the seemingly irreconcilable can be reconciled” (Charlie 1). In this way, collage becomes a practice oriented toward decolonial ends: Charlie’s study specifically demonstrates how the act of bringing disparate people, places, texts, contexts, experiences, practices, histories, traditions, and ontologies onto the same theoretical plane encourages a capacity to imagine beyond a given reality. Ultimately, this theory of

collage embraces the tools of cut and paste to disorient reality into a dream-state that provide “new access points into seemingly incommensurable political, social and cultural divides”, which is especially important at a time that is increasingly polarized by the vital and transformative activist work and advocacy by community-oriented groups (Charlie 8).

The second collage selected for analysis, *Flight or Fight with Tortoise (III)* (Fig. 7), aptly speaks to the reorientation of perspectives that Diallo’s collages accomplish. The construction of new mythologies based on many distinct points of reference becomes a profound challenge to linear narratives and one-dimensional histories. Atop a tortoise, a silhouetted figure leans forward with arms outstretched as though propelling momentum forward. The body of the silhouette is primarily comprised of geese flying over a lush and expansive valley. This imagery shifts as it progresses downward, as birds fly over a distinctly different scene of combat. A fragment of the face of a white man dressed in European garb, wielding a weapon in mid-strike, shifts the context from “flight” to “fight,” as per the title suggests, employing the silhouetted body as a visual hierarchy of values that stands in opposition to the westernized evolutionary “fight or flight” rhetoric. In this way, Diallo employs collage as a methodology that de-centres violence as as strategy for understanding conflict, instead providing the space to express worldviews beyond western euro-centrism and advocate for epistemologies grounded in other forms of conflict resolution as well as broader notions of compassion and balance. To relate back to the initial symbolism of human and tortoise, this collage ultimately suggests a larger metaphor regarding the relationship with humanity and the environment as a process of exchange and cooperation rather than domination.

The methodological strategies that Diallo employs in her distinct approach to collage echo the notion of the 'rhizome' popularized by the work of psychoanalytic scholars Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In their seminal work, *A Thousand Plateaus,* they formulate a theory of the rhizome based on the botanical model of a modified subterranean plant stem that grows horizontally (or laterally) and sends out roots and shoots from a node, allowing for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in representation and interpretation. With no beginning or end, the rhizome occupies a similar in-between space to Bhabha's hybridity as a cultural model that similarly works against linear narratives of history. Honouring connection and multiplicity, the rhizome becomes a useful model for analyzing Diallo's collages as paradoxical spaces of rupture and repair. By taking apart material objects that represent cultural hegemony and reframing the narratives around them, Diallo employs a process of hybridity that is rhizomatic in nature wherein there is no beginning or end but rather a multitudinous 'all-at-once'. Each element of the collage comes from an individual root that may be in conversation with many different narratives based on the lateral construction of a narrative through the processes of fragmentation and juxtaposition.

Ultimately, Diallo's work speaks to a necessary turn toward what has been passed down or left behind throughout generations. Offering a three-dimensional contour to history, Diallo responds to the questions of what voices survive in the narrative of Senegalese, Métis, and Canadian art history, and what voices are erased, addressing crucial gaps in representation during this time of ongoing reckoning with the photographic canon. For this reason, Diallo's artistic investigation ultimately seeks to weave bridges between cultures, particularly those she has personally inherited,

inspiring others to similarly examine their heritage to build discourse around different cultural references and histories. Refusing any fixed truth or identity, her work attends to the resonances that emerge from the counter-narratives produced by telling multiple stories at once. Rather than providing a corrective history, these collages function as radical departures from history entirely, demonstrating the power of counter-narratives to imagine beyond the scope of linearity and instead pay tribute to all that has been lost along the way.

Conclusion

At the outset of this research, my intention was to reveal how collage visualizes non-linear approaches to piecing the world together through objects of material culture. Focusing specifically on notions of storytelling, history, and pedagogy, I employed an interdisciplinary methodology to trace the revolutionary departures that artists working with collage have demonstrated throughout history and into the present. Importantly, collage has a distinctly contemporary capacity to engage with the specificity of the present. Fundamentally dialogic and grounded in critique, collage has a demonstrated capacity to re-arrange temporality and critically engage the present with the past. Resolutely turned toward history while simultaneously engaged with the present, I argue that collage makes space for other forms of imagination as a way to respond to archival silences in the elongated wake of historical erasures, systemic oppression, and the legacies of colonization.

A crucial implication of this research emphasizes how counter-narratives contribute to a larger project of dismantling of white supremacy and its structures by adapting and reclaiming knowledge. With agency and innovation, collage re-presents material culture as profoundly personal, evocative, and able to be questioned; a gesture of freedom that has been consistent since its inception. By tracing the consistencies and departures throughout history from an interdisciplinary perspective, my research intends to arrive in the present moment with a multifaceted understanding of the ways in which collage becomes emblematic of broader experiences of cultural diaspora and hybridization, particularly in the colonial context of Canada.

It is clear that the structures of oppression that serve as the framework for western settler culture cannot continue to go on as they do. Right now, the question of the future comes out of the uncertainty of the moment we are in: a sad, maddening, and devastating year of global pandemic and racialized violence that has forced a sense of urgency, despite mandates of slowness and isolation. In these moments of bewildering temporality, there is an overwhelming gravitation toward other worlds, if only through a fragmented lens, that represent futures yet to fully come into view. An overwhelming sense of hope for something better informs the ways in which material conditions of reality must be re-imagined, not just conceptually, but in the shifting of actual space and narratives.

My research positions collage as a way to engage the silent, empty gaps and in-between spaces where critical pedagogy is possible. Thinking materially outside of the art historical canon becomes increasingly necessary to understand the distinct value of such fissures, as evidenced by the work of cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Deleuze and Guattari, Frantz Fanon, and Sara Ahmed who emphasize the importance of hybridity, rhizomatic knowledge production, and disorientation as key theories of resistance that echo the methodology of collage. A linear history of collage therefore becomes somewhat ironic, but offers a foundation to build, and re-build, upon. Any attempt at reconciling with the past must be multifaceted, and these theorists demonstrate that is a power in recognizing brokenness — and to not be afraid to break apart. After all, with collapse there is the potential to rebuild and hold space for other stories and modes of being.

Importantly, the development of counter-narratives requires a deep examination of power and privilege. Through the questioning of such historiographical, photographic, artistic, and cultural records, artists such as Jasmine Cardenas, Aaron Jones, and Anna Biota Diallo have the agency to undermine colonial, institutional, and even cultural archives, therefore shifting the inherent power dynamics of visual culture. Collage therefore becomes a way to visualize the nuances and complexities of history and culture outside of dominant paradigms. By problematizing privilege, racial bias, colonial framing, and linear temporality, the methodology challenges and undermines inherent euro-centric understandings of art to locate these erasures while resisting the replication of problematic historiographies.

Broadly geared toward impulses to re-tell history, re-frame identity, or otherwise re-orient perspectives, the practices of Cardenas, Jones, and Diallo involve plumbing commonplace objects of material culture such as magazines, newspapers, and maps to question the narratives they represent and produce counter-narratives in response. Resolutely turned toward history, while simultaneously engaged profoundly with the present, their work with collage is demonstrative of the necessity for any attempt at reconciling with the past to be multifaceted, otherwise it takes on the character of propaganda. The selected collages not only acknowledge, but resist and work against traditional political economic and social hierarchies that are really embedded in all of our institutions. Through the questioning of such historiographical, photographic, artistic, and cultural records, each demonstrate how the manipulation, diversification, and decolonization of archives can act as sites of resistance and work against their original objectives, therefore shifting the power they hold.

As a process of retelling and recombining narratives from popular media and history, collage offers a creative way of thinking otherwise and beyond. Importantly, this serves as a crucial reminder of the ways that the past, present, and future are always in fluid conversation. A collage becomes a site of connection; distinctly grounded yet forged between places, and collaboration among both temporalities and mediums becomes an important motif. While the actual process and production of collage is often an individual, long, laborious process of collecting and then rapidly condensing through purposeful juxtaposition, the process sparks a dialogue that begins with the artist through the choices they make. This can involve the types of materials the artist had at their disposal as well as their own visual language. The dialogue is continued by the viewer bringing their own references and modes of connection to the work, and thus a chain of meaning is created. What I find beautiful about collage is the fundamental destabilization of meaning, something that art history tends to hold very dear. Built in to the very nature of a collage is plurality and expansive relationality that speaks to the critical theories that inform this project in the attempt to unsettle and rebuild parts of history I was brought up to forget.

In responding to inequitable power structures, environmental devastation and the perils of late capitalism, a crucial step in the production of counter-narratives is the offer of alternatives. This research set out to demonstrate some of the ways that arts-based methodologies such as collage are especially suited to counter-narrative construction through such processes of resistance and imagination. Exploring the archive through collage ultimately offers different possibilities for thinking through time to create a space that is free from the concerns and canon of western art. While it may

perhaps be impossible to ‘fully know’ a collage, the yearning to understand is itself a way to know. The use of resources, some factual and some confessional, grasp at the limitations of knowledge, but this collective grasping is perhaps the most honest condition of analysis. In this way, the production of counter-narratives through collage becomes a process of way-finding to navigate a disorienting and multifaceted present.

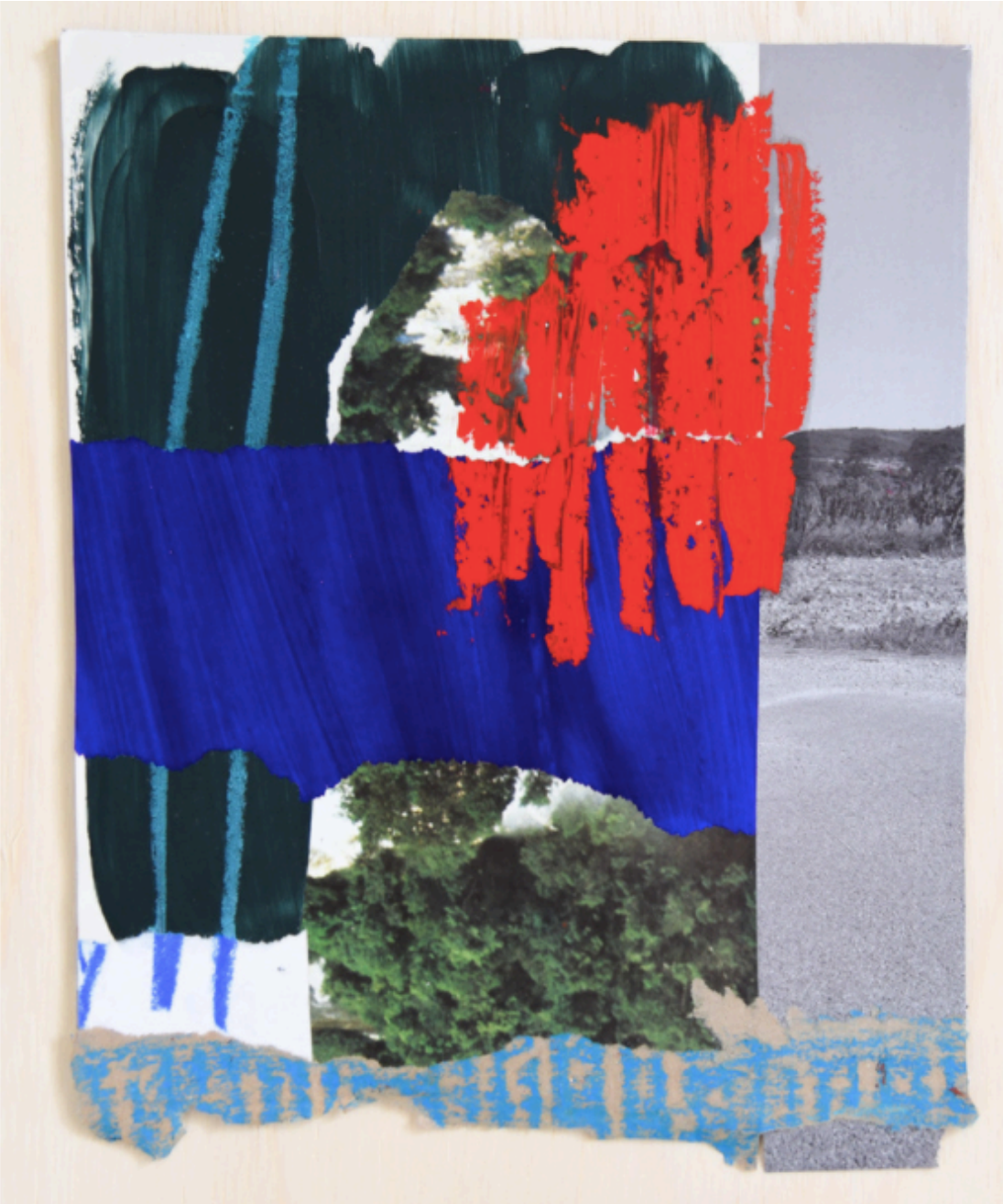
As a contemporary practice in defiance of western art tropes, collage makes visible what may be collected, archived, and brought into the future. By thinking critically about the task of counter-narratives — what they question, as well as what they foreground — my research understands collage as not only a practice but a logic that determines who may be visible and what stories are told in the realm of contemporary art and beyond. As critics and curators, this work of unbinding the institution of art from colonial and deeply problematic histories must be continued in order to expand and prioritize epistemic traditions and modes of knowing that have been systematically oppressed. This is a fight that requires meaningful integration of art production and practices into broader interdisciplinary, and even anti-disciplinary fields of inquiry and a deliberate resistance to western engagement as the ideological centre. As further work is done to expand the history of collage and its significance as a socio-political tool, curators and critics must continue to look to, and bring forward, artists and makers who re-write history and re-frame the present beyond the periphery and contribute to a cultural record that is open-ended, always revised, and endlessly enriched by an integrated web of relations.

Appendix

Fig. 1:

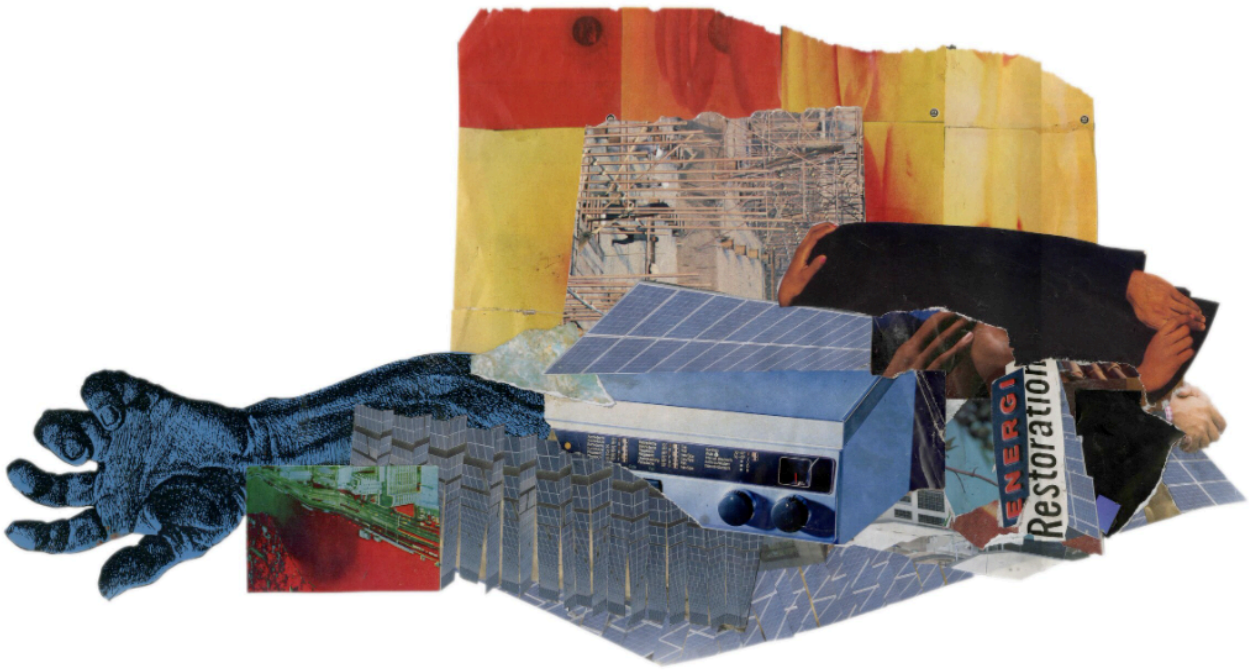
Jasmine Cardenas, *Untitled 1* (2016)

Fig. 2:



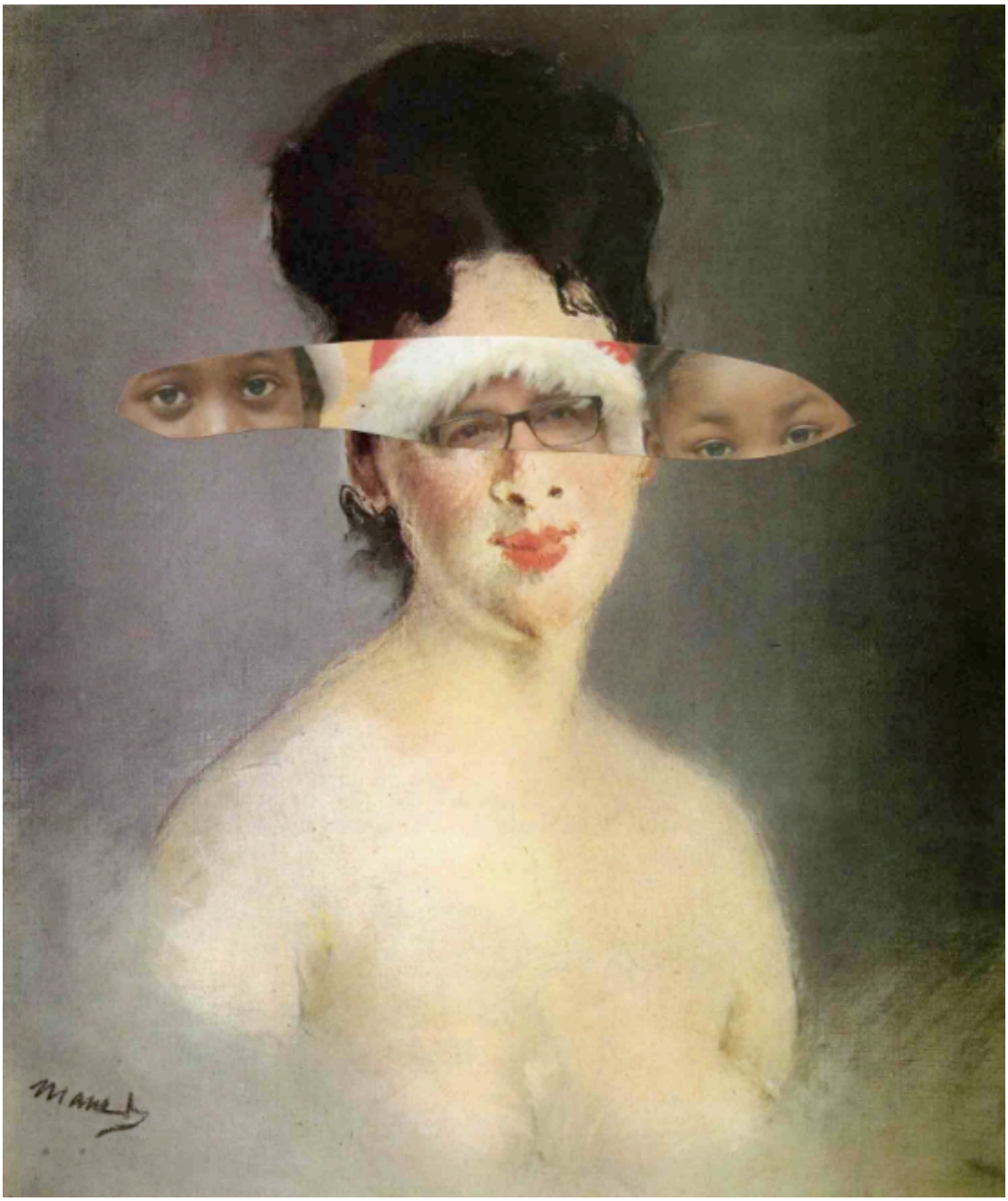
Jasmine Cardenas, *Untitled 2* (2016)

Fig. 3:



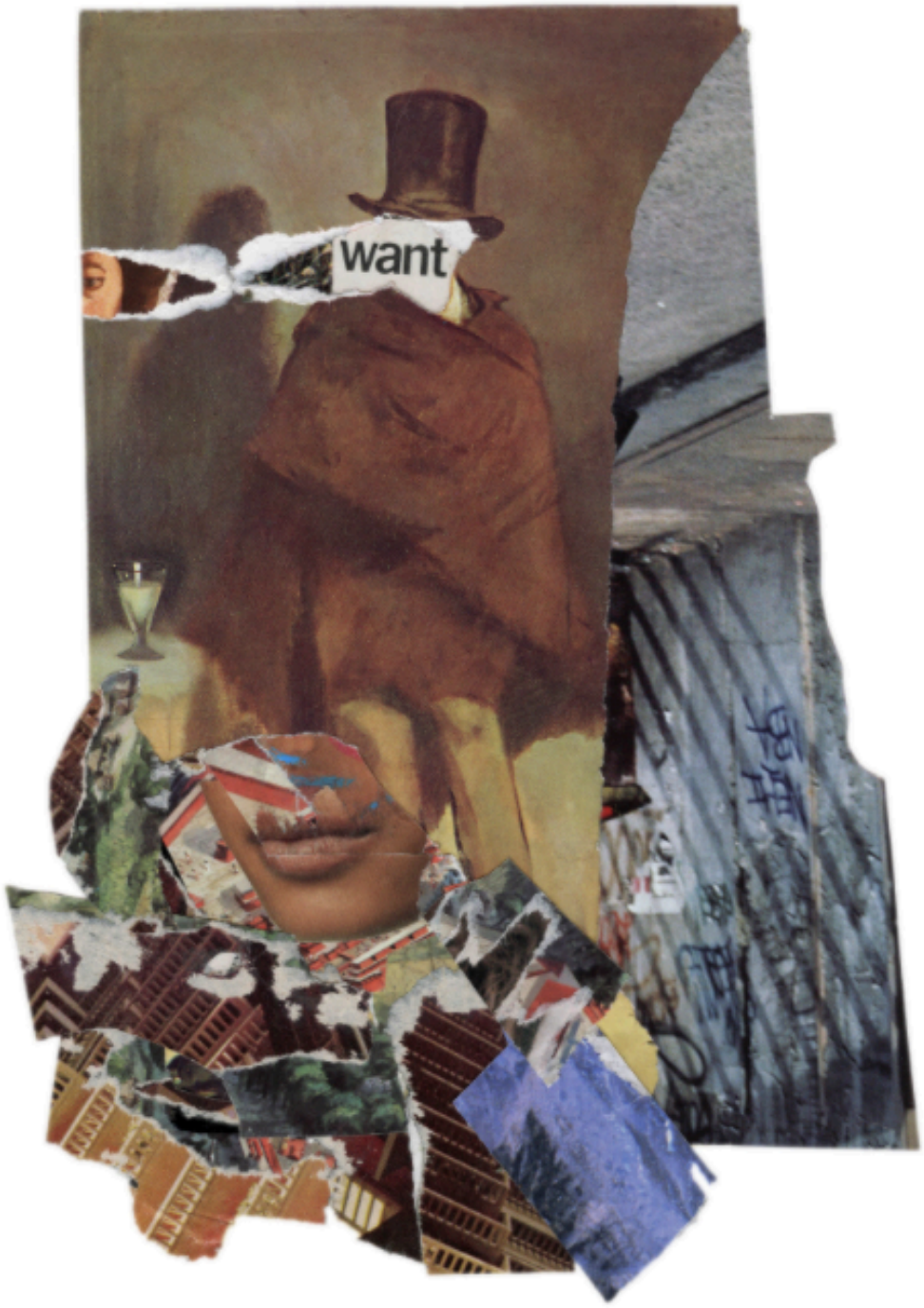
Aaron Jones, *Energy Restoration* (2018)

Fig. 4:



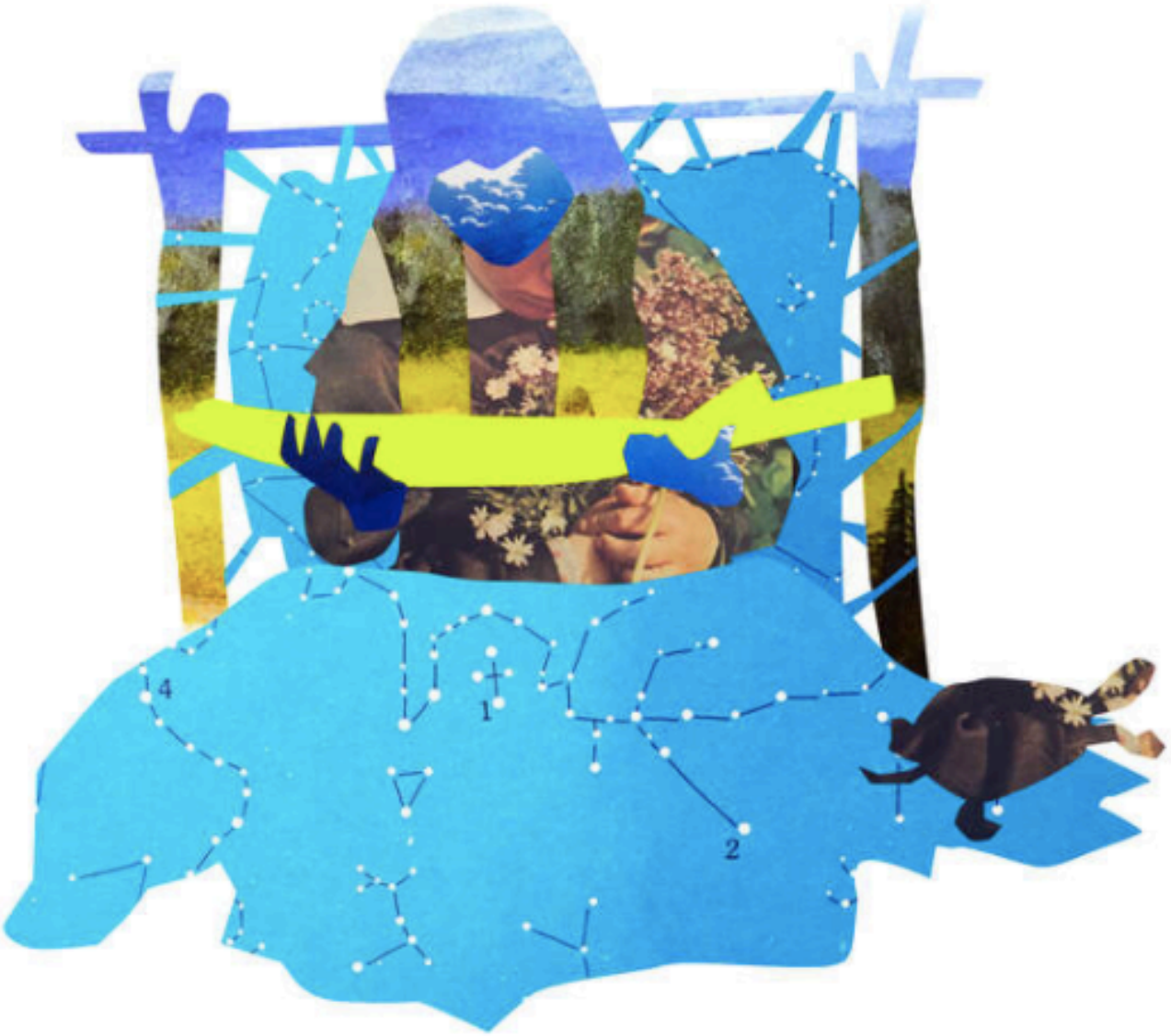
Aaron Jones, *Untitled, 2017* (2017)

Fig. 5:



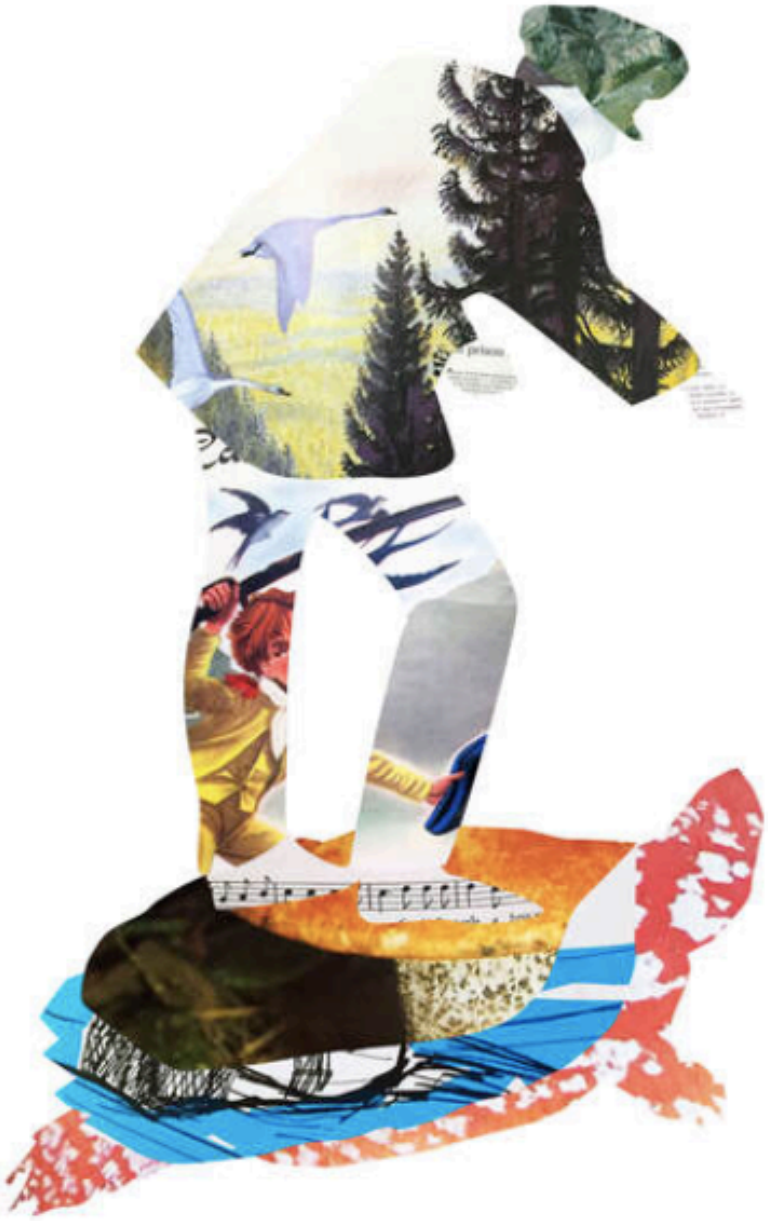
Aaron Jones, *Want* (2017-2018)

Fig. 6:



Anna Binta Diallo, *Freshwater Constellations I* (2020)

Fig. 7:



Anna Binta Diallo, *Flight or Fight with Tortoise (III)* (2020)

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