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Simon Benjamin

Legacies of the African diaspora.

BY LOUIS BURY ([HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/AUTHOR/LOUIS-BURY](https://bombmagazine.org/author/louis-bury/))

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(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Errantry-Simon-Benjamin1.jpg)

Installation view of Simon Benjamin, *Errantry Transcript*, 2021, 27-inch SD television, concrete bricks, 11 minutes. Photo by Néstor Daniel Pérez-Molière. Courtesy of the artist.

Footage of the Jamaican shoreline plays alongside nautical imagery of a fisherman in Simon Benjamin's short film *Errantry* (2021). The title alludes to a concept in Édouard Glissant's seminal 1990 book *Poetics of Relation* ("errancy conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or possess it"), and the film's twin screens flit back and forth between airy coastal vistas and close-ups of the fisherman, Tommy Wong, at work. These in turn contrast the ocean's vastness with fishing labor's minutiae. In unhurried Jamaican patois, Wong's voiceover recounts the story of a friend whose fisherman son lost his life after falling overboard. Benjamin befriended Wong while conducting oral research into the contentious relationship many Jamaicans, a significant number of whom can't swim, have with the sea. Yet the film's calm tone and patient, lyrical camerawork convey Wong's ease in and around water.



(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Errantry-Simon-Benjamin2.jpg)

Film still of Simon Benjamin, *Errantry—Film*, 2021, HD video, 11 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.



(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Errantry-Simon-Benjamin3.jpg)

Film still of Simon Benjamin, *Errantry—Film*, 2021, HD video, 11 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.



(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Core-Simon-Benjamin4.jpg)

Installation view of Simon Benjamin, *Core II*, 2021, cornmeal, sand, beach detritus, non-toxic resin, plywood, 17 × 14 × 38 inches. Photo by Néstor Daniel Pérez-Molière. Courtesy of the artist.

Benjamin's other works on the legacies of African diasporic history also exude a sense of serenity with hints of turbulence beneath the surface. His *Core* series (2019–present)—stratified amalgams of natural and synthetic materials (such as cornmeal, sand, and beach detritus) shaped like core samples—rest placid, almost funereal, in wooden drill-core boxes. The sculptures respond to geographer Kathryn Yusoff's argument in her influential 2018 polemic *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* that colonialism's impacts on the natural world haven't been accounted for in Western geology. Benjamin also endeavors to give form to historiographic omissions in his *Tropical Imaginaries* series (2020–present): Risograph reproductions of nineteenth-century archival images of Caribbean people, only with the human subjects' bodies hidden behind the paper airplane-esque folds the artist has made to the prints.



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Diamond Wedding

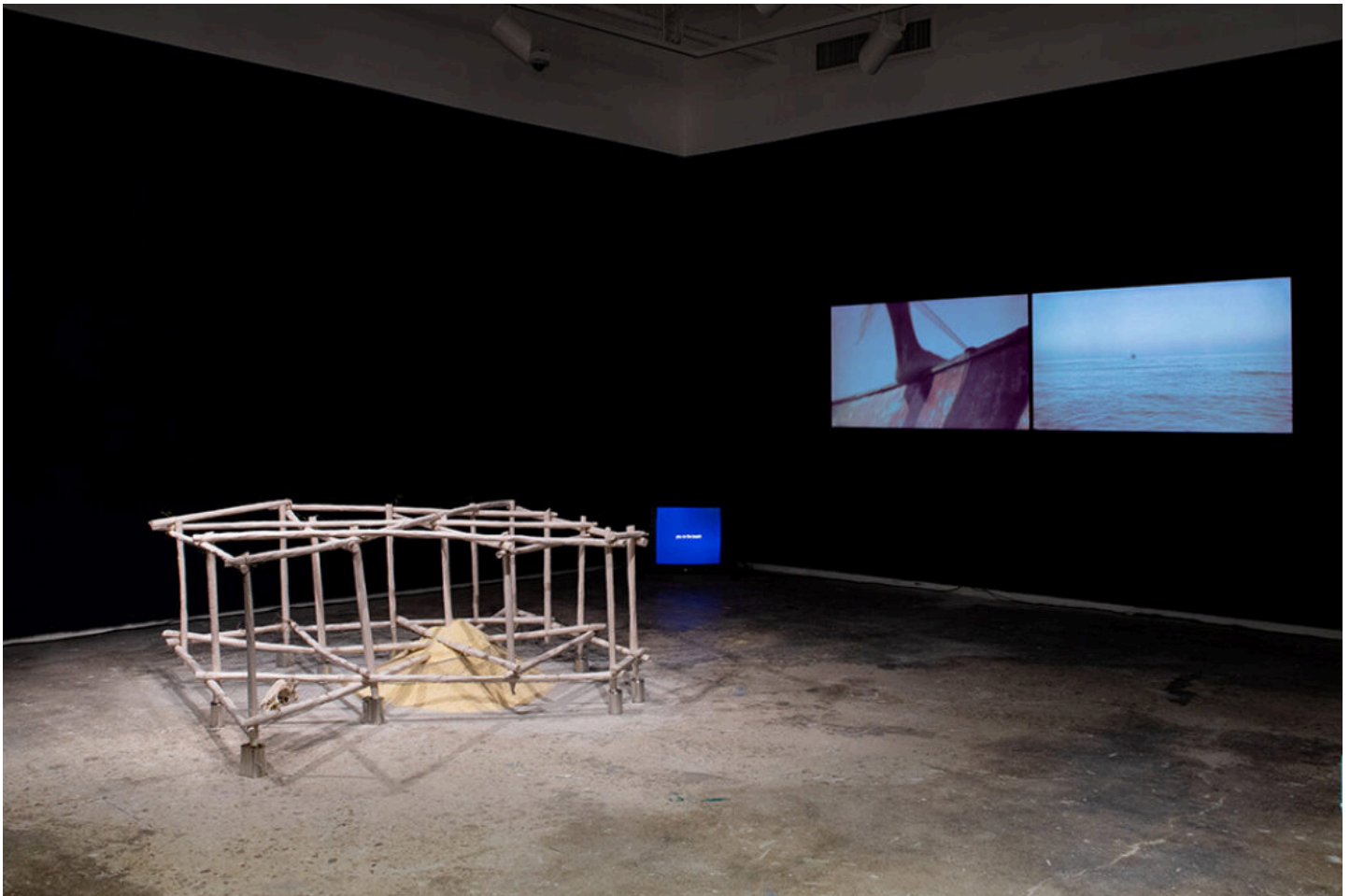
Simon, 21

Simon Benjamin, *Diamond Wedding*, 2021, Risograph on archival paper, 10.5 x 15 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Errantry-Simon-Benjamin7.jpg)

Detail of Simon Benjamin, *Ghost Trap*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Errantry-Simon-Benjamin8.jpg)

Installation view of Simon Benjamin, *Errantry*, 2021, three-channel video installation with sound and sculpture, 11 minutes, dimensions variable. Photo by Néstor Daniel Pérez-Molière. Courtesy of the artist.

These oblique approaches to mimesis constitute for Benjamin “ways of speaking around a topic,” poetic modes of visual storytelling akin to Saidiya Hartman’s concept of “critical fabulation” that acknowledge the gaps and silences in the historical record. Going forward, Benjamin plans to turn his speculative documentary approach toward the topic of oysters as a means of thinking about the aftereffects of European settler colonialism from a nonhuman perspective. The project, still in its early stages, is inspired by the artist’s proximity to oysters in two separate recent residencies: the Billion Oyster Project on Governors Island and the Fishers Island Oyster Farm.

Simon Benjamin’s Pillars (<https://lmcc.net/lmcc-arts-center-at-governors-island/exhibitions/simon-benjamin-pillars/>) is on view at the Arts Center at Governors Island in New York City until October 30; Benjamin’s work can also be seen in the group exhibitions *documenta 15* (<https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/>) in Kassel, Germany, until September 25; and *Kingston Biennial 2022: Pressure* (<https://nationalgalleryofjamaica.com/event/kingston-biennial-2022-pressure/>) at the National Gallery of Jamaica in Kingston, Jamaica, until December 31.

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Louis Bury is the author of *Exercises in Criticism* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2015) and *The Way Things Go* (punctum books, forthcoming 2023). He is Associate Professor of English at Hostos Community College, CUNY, and contributes regularly to *Hyperallergic* and *Art in America*.

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