[00:00]

[piano music]

Bettina Korek: Hello. I'm Bettina Korek, Chief Executive of Serpentine. It's my pleasure to welcome you today to *Hervé Télémaque: Double Language*. Following the major exhibition*, A Hopscotch of the Mind* at Serpentine, and now at the Aspen Art Museum, this special livestream programme celebrates the life and work of Haitian Artist Hervé Télémaque.

Double Language invites world-renowned artists, thinkers, and writers to respond to Télémaque's rich visual language and explore how his practice, which spanned many decades, continues to influence the role of language and literature in art today. We'll be hearing from an extraordinary group of contributors whose practice intersects with Télémaque's work in many inspiring ways.

Double Language also features a previously unseen interview between Télémaque and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director of Serpentine. Ever since Hans Ulrich's first encounter with the artist in the 1990s, Serpentine has followed his career closely. We were thrilled to be able to present audiences in London and Aspen an opportunity to see the work of this remarkable artist first-hand, which is with his first major exhibitions in the UK and US, presenting works from the late 1950s until present day. *A Hopscotch of the Mind* opened at Serpentine in Winter '21, and is currently on view at the Aspen Art Museum until March 26th, 2023. We're so grateful to Aspen Art Museum and Director Nicola Lees for their incredible collaboration and for our friendship over many years.

This exhibition is part of Serpentine's ongoing commitment to exhibiting pioneering artists who are further in their careers but deserve wider recognition. This mission has come to life in other recent solo exhibitions of artists Rose Wylie, Luchita Hurtado, Faith Ringgold, James Barnor, Barbara Chase-Riboud, and Kamala Ibrahim Ishaq.

Were enormously grateful to Hervé Télémaque for his energy and dedication, as well as to his daughter, Elodie-Anne Télémaque, and collaborator, Florence Half-Wrobel for their knowledge and support. The realisation of this exhibition depended on the generosity and support of all the lenders, as well as our supporting partners, Hublot and Citi, and members of the exhibition circle, Paul Coulon, Catherine Petitgas, Rabouan Moussion Gallery, and Fluxus and Chanel.

As ever, we express our continued appreciation to Bloomberg Philanthropies for their ongoing support, including the Bloomberg Connects Digital Guide. The Council of the Serpentine is an extraordinary group of patrons who we always thank, as well as our incredible Innovation Circle, Americas Foundation, Asia Council, Patrons, and Future Contemporaries. Final thanks to AECOM, Weil and Gallowglass. We're so happy that you tuned in, and it's my pleasure to welcome Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director of Serpentine. Thank you.

[piano music]

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much, Bettina. We are actually celebrating, tonight, the work, the legacy of Hervé Télémaque. We are incredibly grateful to all the poets, the artists, the thinkers who have participated in this programme and for those who want to know more, we have the catalogue here of the Serpentine of Hervé Télémaque, designed by Zak Kyes, *A Hopscotch of the Mind*, which is wonderful parallel reading to tonight's programme.

Since the late '50s, Hervé Télémaque has created a very complex, extraordinary body of work with a unique and also playful visual vocabulary, featuring abstract gestures, cartoon-like imagery, and also mixed media compositions. Through paintings, drawings, and also collages, objects, assemblages, Télémaque combines historical and also literary references with those of consumer and also popular culture. Télémaque's compositions consistently draw connections between the movements of his internal thoughts and everyday experiences, bringing about striking collisions of image, text, and also material.

Recurring through Télémaque's works is, in a way, the eternal return of meditations on his own life story, experiences of racism and colonialism, the psychological exploration of sexuality and desire, the presence of violence within the everyday life, and also contemporary politics and news media. As Hervé told us in a conversation, I'm going to quote him here, "I drew on my life as a Haitian of mixed race to construct a double language based on both the political and social, the question of identity, racism and sexuality," end of quote. And today, in *Double Language*, the title of tonight's programme, we bring together a new generation of artists who are concerned with these very same issues in their practice and who continue to permeate our everyday lives.

Informed by and also associated with many writers, language was always central to Hervé Télémaque's practice. The artist wrote experimental text and integrated words into his visual work, throughout his career. He also had a practice as a writer, often wrote commands. An entire book was published on his collected writings, and we tried also, for the catalogue here, to translate for the first time some of these extraordinary artist writings into English. It's, I think, important to say that very often when artists write, it's an important medium for them, very often, not enough recognised. So the focus on artist writing is really important. And Télémaque brought the writing also very often into his paintings, into his installations, as we could see and can see in the exhibition in London and in Aspen.

With works often produced in critical dialogue with current events, Hervé's practice also explored and expressed the multiplicity of Caribbean and also diasporic identity by juxtaposing context and layering meanings. These resonated with what Hervé called the force of poetic synthesis, something he found in Creole language and also, of course, in a dialogue the work has with Édouard Glissant's writing and Glissant's concept of Mondialité, which is so important for us here, at the Serpentine. We brought

Édouard, invited Édouard here to London for a conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson many years ago, and his thinking has really very much inspired our entire programme.

Tonight's programme explores the relationship between literature and visual art. It takes inspiration from how Hervé's work drew on idioms, on multilingual experience in the Caribbean diaspora and also, as said before, again and again and all over again, incorporated language, often also in his own handwriting, actually, into painting. Télémaque's unique visual vocabulary inflected his practice with a critical awareness of an evolving and also complex modern world. This evening's contributors have offered their own interpretations, not only in response to Hervé's work, but also to their own practices, which we also celebrate here in these programmes.

Hervé Télémaque: Double Language begins with a deep-dive look into the making of the Serpentine and Aspen Art Museum exhibitions by co-curator Joseph Constable, followed by a film poem by artist Julien Creuzet, who will represent France at the next Venice Biennale, followed by a reading of a new text by Mari-Célie Agnant. It then continues with the discussion between artists Janiva Ellis and Adee Roberson, a new film by artist Manuel Mathieu, as well as a previously unseen conversation between myself and Hervé Télémaque, which we recorded last year in his Paris studio, and last but not least, a newly commissioned film by artist manuel arturo abreu.

I would also like to thank the Aspen Art Museum, above all Nicola Lees and all the teams, and of course Joseph Constable for this wonderful collaboration to make the Aspen exhibition happen after the show in London. We always say the Aspen Art Museum and the Serpentine is one plus one equals at least 11.

Our thanks go also to Zak Group, Zak Kyes for designing our beautiful exhibition catalogue. As mentioned before, the catalogue includes writings by Hervé. It's actually books within the book. There is also a book about studio drawings of Hervé. And of course, the text, academic C.C. McKee draws under specialism in the art and visual culture of the modern Atlantic world in order to read Télémaque's works through a psychoanalytic lens and the context of Haitian art, of course.

Artist Helen Marten, who also designed and developed a display feature for the Aspen exhibition, and legendary writer Lyonel Trouillot have composed thoughtful and poetic responses to Télémaque's work, suggesting new points of entry into the artist's oeuvre.

[10:00]

Political scientist and historian, Françoise Vergès, who has accompanied the trajectory of Hervé for so many years, and we actually recorded a last conversation with Françoise and Hervé in Paris, just a few weeks before his passing. In the extraordinary text, Françoise uses the artist's recurring motif of the open mouth as a starting point for a meditation on Haitian history and also on the politics of anti-

Blackness. While art historian Sarah Wilson's text contextualises Télémaque's practice within the wider European artistic scene.

We would like to thank the amazing Serpentine dream team who has put today's programme together, Hannah Girma, Senior Editor, Curator of Editorial Projects, Fiona Glen, Content Producer, Kostas Stasinopoulos, Associate Curator Live Programmes, Eva Speight, Curatorial Assistant, and Bea Redweik, Production Coordinator of this project. Above all, we are immensely grateful to the late Hervé Télémaque for the incredible work, the incredible collaboration, also for more than 30 years of dialogue.

I met Hervé for the first time a few weeks after moving to Paris, in the early nineties, when I started to work for the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Hervé and I were part of a wider jury of the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain at La Défense, and we meet every couple of months, over years, and got to know each other.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of Hervé's daughter, Elodie-Anne Télémaque, whom we thank very, very much, and of course, also Hervé's closest collaborator, Florence Half-wrobel. Thank you all so much for joining tonight's programme for *Double Language*, and please give now a very warm welcome to Joseph Constable, the Co-Curator of *A Hopscotch of the Mind* at the Serpentine and the Aspen Art Museum. Thank you all so much.

[piano music]

Joseph Constable: Thank you so much, Hans Ulrich. Hello, everyone. I'm really excited to be here to introduce and provide an insight into the making of Hervé Télémaque, *A Hopscotch of the Mind*, at Serpentine and Aspen Art Museum.

I'd really like to start this introduction by acknowledging the late Hervé Télémaque, who I first met in 2020, online via Zoom, in the midst of the pandemic, as we started to plan for his upcoming exhibition at Serpentine. Due to ongoing travel restrictions so many of these meetings took place online, with me in London, him in Paris. During which we would talk through his incredible archive of works, stretching from the late 1950s, when he arrived in New York City from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, right through until the present moment, with pieces that he was working on as we continued to meet, essentially comprising around 70 years of making. Télémaque's work is notable for its expansive visual vocabulary, a wild and idiosyncratic ride through language and image, expressed through a brilliant and unique mind, a double consciousness or double language that reaches across the realms of identity, sexuality, at the political and social.

It's important to note that there is nothing lofty about Télémaque's genius, but rather a deep understanding of human nature that is explored with humbleness, playfulness, humour and joy,

which is also an apt summation of Télémaque, the man, as well as Télémaque, the artist. It was truly a privilege and highlight of my curatorial career so far to engage with his work for this exhibition.

I think the following quote sums up Télémaque's approach to his life and work rather well, and he explains that, "Basically my painting is rooted in what I have lived, in anecdotes, little incidents that have happened to me. But my problem as a painter is how to move from that lived experience to pictures that can circulate, and to do so with my sole resources, the plain, the colours, the titles. They are not enormous resources, but they satisfy me. But they will have to do, to find a way of making my lived experience no longer directly personal so that everyone can perceive its meaning."

A Hopscotch of the Mind brings together works from the early 1960s until the present day, highlighting the enduring themes of Télémaque's work through his multifaceted practice. But rather than taking a chronological approach, Hans Ulrich and I proposed, through the exhibition, a non-linear exploration of Télémaque's visual vocabulary, encouraging viewers to jump between media and periods, and forming their own associations between the disparate narrative fragments. This exhibition is very much an invitation. It's an invitation for viewers to carve out their own pathways through the artist's visual language, forming new associations, both based on their own experiences and perceptions.

Following its run at Serpentine, which was from October 2021 to January 2022, *A Hopscotch of the Mind* has taken on a new life in the Colorado Mountains at Aspen Art Museum, which is currently on view until the 26th of March of 2023. As part of this new iteration of the exhibition, we were able to expand the list of works, including never before seen pieces from the artist's studio in Paris. And we also invited artist Helen Marten to develop the exhibition design. I'd really like to include an extra special mention here of the amazing vision and contribution that Helen brought to this process.

Helen Marten's exhibition design references Télémaque's play between graphic authority and painterly playfulness. Structured around motifs of recognisable architecture, and which fragment between the museum galleries, the viewing experience is one that moves in a process of construction and collapse. We see familiar compositions, house, shed, window tent, cubicle, which provide framing devices in contained environments, which then mirror visual moments of perspective and exposure in Télémaque's work. Following this sense of shifting viewpoints and narration within each of Télémaque's compositions, Marten's design is composed using multiple facets and cutaway apertures, windows, which allow for works to be seen in collective and sequenced layers. Again, we are so grateful to Helen and her team for their work on this exhibition.

On behalf of Nicola Lees, the Nancy and Bob Magoon director at Aspen Art Museum, there are a number of individuals and organisations without whom this exhibition would not have been possible. Aspen Art Museum exhibitions are made possible by the Marx Exhibition Fund, and leadership support for *A Hopscotch of the Mind* is provided by Susan and Larry Marx. General exhibition support is provided by the Toby Devan Lewis Visiting Artist Fund and the National Council.

Admission to the Aspen Art Museum is free, courtesy of Amy and John Phelan. Last but not least, the Aspen Art Museum exhibition really would not have been possible without the amazing work of Simone Krug, Assistant Curator, and Kate Marra, Director of Exhibitions, along with the rest of the museum team. Thank you so much for joining *Double Language* today.

[piano music]

Julien Creuzet

[sound of lapping water and wind on mic]

air pocket
too late
weightless
weightless

air pocket
too late
weightless
weightless

balata tarantula omen message
cloud erases every trace of passage

balata tarantula omen message
cloud erases every trace of passage

cloud erases every trace of passage
here and on the other side

cloud erases every trace of passage
here and on the other side

I dreamed of you
I dreamed of you for a long time

Matoutou my Doudou
Matoutou my Doudou

[languid solo singing in French with music]

[20:00]

[moody electronic melody and beats]
[with processed, layered vocals]
[phone recording of quiet singing fades in]
[underlying music stops]
[sound of a kiss being blown]
[sound of rushing water and wind on mic]

you make me feel

vanishing
little breeze beware of the church

who is but deep down who knows
all the secrets that materialize

you but who are you
you but you kill me

you but who are you
you but you kill me

you but you kill me
you make me feel

you but you kill me
you make me feel

rainbow in the distance recedes
ventricle aurora commands
such loneliness
when you rise in altitude

you but you kill me
you but you kill me

[music returns with slow, reflective melody]

[music replaced by tender solo singing in French]
[music returns with singing]
[sound of rain fades in under music]
[music stops, rain continues]
[silence]

Marie- Celie Agnant: [speaking in French] To be able to discuss, even briefly, the work of the unique painter Hervé Télémaque is an undreamt-of opportunity to relive a fabulous encounter with what I would call the discovery of creative identity: an identity carried by a force for freedom, so powerful that one is almost physically affected.

It was during the year 2015. I took the time, while on a brief stay in France, to see a retrospective exhibition of the artist's work at the National Modern Art Museum, the Centre Pompidou. I remember being completely transfixed, caught up in an indescribable whirlwind, swept away by a wave of incomparable creative boldness. I was – I told myself – in the presence not of an ordinary work, but of a monument which, at each step, each stage, each gesture, and each movement, generates its own model, its own form, its own status and which, above all, keeps itself at an infinite distance from all stereotypes.

Instantly, a stream of questions about literary creation instantly erupted within me: recurring questions which I also asked myself, whilst I found that I was literally moving from one painting to the next, in a sort of rapture mixed with a vague feeling of agitation, which hastened me... Up until the end of what was, for me, nothing other than magic. It took little time for something to emerge, something from me, originating in distant childhood, the impression of discovering some sort of unsuspected language.

So, I endeavoured to decipher it, to capture the narrative that offered itself to me. Admittedly, only mediocre words came to my rescue: refusal, liberation, balance, order, assemblage, harmony, synthesis, totality, coherence, fluidity. Their echo reflected the existing dialogue to which I was summoned by the colours, each sharper than the other, the forms, the irony, the indescribable sense of humour. From one painting to the next, the whirlwind intensified.

I remember thinking that the painter had undoubtedly made the choice to be. Simply himself. In all his entirety. His poetic approach, at the same time refined and imbued with a profoundly spontaneous character, thrilled me: I detected an artist's ability to make a clean break with the fears linked to achievement as well as of the impulses associated linked solely to the imaginary. Exploring this trajectory brought me back to certain texts by Garcia Lorca, an artist with a lucid poetic style, who left irreplaceable texts thick with metaphors. I was guided to follow an artistic path that seemed to be reinvented with each artwork. This path was led by a voice chanting an ode to absolute freedom in the act of creation. After this moment, when emotion and disruption met wonder, I let myself open up to

a reflection on the invisible. In all its intensity, the work of the painter Télémaque settled in me: I gave it a place in myself as large as the one granted to Lorca's metaphors. I resumed my exploration, calmer this second time around. On the canvases, objects were slowly breathing, a language was forming before my eyes; a dialogue was taking place, it was being born, for me, in me. I saw with my eyes, only. I saw the invisible.

[piano music]

Janiva Ellis: I feel like when I think about satire and symbolism, there's the dialogue with making something in your studio, and then the understanding of the landscape it's going to be received in and responding to. I think where I saw some parallels was that there's a push and pull with the freeness that poetry can inhabit when you're by yourself or when you're speaking with people who see you, and the need to note and acknowledge how fraught the larger world is and how fraught the landscape is, in relationship to how your work is framed.

And Adee, you and I were talking briefly earlier about this. But thinking about Black artists, but also maybe particularly Black artists who also have white parents,

[30:00]

there's push and pull with identity that feels existential in a really particular way in relationship to art because the environment is canonised in a way that just ignores anything non-white, unless it's being colonised. I think just the desire to find humour with communicating the trickiness of that and the multidimensionality of that violence, as a material, it feels like a potent part of the overlap I see in my work and his work.

Adee Roberson: Yeah. Yeah, and I feel that, on a level of thinking about even just being a Black person who was born in America, but maybe you're a descendant of people from other places, I mean, we both have ties to Jamaica and being Caribbean. And that there's even between us both and our experiences, there's distance in that, based on who. And our family members have migrated, or how close we are to our families, and how close we are in proximity to that island.

I thought about that a lot and how sometimes the symbols also come from this very intuitive place, or the colours come from this intuitive place. I think I notice that a lot with his work and felt the connection to that as well, that experience of being from a place, migrating to a different place.

And the way that I feel... And this is not a generalisation because so many people interact in different ways, but I feel like the way that Caribbean people connect to colour, and the way that that's connected to being a part of the African diaspora and symbols, what I've noticed, intuitively, with working with my practice with colour, that I've seen... I might paint with this neon colour, and then I've seen it in

clothing that's connected to voodoo in Benin or connected to masquerade clothing in Nigeria, in Igbo masquerades.

There's also I feel like there's an intuition that comes through colour and through symbolism that even some of us, we're connected to it, but we don't necessarily even know what it's from until we realise that connection. So, I felt like I did see a lot of that in Hervé's work as well, and felt that energy in that.

Janiva Ellis: Totally. It's less explicable. It's just sensational, and so much meaning can be embodied in those choices that colour feels like an emotive anchor that doesn't need any other... it's a description in and of itself, doing a lot of that.

Adee Roberson: And I thought we talked about that, as friends, around emotions too, with certain times you're painting certain things, and maybe colours come out in this way, that's emotional. Or when we both looked at Mavis Pusey's abstract paintings, and it happened to be... And she's Jamaican, and we're both are descendants of people who are Jamaican, or have a connection to Jamaica, but didn't grow up there. And we noticed that the blinds that were in this painting that she did, you happened to be painting this colour blinds in your painting, and you had never heard of her work before. So, I feel like those kinds of things, like the magic around that, and the spirit around that, and the energy around that comes up a lot for people like us.

Janiva Ellis: Yeah, it's the feeling part. It's the part that's not being contained by description or deciphering, it's just the feeling connection. I feel really connected to you, and I feel connected to your work in a way that is just a sensory feeling and an emotional feeling. And that feels really potent. And that does feel really linked to conversations around Caribbean-ness and Blackness and communication that is inherited in a way that's not about study or comparison, but about just dialling in and sinking in.

And I see that. I feel like looking at Hervé's work, I was like, oh, because I learned about his work pretty recently, and I was like, Oh, this was here? This has been here? I didn't even learn about any of this. And there have been a number of black artists who that's happened with recently, where I didn't learn about these things in school, but I just see such a link.

And in a way, I'm thankful to have come into contact with it maybe later in terms of just whatever, my own spiral, but I also feel really... Yeah, it feels like a shame to not have been informed by some of these things because who knows what that produces. So, it does feel like an unspoken dialogue, that when you do touch hands with it, you're like, Oh. Of course. Of course, this is a view of this conversation. That is our technology. That is how the sharing happens, and it feels so funny to do that sharing in a space that's really about ownership, and colonising ideas, and mapping, and just containment, containing everything.

Adee Roberson: And even the timing. There are so many people that I've just recently found out about that I see so much a reflection and feel a connection with their work, who are older, who've passed, or who are just in a whole different country or different place. So, I want to ask you too, what about, technically, when you look at Hervé's work do you feel like... Because I do see the connection with you guys with some of the cartoon things, or the characters in the work. Is there a painting style or technical way that you also feel a connection to that?

Janiva Ellis: Yeah. When I looked at it, I was like, Oh. Okay. Yeah. I was surprised to see something that felt reflected back at me. And when I was reading the interview that he had done with Hans, I feel like there's a connection with immediacy.

The reason I started incorporating cartoons was to maybe evacuate myself of a responsibility to depict something, and also to just learn how to draw and have a quickness and an immediacy with something that already existed. I can't speak to these motivations. I feel like this, like a lot of the cartooning happening here is in such close relationship to the initiation of pop art, but there's that happening in a very cheeky and overt way. I feel like there's a parallel with using stock cartoon, and then an invention of the cartoon in relationship to one another. That nuance has a tension that really speaks to the way that Hervé is communicating a critique of whiteness, basically. It's a communication of navigating, as a Black person.

Speaking about cartooning and the ways that I see an overlap in my approach to cartooning and Hervé's approach is the use of cartoons as a ready-made image and the use of cartooning as a style to use in an angular way, to be descriptive with, when something is drawn in a cartoonish way versus in another way, and how that interacts with a ready-made cartoon, or a ready-made comic. I think at the time that Hervé was doing that is in a more direct conversation with pop art.

The way that I had approached doing it was just to evacuate myself of... It's almost like a reference... It's like something is so steeped in a reference that it is meaningless, or something, when something is so ubiquitous, it's like it means nothing, it means everything.

I think, when I started doing that, it was to alleviate myself of having to create meaning and just be able to learn how to draw. That led into a confidence with drawing my own things, and then figuring out what the dialogue was between these images that were ubiquitous and the ones I was trying to carve out for myself. That also feels like an ability to have a dialogue between... I don't know, a structural dialogue about what is here and what's being invented, what's being said, what's overstated, and what's unstated.

[40:00]

Adee Roberson: About the tension part too, I feel like that's something that comes up a lot. Maybe that I see in his work and in your work, there is this tension around, yeah, these cartoons and these images that are created, and there's these things that was, and there is these tension that I don't even think that you are doing, but the people even perceiving things in that way.

I guess that's, in a way, how satire in those things work, but it's just like it... Yeah, you were talking about how there's that tension between this thing, and then this thing you create, and this thing that you draw from. And thinking a lot about how that connects to race and the dialogue around people's perceptions of race and people's perceptions of what, even as the painters or the people creating it, what you're even trying to put through in that.

I really appreciated how you said it's everything, and it's nothing, and there is something in that. But then people can perceive it as one thing, but in everything, and there's nothing, there is the talking about the race. There is talking about colonisation and perceptions around that, but it's also not.

Janiva Ellis: Yeah, I mean, the codes, symbolism can function as codes and can function as a hidden dialog as well as something that... Which symbolism often is. And I think when it functions in a canonised context, it's about who is educated and can align with these understandings versus maybe one that's about experience, not through a hierarchy, but through a base level of connectedness.

I think that creates a new base for implication because so much of art and context relies on implication to feel like you've understood what's there. I feel like a base of implication for experience is a different way to think about symbolism, and one that feels... Yeah, it extends in a different way.

What's being said and what's not being said resonates differently for different people. And that, in and of itself, creates a tension when you're trying to decipher a work and enjoy something or understand what value it has to you, or why you're looking at it.

And sometimes, in my work, I feel like people like, this is really chaotic and intense. And I'm like, It's really not. This part is. This part is very intense and being perceived as a very simple gesture. And a lot of the gestures get inverted when they're being looked at, or perceived, in a more formal art space that's relying on white existential canon.

And yeah, I feel like it's fun to have that playfulness that just feels kind of insulated by Black perspective.

Adee Roberson: Exactly. It's like you can just feel, I mean, the difference, but even how people respond to the work in certain spaces where it is about the white gaze, it's this whole didactic thing. It's created these scenarios that necessarily either one of us have probably put into the work. And I'll feel like just

a person who's not in any sort of art world, or a person who's a just human being existing, or a family member. I've experienced that a lot with, who see the work, and they're like, Oh, I can see this in it.

And that means that. And it just feels like it comes with such ease and simplicity, and you're like, Yeah, that is what it is. And that I love that critique from... or my niece who's two, Ozzy.

Ozzy, the other day, she saw one of my paintings, a bigger painting. She was like, It's like a playground. And I was like, Wow. That's the best critique I've had, from a two-year-old. She was like, It's like a playground. She's like, I love it, Auntie Adee. I was like, Thank you.

Janiva Ellis: Yeah, Adee, I was wondering how you thought about symbolism in your work, looking at Hervé's work, and how some of those connections were coming up for you.

Adee Roberson: Yeah. I guess when I saw his work, and I saw these various, those shapes that were made up shapes, I definitely felt a connection to that, when a shape isn't a perfect circle, or a square, or a rectangle, but it's this other shape that you create, and what those mean, these moments, these forms that we create and how those are... They're 2-D, but they're also sculptural, and they exist in this space.

I think, as far as my practice, that it's so much about intuition, and I don't know what the symbols or shapes you're going to be until I just start making them. And then I connect them and they all connect to each other, to a larger thing. But I definitely feel like they're around spirituality and around nature and how nature, just it's all connected.

Janiva Ellis: With some of the sound projects you do, there's a lot of collaging. When I think about sound and video and the way that those things feel like they're in relationship to your paintings and your prints, a lot of that is layers and not some stable ground, but a lot of weaving in and out.

Adee Roberson: Yeah. Yeah. No, it's true, with the music stuff too. I just feel like it's all... Because a lot of the music is more ambient, or more experimental, or even the performances are more of creating of this own world that I think a lot of us have to create. If we're we're not connected to the place where we were born, or where we're from, or where we're a descendant of, we kind of live in creating these worlds.

I feel like all of those parts of my practice come together to create this bigger world. It's everything and it's nothing, and it's also just a part of being in conversation with the larger diaspora and being able to connect through... Really, I feel like my practice is, really, a lot about relationships, really, honestly, and somatic things, and the body, and how colour and sound and form and all of these things are ways to transmute trauma into healing, and using those things to just move my own energy and my own

life and to transmute things of my own experiences. And the just experience of being a Black person in this world, and how to just move that energy and make it generative.

Janiva Ellis: Yeah, creating dimensions to feel through those things, those sensations.

Adee Roberson: Yeah.

[piano music]

Manuel Mathieu - After we have eaten

Kazuno Ono - before employing techniques, the question of mind, spirit or life must be considered. When choreographing for example if you consider techniques and apply them to dance somehow in the process the most crucial part disappears. If the technique comes first in dancing, well why should we bother dancing? We don't depend on techniques to live. Rather, I myself have experienced that the more techniques are employed the more they push aside what is crucial. I don't need techniques to lead my life after death. I try to ignore techniques and structures and focus on the spiritual. I believe that a piece of work comes out naturally from a human being just like one human being comes out of another.

[mysterious electronic music]

Manuel Mathieu: After we have eaten our innocence, naivete and vulnerability, we explode into a thousand pieces. The picture is painted with blood. Pillow, window, shallow, sucking life from my first soulmate, invisible to my own presence, solely a witness of my sovereignty. Bridges on bridges, digging into my slippery soul, searching for where to draw the line.
The pendulum swings new paths and cracks the horizon, expansion of a world of speculations and desires. I exchange it all for a mirage of myself. The salty taste of despair clashes with the thirst of my spirit,

[50:00]

and this fragility echoes in the perilous abyss of abandonment. The scabs crumble to ashes, liminal. After we have eaten our dignity, pride, and certainty, we explode into one hundred thousand pieces. The picture is painted with cum, oblivious, searching for gold on the moon. New forms of apparition embrace me, moulding my ethos formless blurs the weight of the past.

Brick by brick, I become the king of invisible territories, running from one castle to another, trapped on a land, a minefield, of false certainties, blinded by the light of time. I explore the possibilities within my condition to then slowly land with burned wings, gazing through the firmament, comatose.

After we have eaten our fragility, humanity and empathy, we explode into a million pieces. The picture is painted with faeces. The song I'm singing resonates miles away and fragments the ground to leave craters as deep as oceans. As my projections fall into these craters, my face gets covered in dust. On the windows of my sanctuary, the condensation helps me trace my favourite flowers. With the light of the sun rising, I sit down and watch them disappear forever.

[piano music]

Hervé Télémaque: [speaking in French] I chose to share the work of a great Haitian poet called Jacques Roumain, who was an agronomist and a diplomat, but from the Haitian aristocracy and who was even the founder of the Haitian Communist Party. I am going to try and read you a little poem, both light and funny, very much in contrast with the politically engaged poetry, typical of the Caribbean. This is more a little poem of lightness called 'Cent mètres / One Hundred Metres', dedicated to a Haitian athlete named Silvio Cator, champion. I'll read this poem to you, this short poem, a lively one, as we say. Here we go:

'Cent Mètres / One Hundred Metres', is the title. "Four.Stocky, like wild animals. Four men. Energies bandaged like ropes feel fluid, colliding strongly with embrocations; Nervously crumpled. Anxiety .Anxiety of waiting. Summons. Starter, Ô Starter, fire deliver! Us Ready? Arms, propellers abruptly triggered by the gun turning wildly in a quarter circle. Twenty metres. All abreast. Well-being. Voluptuousness of the wind between the teeth. Fifty metres: two let go. Chopping the wind. Lumberjacks of fatigue that draw muscles to the ground. Despair. The other two abreast.
Here you are, a short poem very much in contrast with the politically conscious tradition of Haitian painting and of the Caribbean Left, etc. This man was, as I said, an agronomist, but also a diplomat and an aristocrat.

Hans Ulrich Obrist : Maybe you could read out a second one.

Hervé Télémaque: You want me to read a second one?

Hans Ulrich Obrist : Yes, I think so.

Hervé Télémaque: This one is more serious. In fact it is about something that you know, which is the concept of the word 'guinea'. The word 'guinea' means 'death' in Haitian Creole. The poem is called 'Guinée'. It's the long road to Guinea. Death takes you down Here are the boughs, the trees, the forest. Listen to the sound of the wind in its long hair of eternal night. It's the long road to Guinea. Where your fathers await you without impatience. Along the way, they talk, they wait. This is the hour when the stream rattles like beads of bone. It's the long road to Guinea. No bright welcome will be made for you in the dark land of dark men. Under a smoky sky pierced by the cry of birds. Around the eye of the river the "marigot" in French, which can also mean a 'thought', the eyelashes of the trees open on

decaying light There, there awaits you beside the water a quiet village, And the hut of your fathers, and the hard ancestral stone where your head will rest at last." This one is more serious. As I told you before, the return to Guinea, 'Al l'en Guinée' in Creole, we say, means both, 'death' but also 'pleasure'.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: You came from a family of artists, your uncle was a very famous poet named Carl Brouard, but you left Haiti at quite a young age and arrived in New York in 1957; so if you could tell me a bit about that time ? It was obviously during the height of Abstract Expressionism. So perhaps let's start with that.

Hervé Télémaque: Okay, so you have to understand that when I first began to paint a little in Port-au-Prince, I was under the influence of the Analytical Cubism of artists such as Georges Braque and Picasso. I then decided to study decoration or design. Obviously, this is the version I gave my father, a doctor, a man of rational thought and quite classical. So, I told him a fib, and went off and enrolled in an art school which was called the Art Students League at the time. So, I went there and it proved to be a very good initiative and it gradually revealed in me a passion for art, namely thanks to the many museums in New York. It is not necessary that I mention them all here, nor all the galleries of New York where Abstract Expressionism was showcased in all its splendour at the time. I discovered that the canvas could be the field of play for violent and free initiatives. Which was quite contrary to the Analytical Cubism that I admired in the little books that I used to buy in Port-au-Prince. Very soon, I saw all the beautiful exhibitions of de Kooning, Rothko, Pollock and others, but I came to progressively discover the limits, after three years nonetheless, of this free gesticulation. One which intended within the Surrealist Tradition of the time, namely, to discover, broadly speaking, the mechanisms of thought and of freedom, gestural and so on. And so, I learned. I observed these figures who, unfortunately, dominated the whole New York scene. We can say that Abstract Expressionism was a kind of generalised academicism. While it was for me very stimulating and instructive, it left within me a sense of lack, that of: what do I have to say in this story? And so, my work became increasingly narrational, an attempt of narration, namely sexual, political, and so on, which came to be the cornerstone of my work. Words came to me very quickly, as early as 1958 in my painting.

[60:00]

It became a recurring element which is present throughout my career. Because ultimately, the sign of the word is not far from the sign of the image, and so it was natural to put them together. It means paradise and, as you said, the return to Africa. In fact, what is interesting is that it is also the title of your biggest painting in the exhibition at the Serpentine.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: This is the only painting that has a title in Creole. Could you tell us a bit about this painting and about Creole?

Hervé Télémaque: With this type of painting, when I hang the 2x10-metre on a wall, it invites all kinds of improvisations. It offers great freedom on which I have relied to describe different shapes, different objects, namely the salt lake in America the 'Lips' of Man Ray. There are many successive citations in this painting. Freely approached, this type of scale invites a free composition, a narrational and numerical one. To finish with a barrel of petrol, says it all, but lightly. This death of guinea, "Al l'en Guinea" is a light death, without dramatisation. I want to say how much the fact of being from the Caribbean, being Haitian, to come from this complicated basin called the Caribbean Basin, is not only to come from a place of the lumpenproletariat suffering, as we easily imagine it from the wealthy West. It's also a place of pleasure, joy, of exuberant nature, capable of evoking cheerfulness and pleasure.

Hans Ulrich Obrist : There was within you, from the beginning, already in New York, a desire for narrative.

Hervé Télémaque: Yes, that's right.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: You were telling me that there was a strong desire for fiction, for narration: about who you are, where you come from. And I was last week in conversation with Edwidge Danticat, based in Miami who comes from Haiti, She said something very powerful about the stories we never forget, the stories we know from our childhood. Hence I was curious if you could speak a bit about this desire for narrative? To what extent is it connected to Haiti?

Hervé Télémaque: As Edwidge said before. Well, being Haitian is not a small affair. We come from a charged history. We shouldn't forget that Saint-Domingue was the former name of Haiti, and it was an important place for the French colonisation. Saint-Domingue was a major French settlement at the time. Rich in coffee, cotton and sugar. So, we are used to calling upon our history to define ourselves. We are naturally and simultaneously two things: both open to Surrealism, and by the way, we shouldn't forget the passing of André Breton through Haiti, which had some influence. We also have the need to tell a story about ourselves. We are Black people, who were dropped one day in Saint-Domingue, to take care of enriching the plantations, and from that point, there was naturally a need to find ourselves again a need to know who we are, where we come from, and why. And so, with the city of Miami nearby, both racist and closed, there is a need for all Haitians to define and redefine themselves. for Haitians, narration has become a natural passage embedded within us. A painting that we have on display at the exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery which will next go to the Museum of Aspen, and which is a fundamental piece of work. This painting belongs to the Centre Georges-Pompidou collection, it is called My Darling Clementine and in a certain way, many of the preoccupations and things you just described come together in this painting, it is a self-portrait...In the form of a cowboy. I must clarify that this choice of a Black cowboy came to me spontaneously, but, I heard this allegory of the Black cowboy came to be widely developed in the United States. However, I actually discovered it on my own at the time. I thought to myself, why not make a Black cowboy? It's

what I wanted to do, but in direct relation with France. For instance, the problem of “curly hair” treated with sophisticated products, or even the little Black doll holding a banana, made in France. What I wanted to show, is that I basically found in France the same negative depictions which existed in the United States and it is essentially the same, but at a lesser degree. I made it the source of my work at that time, since I already lived in France. It is also the moment where you paint "My Darling Clementine". As you say, it is a character with elegance and reserve, you say it is a pirate, a demon from the Haitian carnival. You say it is the moment where there is not only a turn towards Pop, but also where you realise that Surrealism is no longer modernity in a way. At the time, there are new experiments with novels, also the Nouvelle Vague in film. At the time we're missing the legibility of figure, one that Surrealism doesn't have. It is stuck in old things, namely Automatism, which is close to Abstraction, and where the force of the image is missing. French Pop art, at the time, brought me a sort of clarity, a way of putting words onto things. That's the strength of Pop and the Pop method. It's the use of the existing, the already done, already known, to go towards a more explicit place.

Hans Ulrich Obrist : Towards the end of the 1960s, around 68, you make the move towards two dimensions and a half. Often, there are objects brought in from elsewhere. We discussed this quite a bit with Helen Marten, a young British artist who wrote for the London exhibition catalogue about this idea which interests her, of objects attached to paintings, with these objects often migrating towards the space. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Hervé Télémaque: We could discuss the influence of Combine that I perceived in Robert Rauschenberg's work at the time, which was very inspiring. Since, essentially what is happening at the time, is that artists discover the multiple possibilities of language: the capacity of utilising words, text, of using even a 3D object, a foreign object and that it functions as a sign, as a painted sign. It is basically the expansion of discourse, so as to be as efficient as possible. It's important to remember that I was for a long time hesitant when I first contemplated going to the Arts Students League. At the time I was also very drawn to studying film. Thus, my interest for Combine; for the added object or the object attached to the painting, in other words, to the painted image. This act is, at its core, in close relation to film. It means promptly passing from one element to another. You can pass from an image to a 3D representation and it is a plus that we add to the work, which is already a composition of elements of canvas, brushes and paint, that we just add another object to as a means of speaking louder. This is its purpose. It is the great lesson of Pop: how to speak louder after the loss of meaning with Abstract Expressionism.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Speaking about your paintings, and we've talked a bit about the way you work, of your work methodology.-My personal methodology, yes. you said it was a bit like a mill? And I was curious about this image of the mill. Like a mill of words.

Hervé Télémaque: It is to say that we can make mistakes, such as when we use the wrong word or the wrong image, but we can come back to the problem again,

[80:00]

by adding or correcting, correcting reality. Basically, the painting has an advantage, it provides the possibility to correct the state of perception of the world. That's not so bad, and it's why painting is still worth it. It's in the correction of reality that it is most giving to the spectator and to the artists themselves.

That's why you are still painting. What other projects do you have unfinished?

This is why art is appealing, it's about all those potentialities which remain unanswered, latent or in wait of meaning. We must always go towards new meanings, always, as much as possible, even if we crash in the process, even if we cannot go further, or are forced to stop. Nothing is more beautiful than the unresolved.

[piano music]

manuel arturo abreu: A Haitian revolutionary soldier, Montá
s, or Montes perhaps, resurrects in modern Little Haiti, Brooklyn. In the museum, she finds pieces of her ancestors. From within the vitrine prison, an ancestor guides her to a French Renaissance era painting. She jumps in. From inside it, she works a deeper power. She sees other pieces linked to the one she's in. A cosmic nexus of *Toussaint in New York City*, by Hervé Télémaque, 1959.

She taps into its raw scope of line, scale, form, colour, to breach the thin canvas, or veil, or sail between material and immaterial realms. And so, as Toussaint Louverture suddenly arrives in de facto, homo economicus, segregated, abstract expressionist, Robert Moses, Dreamscape-era New York, he conquers his bewilderment. He conquers his bewilderment, starts planning after having learned from his own tragic mistakes which led him to his death by a Napoleon's sham treaty, invite straight to a prison cell in the Jura Mountains. This time he thinks, Heed Dessaline's lion spirit.

The numerous victories of the US civil rights movement and the Black arts era drawn Toussaint's new stateside presence, but our Haitian soldier has more to do. When Toussaint arrived, Hervé Télémaque was already fleeing a hyper-marketised New York City landscape for the sunset post surrealist dream of 1960s Paris. Here he drew on Pop and mass art, Hervé's linework, assemblage, and a gnomic pictorial language. Narrative Figuration. Lean Sculptures maigres, the sense of power awaiting activation, but also the sense as Télémaque himself wryly notes in a recent interview that painters make some of their worst work in their old age. Perhaps elder status reframes youth. One sees oneself as a mask, only recognisable from a huge distance, a distance, nevertheless, very close to oneself. The

mask has the nerve to talk back and be petty about all one's failures, and in this way, insufferable in the loss it encompasses.

Yet the drive lacks the art, yet the lack drives the art. Future ancestor, Télémaque, faces his mask and the new strength of age, the strength of closeness to the veil, and says, "I am a stranger to you. Our breach and struggle, mutual nervous masked dance which cuts me deep and even causes me to loathe you, loathe the future. And death has shown me the stranger in myself, the sweetest witness, the one who is of the future and so can't ever reject the future. You see? He witnesses the unborn and the unchained dead in me, let loose by time's book. So, in this way, you, the mask of me showed me the nurse miracle of innermost address, the capacity to write or paint my life and self into innermost existence. So, I am a stranger to you, to myself."

In unsaid and unthought ways, our Montás or Montes helps Télémaque gain the strength to say this to his mask, the mask of age. And so doing, Télémaque resonates enough to awaken from across the drum skin of time, the voice of Guyanese, a writer of quantum fiction, Wilson Harris, in the lineaments of the pictorial frame, who remarks, "I too was told I flew the coop, that I fled the reality of Guyana for the dream of England to pursue this pipe dream of being a Caribbean who makes a living off their art, to keep alive the eternal flame of the imagination."

"Télémaque, my lad, if Paris became your base of operations, then that's just how it happened. The bravery of forging one's path and ignoring the tides of fashion is a task of timeless value, and the Caribbean human reaches all corners, you know. There are contours of hidden voyage written in us, roots of ancestral migration. You see, apparently fathers sent their children away, or perhaps the kids had to go far to love them properly."

You're a painter. You know about distance and perspective. A covenant of migration is written into many a Haitian and Dominican palm. The Antillean people, in sequence, involved conflicts and syncretisms of diverse groups to form the basis for the indigenous cultures eventually encountered by Columbus's Christ-drunk boats. Frontiers existed between Guanahatabey, Taino, Eyeri, and Kalina through the island chain. A modern language like Garifuna are the last living island Arawak language, with much vocabulary from the Carib settlers who were with the Taino, evidences the syncretism at play between these diverse peoples long before European colonisation.

My Guyanese colleague, Ivan Van Sertima, also worked deeply on the question of pre-Colombian contact between Amerindians and Africans. The Taino, for example, highly valued guanin, a South American alloy of copper, gold and silver, whose name is suspiciously close to Guiné, the Creole term for both Africa and the immaterial or spiritual realm.

"Archeologist Samuel Wilson considers the motives for these initial migrations. The Caribbean may well be the last uninhabited place settled by First Peoples. If we take Irving Rouse's, 6000 BC, or

something around there, as the start date, seen from this light, the Caribbean, this zone of catalysis for global modernity, is also a kind of swan song for a different older story. The last place reached by First Peoples, the first place reached by missionaries in their sick gold lusts, a painterly cosmic nexus in world theater. But I digress, dear Télémaque."

Roused by the impromptu lecture, yet somewhat suspicious, Télémaque recognises the vague contours and catalysts of these possible dreamscapes. He recalls Harris's final novel, the Ghost of Memory, where a man is mistaken for a terrorist and shot to death, but the bullet lets him step into a painting and work from within it.

Télémaque remembers the eager young student of her own genealogy, a distant relative of the important Haitian journalist, a distant relative of the important Haitian journalist, Michèle Monás, and former Dominican politician, Temistocles Montas, who recounted these mixed ancestors attempts to pass for white under the Ancien Régime. Is she the dream soldier who appeared to him, who ferried Toussaint to NYC from within Télémaque's painting and conveyed Hervé himself to Paris? What was her mission? Into the kitchen sink of the mind, it all goes.

Does the soldier refuse to speak, choosing instead to witness and act from within the magic of a picture frame? Time in the shape of memory must have something to do with this camouflage, this opportunity Hervé Télémaque is given for scrying a visual surface. A vague muscle in him clenches. A vague muscle in him... Oh. A vague muscle in him clenches subtly, and at that moment, our soldier appears to him veiled in a throbbing fog of scribbles, whispering, "The battered cowboy wants to heal." A mouth, whose tongue is a tombstone, gobbles up both image and phrase. But before I can spit out a gnarled mass, the soldier takes a cane and shoves it down the floating lips into an invisible throat. Choking, the throat starts to speak, but the silent words seem to come out of Télémaque's own mouth. Finally, it vomits out the cane. Finally, it vomits out the cane, now glowing white-hot, as well as a pair of underwear that drift upwards like a sail to heaven. "This cane is for you," Montás or Montes says, handing it to Télémaque, as she steps out of the painting to head home.