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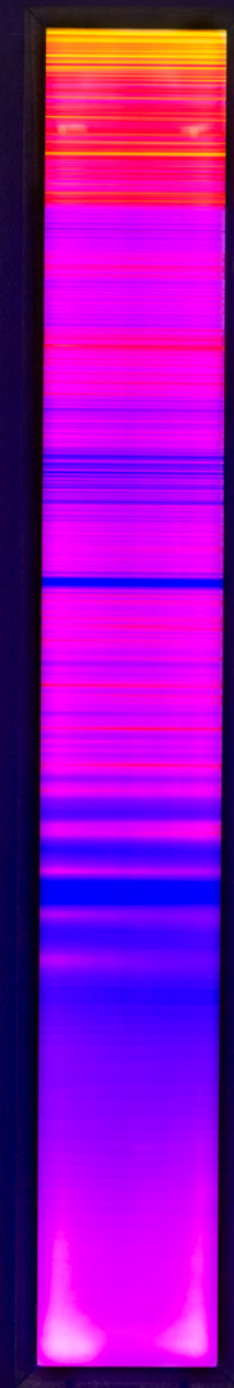
**CHARLES CAMPBELL**

*Breath Portraits*

Opening: Thurs, Nov 13, 6-8PM

Exhibition: Nov 13 – Dec 20, 2025

Image:  
Charles Campbell  
*Valérie*, 2023  
Duratrans print in lightbox



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## CHARLES CAMPBELL

Charles Campbell is a Jamaican born multidisciplinary artist, writer and curator based on ləkʷəŋən territory, Victoria BC. Using sculpture, sound, installation and performance, his work pulls at the threads of time. Finding channels into the past and future Campbell reconstructs broken somatic, communal and spiritual connections, creating spaces of solace and meaning for all of us living in the wake of slavery and colonization.

Campbell's artworks have been exhibited widely in the Caribbean, Canada and internationally, including the Havana Biennial, Cuenca Biennial and Kingston Biennial. Recent exhibitions include *The Other Side of Now* (Perez Art Museum Miami), *How Not to Be Seen* (Remai Modern), *Vancouver Special* (Vancouver Art Gallery), *Fragments of Epic Memory* (Art Gallery of Ontario) and solo exhibitions *Ocean to Livity* (Surrey Art Gallery, Nanaimo Art Gallery, Goldfarb Gallery) and *How many colours has the sea* (The Power Plant Gallery). His public art installations can be seen at the Victoria Airport, Concordia University and Royal BC Museum (2026). Campbell is the recipient of numerous grants from the Canada Council and BC Arts Council, the 2022 VIVA Award, 2020 City of Victoria Creative Builder Award and was long listed for the 2025 Sobey Art Award.

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Campbell's *Breath Portraits* translate the transient idiosyncrasies of breath into glowing abstract images. Using recordings from his ongoing *Black Breath Archive*, the images capture one tenth to one hundredth of a second of breath, freezing the briefest moment of life's ongoing and most essential process. Here Campbell presents part of the original set of *Breath Portraits*, featuring friends, colleagues and senior members of British Columbia's Black community.

Campbell describes the process of recording the breath as deeply intimate. "What's communicated sitting in a quiet room listening to breath is extraordinary. The Breath Portraits become that experience."

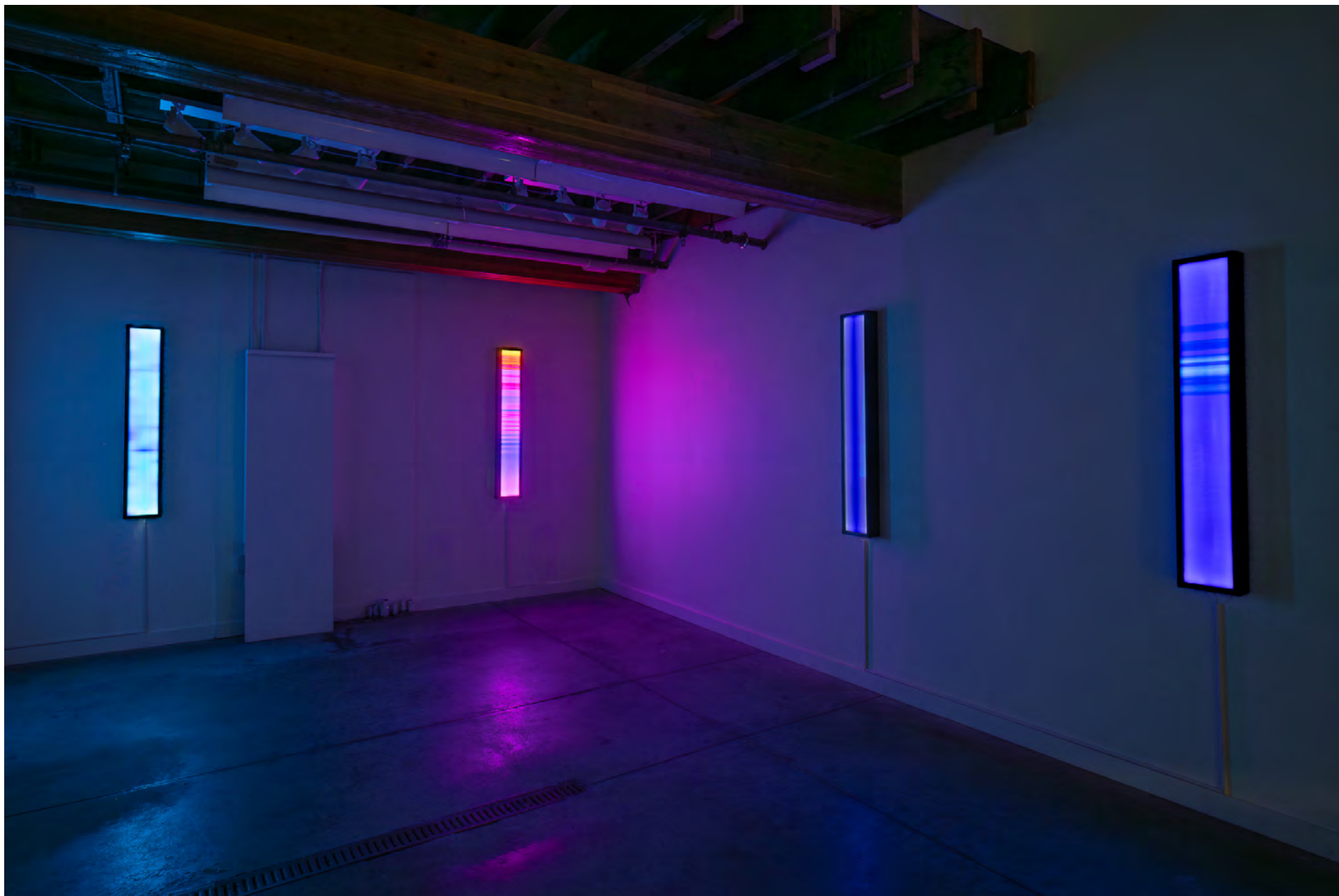
Beginning with the early stages of his investigations into the preciousness of Black breath, Campbell's 2021 performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Black Breath Spectacle*, turned the simple act of breathing into a response to the poor representation of Black people in art institutions and a meditation on collective power and vulnerability. Viewers convened around Campbell's monumental sculpture, *Maroonscape 3 Finding Accompong*, which references both a tree and the bronchial structure of human lungs, emphasizing the importance and precarity of a single breath.

This body of work led to major institutional exhibitions across Canada notably at The Power Plant, and the Surrey Art Gallery, where his *Breath Portraits* were first exhibited. Campbell's work on Black breath as archive culminated in the exhibition, *how many colours has the sea*, 2024, co-commissioned by the Toronto Biennial of Art and the National Gallery of Canada.

Campbell's *Breath Portraits* make their way back to the West Coast, in the artist's solo exhibition at Wil Aballe, 2025. Campbell considers these works as having a presence, almost like sentinels or evocative of ancestors, imbued with an almost spiritual dimension.

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Charles Campbell

*Odera*, 2023

Duratrans print in lightbox

45.5 x 7.5 x 3 in (115.6 x 19.1 x 7.6 cm)





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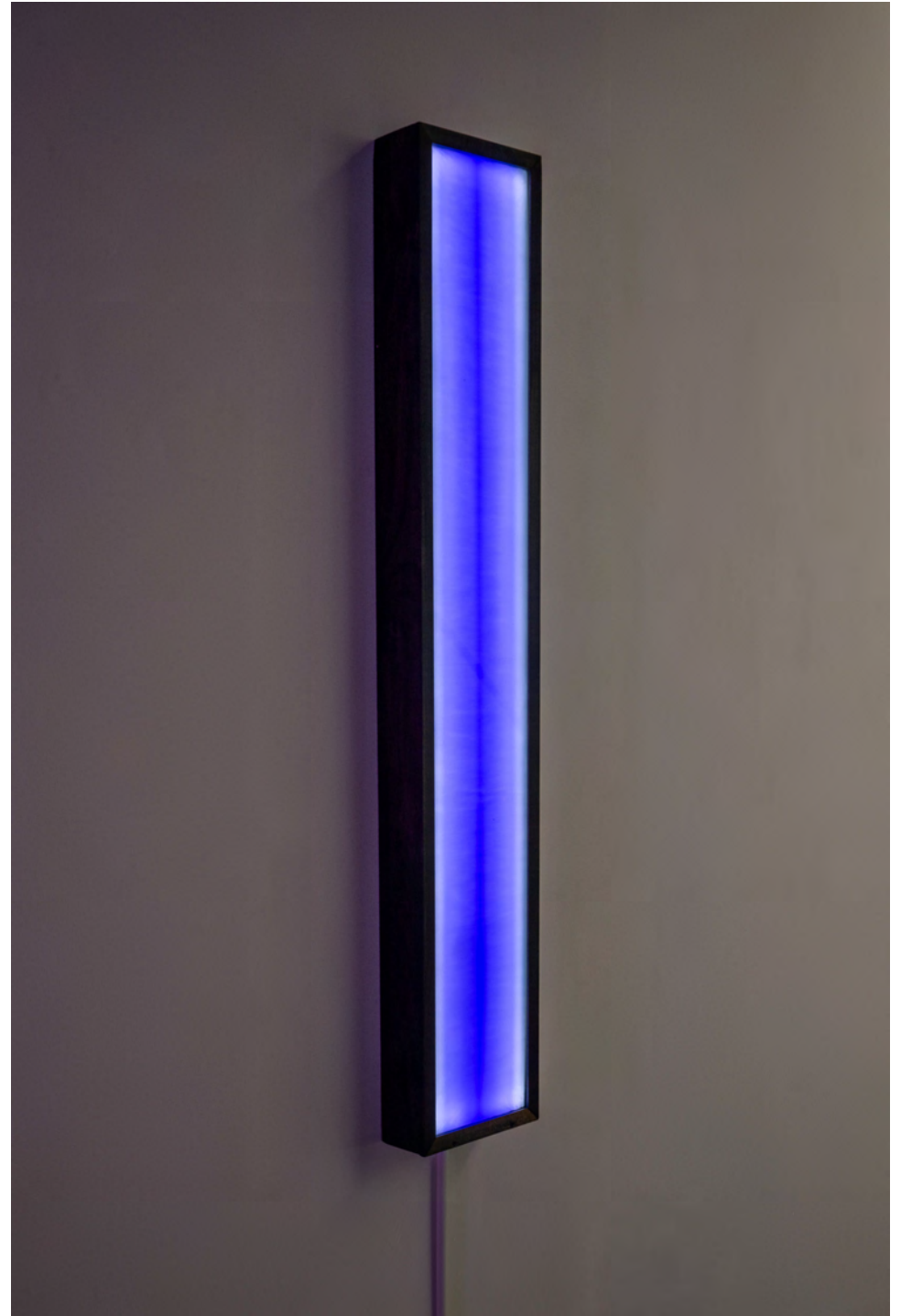
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Charles Campbell

*Devi 1*, 2023

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Charles Campbell

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Charles Campbell

*Fran 2, 2023*

Duratrans print in lightbox

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*Fran 3, 2023*

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Charles Campbell

*Charles*, 2023

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## CHARLES CAMPBELL Institutional Exhibitions

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The Power Plant, Co-commissioned by the Toronto Biennial of Art  
and the National Gallery of Canada, *how many colours has the sea*, 2024

Surrey Art Gallery, *An Ocean to Livity*, 2023

Vancouver Art Gallery, *Vancouver Special: Disorientations and Echo*, 2021/22

Art Gallery of Ontario, *Fragments of Epic Memory*, 2021/22

Pérez Art Museum Miami, *The Other Side of Now: Foresight in Contemporary  
Caribbean Art*, 2020





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Image:

Charles Campbell, *Breath Portraits*, 2023  
in *how many colours has the sea*  
The Power Plant, 2024







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Image:

Charles Campbell, *Breath Portraits*, 2023  
in *An Ocean to Livity*  
Surrey Art Gallery, 2023







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Image:  
Charles Campbell, *Tree: Finding Accompong*, 2021  
in *Vancouver Special: Disorientations and Echo*  
Vancouver Art Gallery, 2021/22





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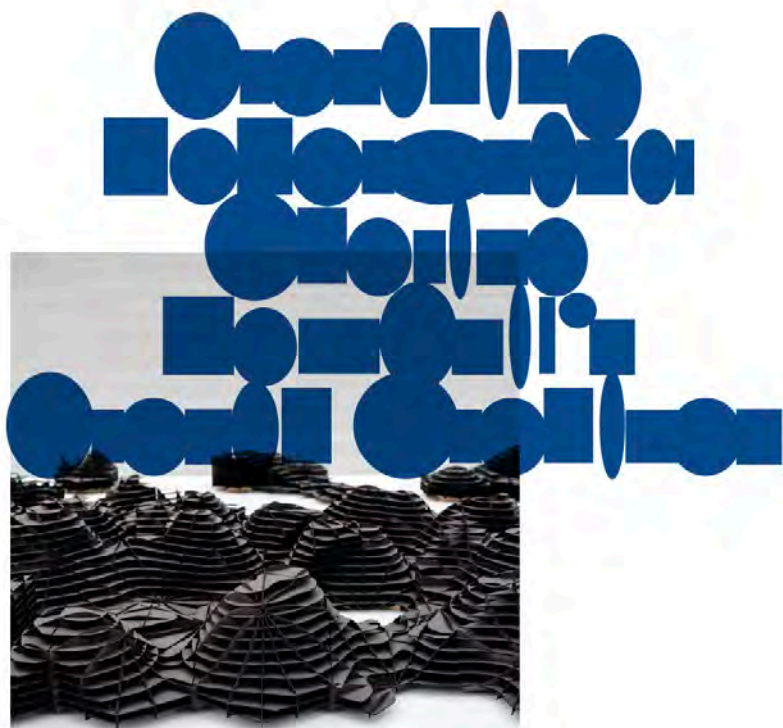
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Esse

Charles Campbell

Maroonscape 1: Cockpit Archipelago,  
vue d'installation | Installation view,  
Pinxten Art Museum Miami, 2019.  
Photo: Mateo Serna Zapata, permission de |  
courtesy of the artist

Jayne Wilkinson



46 — Dossier

Breathing Underwater:  
Charles Campbell's  
Breath Archives

ESSE Article

*Breathing Underwater: Breath Archives*

Jayne Wilkinson

Esse

The ocean depths are, famously, the least-known places on Earth: devoid of light, without colour, still largely unmapped, and where all perception must occur through technological distance. Multidisciplinary artist Charles Campbell takes up this speculative space, both imagined and actual, in his recent installation *How many colours has the sea* (2024). Nine large, luminous aluminum panels, tall and narrow with patterns of vibrant pink, orange, yellow, and blue, punctuate a darkened gallery like thin slices of rainbow cut from indigo walls. A reticulated metal sculpture occupies the airspace; its undulating, angular geometries unfold with a floating rhythm suggesting corals, clouds, or seaweeds. A resonant soundtrack composed of recordings produced by oceanic hydrophones evokes the hypnotic aural effects of moving water, interrupted by the occasional, unsettling sound of a large splash. These immersive contrasts create a feeling of deep reverence, calling to mind the sea as both a metaphorical figure of spirit and renewal and a specific place of mourning.

All this is aesthetically stunning, though somewhat intangible, initially, and it could remain so without recourse to specifics: the linear forms of the hanging sculpture, for example, correspond to bathymetric readings of the Atlantic's seafloor at the precise point where the African and North American tectonic plates meet. The coloured aluminum panels are audio spectrograms rendered from sound recordings of the breath of Campbell's friends, colleagues, and community. Through a sophisticated blend of sound, light, form, and colour, the installation conjures two commensurately unrepresentable subjects: the abyssal depths of the ocean floor as a space both imagined and specific, and the unfathomable losses of life that occurred during the Middle Passage.

Carefully working through difficult topics involving grief, mourning, colonization, and emancipation, Campbell avoids the pitfalls of aestheticizing trauma, or of evoking painful histories directly, by finding conceptual ground from which to produce works that do not deny somatic or bodily experiences. Rather, what is held or felt in the body is realized through abstraction. The apparent simplicity of his geometric constructions paradoxically permits an unravelling of meaning through personal, historical, social, or embodied readings. He frequently calls upon viewers to respond to the past through the present and to consider their own positionality to Blackness vis-à-vis the histories he raises and

the narratives that unfold. To elicit such a range of subjective responses—accountability, connection, love, mourning, responsibility, grief, awareness, and many more—requires careful attention to process, which also raises the question of form. If abstraction can be understood as a strategy for expressing political meaning in art, how does that meaning register for audiences? By beginning from specific sources—data sets, metrics, audio recordings, GPS maps—Campbell develops and expands a work's interpretive possibilities, even as he reduces its visual components. Through a practice of removal, by withholding a certain amount of information about process or detail, Campbell achieves a tension between the actual and the abstract, mediated between data (or concept) and aesthetics (or experience) such that the political stance of the work can be produced through perception.

Abstract art has long been concerned with the tension between perception and its effect on the viewer, but as a historical genre, it is one from which Black artists have often been excluded, despite generations of artists' work. In Canada, this marginalization is clear in art-historical legacies that trace abstraction through largely white communities of painters, whereas important Black artists such as Tim Whiten, June Clark, Jan Wade, Denyse Thomasos, and many others working in abstraction through form and content, have only recently been recognized with museum

retrospectives and exhibitions. Outside of its periodization in Western modern art, abstraction has a longer and more varied history. Campbell calls his practice "a liberty to own my own history," recalling the deep roots of abstraction in African art and how its appearance through the canonization of modern artists in Europe is directly tied to the period of colonization in Africa.

In Campbell's oeuvre, geometric abstraction is a defining vocabulary of expression. Jamaican-born and living and working on lək'wəŋən territory (Victoria, British Columbia), Campbell has a wide-ranging practice that encompasses sculpture, performance, painting, and installation, as well as writing, curation, and public art. From the 2000s into the 2010s, he frequently used tessellated, symmetrical, or repeating patterns to produce paintings and prints that incorporated visual motifs related to the Jonkonnu carnival and Jamaican folk cultures of the early nineteenth century. In recent work, he has intentionally moved away from representations of the body almost entirely, to address Black diasporic histories without being tied to figural representations as expressions of identity. In works from the *Maroonscape* series (2019–22), for example, he uses mapping and GPS data to reproduce the topographical forms of Jamaica's mountainous Cockpit Country, where the Maroons achieved freedom from the British through a series of wars and uprisings in the



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centuries, prior to emancipation. It's a landscape with deep historical specificity, but in the gallery that terrain is transformed into sculptures that can be read in multiple ways: the birds-eye-view of aerial surveillance, but also childhood games of assembly and world-building; industrialization and containerization, but also the spore-like formations of non-human forest life. The sounds of bird calls juxtaposed with Morse-code interpretations of Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) add another evocative layer, unsettling the coded relationships between beauty and ecological and social violence. "My sculptural work is often quite opaque," Campbell writes. "It doesn't 'give' everything. There's a little bit of barrenness, it pulls itself away from people. I found that by using sound elements, I can spatialize this tension."<sup>1</sup>

It is this point of spatialized tension, the shift from an indexical to an interpretive object, that imbues the work with its political dimension. Although Campbell draws upon specific sources, his works are not historical narratives, nor are they didactic: abstraction invites multiplicity. The various affective or aesthetic entry points presume different forms of encounter, rejecting the idea of a "universal" art audience and acknowledging that each viewer brings different histories and subjectivities to their encounter with the work. It's this combination of the representational and the abstract, information and opacity, that produces an engaged experience; it addresses the past somatically rather than visually and transforms what is carried in the body, for both artist and audience members.

Black Studies scholar Leigh Raiford connects processes of material abstraction specifically to the work of contemporary Black artists, emphasizing the non-figurative as a site of challenge and resistance: "To retrain our inner eyes, we must revisit the visual structures that disciplined our sight initially. Perhaps the way to commemorate the dead and move toward a more just vision is through the genre of abstraction. 'Abstraction,' in its most fundamental definition, means a state of *withdrawal* from some original point."<sup>2</sup> Raiford is drawing upon the thinking of Jamaican theorist and philosopher Sylvia Wynter, who has written that humanity's survival depends on rethinking origin stories, "undoing systems of racial violence and their attendant knowledge systems," and retraining the "inner eyes"—a term Wynter uses to refer to biases that both shape perception and dehumanize.<sup>3</sup> Raiford proposes such a retraining of perception through work that abandons figuration, analyzing how abstraction could offer a means of challenging white supremacy. She conceptualizes "withdrawal" both in its visual sense—to reduce or withdraw elements of a subject to reveal a core expression of form—and, more radically, as a site of power that challenges white supremacy specifically in its move away from representations of the body. Thus, technology—as an ordering system that contains, moves, controls, or disciplines the body—is a significant source of critique, implicit in Campbell's choice to use cartography, mapping, and visualization systems to transcend the limits of knowledge into experiential form. He transforms technological data and metrics (what might be called

"the visual structures that discipline sight") into complex installations in which the resolution of the work is not disconnected from its sources but departs from them, producing spaces that sit alongside, or become entangled with, the histories addressed. In contemporary art, one finds parallels in the practices of artists such as Mark Bradford, whose conceptual paintings incorporate maps, posters, timetables, or other materials that aggregate data into what he calls "social abstractions," or Julie Mehretu, whose approach to painting includes layering architectural plans, schematic renderings, and cartographic references to create works that produce a "time-based experiential dynamic, a visceral experience."<sup>4</sup>

1 — Charles Campbell quoted in "Modane," *Polyphons*, Precarious Joss, ed. Dominique Fontaine and Miguel A. López (Toronto: Toronto Biennial of Art and Art Metropole, 2024), 41.

2 — Leigh Raiford, "Durning All Illusion: Abstraction, Black Life, and the Unmaking of White Supremacy," *Art Journal* 79, no. 4 (2020): 77–92.

3 — Sylvia Wynter, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues," *Forum 900: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 44, quoted in Raiford, "Durning All Illusion."

4 — J'Drea Patterson-West, "Julie Mehretu: On Black Abstraction, Plurality and Opacity as a Space of Liberation," *Flash Art*, May 17, 2021, accessible online.



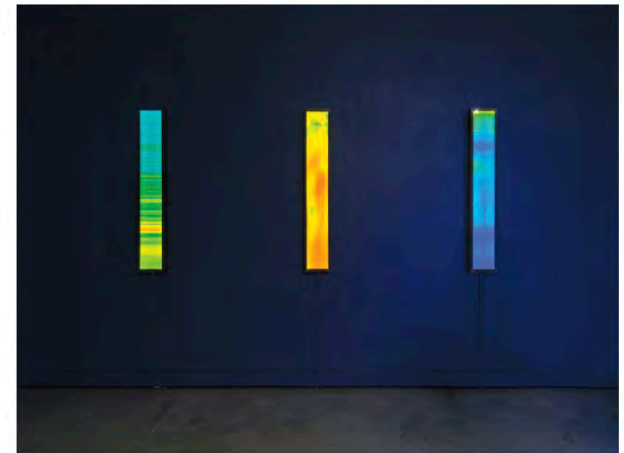
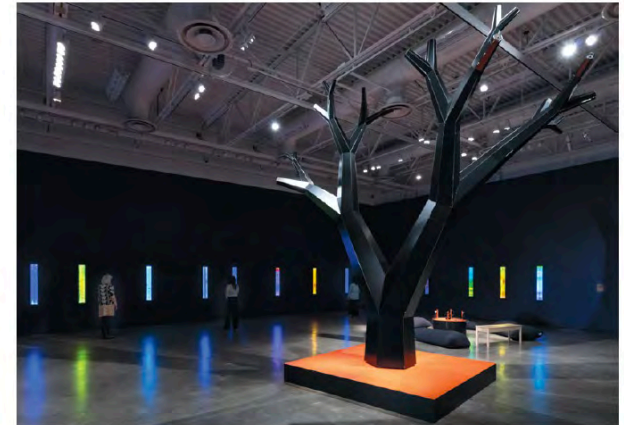
**Charles Campbell**

→ *Jamaican Icarus*, 91.4 × 91.4 cm, 2005.  
Photo: permission de l'artiste |  
courtesy of the artist

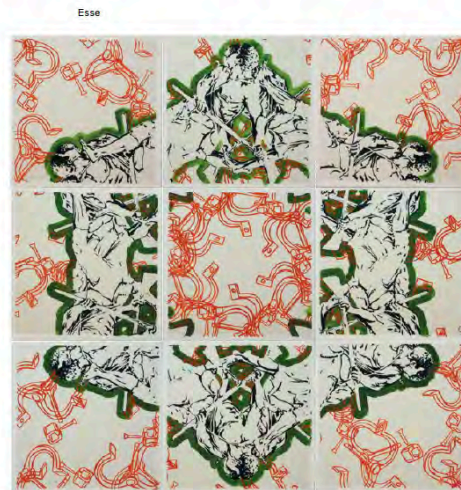
→ *An Ocean to Livify*, vues d'exposition |  
exhibition views, Surrey Art Gallery,  
2023.

Photos: Denis Pils, permission de |  
courtesy of the artist

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Charles Campbell  
Moroon Mandala,  
121,9 x 121,9 cm, 2005.  
Photo : permission de l'artiste |  
courtesy of the artist

This method—thinking through withdrawal as a counter to technologies that have conditioned life—is operative in what feminist theorist Tina M. Campy terms a practice of refusal, a practice that refuses to embrace a diminished subjecthood and uses “negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power.”<sup>6</sup> She recognizes this in an emergent Black visibility enacted by artists “who create radical modalities of witnessing that refuse authoritative forms of visibility which function as refusal in the service of witnessing could well describe Campbell’s ongoing work reclaiming the power of breath as a collective force. The works in his ongoing series of breath portraits may read as colour-field abstractions, but they are produced from the individual breathing patterns of Black community members, offering a non-figurative and non-monumental form of community portraiture and recognition. They are part of a larger project of ancestral narration, *Black Breath Archive* (2022–ongoing), in which Campbell leads participants through a guided meditation connecting them to known or imagined ancestors, recording their breathing during two-minute pauses between the prompts. He has conducted these sessions with friends, collaborators, and colleagues in Victoria, Vancouver, Surrey, Nanaimo, Toronto, and Montréal, and has also had others lead the sessions, including with a Black youth group in Vancouver and with spoken word poets, Joshua (Scribe) Watkins and David Delisica, in Toronto. In reckoning with both grief and solace, the

practice offers participants a connection to one’s lineage, a call to the immediacy of the present moment, and a meaningful symbol of Black collective resistance. It might also be understood as a practice of withdrawal, in which a person’s representational form (their voice and speech) is removed, such that a less legible form of identity (their breath) is surfaced and made public. It offers a powerful humanization of Black ancestry and legacy, in opposition to the anonymized traumas of the Middle Passage and the systemic anti-Black violence of the present day.

The experience of abstraction can also be deeply poetic. In the fall of 2024, curator Sarah Edo organized a live stage adaptation of Dionne Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2002), held within Campbell’s installation at The Power Plant, producing a remarkable exchange between the two through performance.<sup>7</sup> In Brand’s groundbreaking work, she writes of the door of no return as both a specific place—the physical site of violent departure through which enslaved Africans were forced—and an unlocatable place, a simultaneous presence and absence: “Cartography is description, not journey. The door, of course, is not on the continent but in the mind; not a physical place—though it is—but a space in the imagination.”<sup>8</sup> As is the ocean: a site of both metaphor and violent rupture, actual and speculative. Beneath a geometric seafloor, across the breath portraits and audience members, the performers spoke as though they were characters or friends, relatives or ancestors, reaching across time and space to recount feelings of distance, longing,

or diasporas. Campbell’s artworks function like this too, in the service of an experience that interrupts received ideas and narratives, particularly by developing practices, in public, for Black communities to share stories and to claim and preserve space through acts of generative refusal. Within a sophisticated form of aesthetic restraint, Campbell’s work makes a demand that is somatic and experiential, allowing viewers to transform what is carried in their own bodies through multiple, undirected interpretations or critiques, while avoiding the assumption that all audiences will engage the terms of the works’ sources in the same way—that is the provocation of his work. •

6 — Tina M. Campy, “Black Visibility and the Practice of Refusal,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 29, no. 1 (2019): 80.

7 — Campy, “Black Visibility and the Practice of Refusal,” 79.

8 — Adapted by Jaye Austin Williams, it was performed by Amaka Umech, Courtney McFarlane, and Patrick Teed, reciting excerpts of Brand’s text as they moved within the installation.

9 — Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011), 97.

Esse

## Respirer sous l’eau : les archives du souffle de Charles Campbell

Jayne Wilkinson

Les profondeurs océaniques sont réputées être les lieux les moins connus de la Terre: elles sont dépourvues de lumière et de couleurs, elles sont peu cartographiées et toute perception doit s’y faire par le biais d’une distance technologique. Dans une installation récente intitulée *How many colours has the sea* (2024), l’artiste multidisciplinaire Charles Campbell s’empare de cet espace spéculatif à la fois imaginé et réel. Neuf grands panneaux d’aluminium lumineux, longs et étroits aux motifs rose, orange, jaune et bleu vifs ponctuent une salle assombrie telles de minces tranches d’arc-en-ciel découpées dans des murs indigo. Une sculpture de métal réticulée occupe l’espace aérien; ses géométries angulaires se déplient dans un rythme ondoyant, rappelant des coraux, des nuages ou des algues. Une trame sonore composée d’enregistrements réalisés par des hydrophones océaniques évoque les effets acoustiques hypnotisants de l’eau en mouvement, interrompus ponctuellement par le bruit déstabilisant d’un gros bouillon. Ces contrastes immersifs créent un sentiment de profond recueillement; ils font penser à la mer à la fois comme une figure métaphorique de l’esprit et du nouveau et comme un lieu propice au deuil.

Tout en étant d’une grande beauté, ce concept demeurerait un peu intangible si ce n’était du recours à certains détails: les formes linéaires de la sculpture suspendue, par exemple, correspondent aux relevés bathymétriques du fond de l’Atlantique au point précis où les plaques tectoniques africaine et nord-américaine se rencontrent. Les panneaux d’aluminium colorés sont des spectrogrammes sonores obtenus à partir de l’enregistrement du souffle des amis et des collègues de Campbell ainsi que des personnes de sa communauté. Grâce à un mélange élaboré de son, de lumière, de formes et de couleurs, l’installation évoque deux sujets aussi difficiles à représenter l’un que l’autre: les profondeurs abyssales du fond océanique en tant qu’espace imaginé et concret, d’une part, et les insondables pertes de vies humaines survenues lors du Passage du milieu.

En travaillant soigneusement sur des sujets délicats tels que le chagrin, le deuil, la colonisation et l’émancipation, Campbell évite les pièges de l’esthétisation du traumatisme ou celui de l’évocation directe de récits douloureux en trouvant des assises conceptuelles à partir desquelles produire des œuvres qui ne nient pas les expériences somatiques ou corporelles. Au contraire, ce qui est contenu ou ressenti dans le corps se réalise au moyen de l’abstraction. L’apparente simplicité de ses constructions géométriques

permet paradoxalement de déchiffrer le sens à travers des interprétations personnelles, historiques, sociales ou incarnées. Il invite fréquemment le public à réagir au passé dans le présent et à considérer sa propre positionnalité envers l’identité noire relativement aux histoires qu’il évoque et aux récits qui se déploient. Provoquer autant de réactions subjectives — par exemple la responsabilité, la connexion, l’amour, le deuil, le chagrin ou la conscience — exige de porter une attention particulière au processus, qui soulève également la question de la forme. Si l’abstraction peut être perçue comme une stratégie visant à exprimer un sens politique en art, de quelle manière ce sens se manifeste-t-il pour les publics? En partant de sources précises — ensembles de données, indicateurs, enregistrements sonores, cartes GPS —, Campbell développe et multiplie les possibilités d’interprétations d’une œuvre, tout en en réduisant les éléments visuels. À travers une pratique du retrait, en retenant une partie de l’information concernant un processus ou un détail, l’artiste parvient à créer une tension entre le réel et l’abstrait, qui sert d’intermédiaire entre les données (ou le concept) et l’esthétique (ou l’expérience) de manière à ce que la posture politique de l’œuvre puisse être produite par la perception.

L’art abstrait s’intéresse depuis longtemps à la tension entre la perception et ses effets sur le

public, mais les artistes noirs ont souvent été exclus de ce genre historique, et ce malgré le travail de leurs pairs sur plusieurs générations. Au Canada, cette marginalisation est évidente dans une tradition d’histoire de l’art surtout axée sur une communauté de peintres blancs, tandis que d’importantes artistes noires travaillant l’abstraction dans le fond et la forme — par exemple Tim Whiten, June Clark, Jan Wade et Denyse Thomasos — n’ont que récemment eu droit à des rétrospectives et à des expositions muséales. Outre sa périodisation dans l’art moderne occidental, l’abstraction possède une histoire plus longue et plus variée. Campbell, qui décrit sa pratique comme « la liberté de posséder [sa] propre histoire », rappelle les racines profondes de l’abstraction dans l’art africain et la manière dont son apparition dans la canonication des artistes modernes en Europe est directement liée à l’époque de la colonisation en Afrique.

Dans l’œuvre de Campbell, l’abstraction géométrique est un vocabulaire d’expression déterminant. Né en Jamaïque, l’artiste, qui vit et travaille sur le territoire ԼճՔայն (Victoria, Colombie-Britannique), possède une vaste pratique qui comprend la sculpture, la performance, la peinture, l’installation, l’écriture, le commissariat et l’art public. Des années 2000 aux années 2010, il utilisait souvent des motifs tessellés, symétriques ou répétés afin



Esse



Charles Campbell

How many colours has the sea, vue d'exposition | exhibition view, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, 2024.  
Photo: Laura Findlay, permission de la courtoisie de l'artiste

Esse

## La chercheuse en études noires Leigh Raiford lie spécifiquement les procédés de l'abstraction matérielle au travail d'artistes noirs contemporains, en mettant l'accent sur la non-figuration en tant que lieu de contestation et de résistance.

de produire des peintures et des estampes auxquelles il incorporait des thèmes visuels en relation avec le carnaval Jonkonnu et les cultures populaires jamaïcaines du début du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Dans son travail récent, il s'est volontairement et presque entièrement éloigné des représentations du corps afin d'aborder les récits diasporiques noirs sans que la figuration ne soit associée à l'expression de l'identité. Par exemple, dans des œuvres de la série *Marronscape* (2019-2022), il recourt à la cartographie et à des données GPS pour reproduire les formes topographiques de la région de Cockpit Country, située dans les montagnes de la Jamaïque, là où les Marrons ont réussi à s'affranchir des Britanniques à l'issue d'une série de guerres et de soulèvements au cours des siècles ayant précédé l'émancipation. Il s'agit d'un paysage qui possède d'importantes particularités historiques, mais dans l'espace d'exposition, ce terrain est transformé en sculptures qui peuvent être interprétées de différentes manières : des vues de surveillance aérienne, mais également des jeux d'assemblage et de construction d'univers pour enfants ; l'industrialisation et la conteneurisation, mais également des formations spirographiques propres à la vie sylvestre non humaine. Les cris d'oiseaux juxtaposés aux interprétations en code morse du roman *Parable of the Sower* (1993, paru en français sous le titre *La parabole du semeur*) d'Octavia E. Butler ajoutent une couche évocatrice supplémentaire qui bouleverse les relations codées entre la beauté et la violence écologique et sociale. « Mon travail sculptural est souvent assez opaque, écrit Campbell. Il ne "donne" pas tout. Il s'en est un peu aride, il s'éloigne lui-même des gens. J'ai découvert qu'avec des éléments sonores, je peux spatialiser cette tension<sup>1</sup>. »

C'est ce point de tension spatialisée, le déplacement d'un objet indiciel à un objet interprétatif, qui imprègne le travail de sa dimension politique. Bien que Campbell s'inspire de sources précises, ses œuvres ne sont pas des récits historiques, pas plus qu'elles ne sont didactiques : l'abstraction invite à la multiplicité. Comme les différents points d'entrée affectifs ou esthétiques présument diverses formes de rencontres, elles rejettent l'idée d'un public « universel » et reconnaissent que chaque personne porte un récit et une subjectivité différents lors de son contact avec une œuvre. C'est cette combinaison de la figuration et de l'abstraction, de l'information et de l'opacité, qui produit une expérience enrichissante ; elle aborde le passé de manière somatique plutôt que visuelle tout en transformant ce qui est transporté par le corps, à la fois pour l'artiste et pour les membres du public.

La chercheuse en études noires Leigh Raiford lie spécifiquement les procédés de l'abstraction matérielle au travail d'artistes noirs contemporains, en mettant l'accent sur la non-figuration en tant que lieu de contestation et de résistance : « Afin de rééduquer notre regard intérieur, nous devons revisiter les structures visuelles qui forment initialement notre perception. Peut-être que la manière de commémorer les personnes décédées et de se diriger vers une vision plus juste passe par le genre de l'abstraction. "L'abstraction", dans sa définition la plus fondamentale, signifie un état de *retrait* par rapport à un point d'origine<sup>2</sup>. » Raiford s'inspire de la pensée de la théoricienne et philosophe jamaïcaine Sylvia Wynter, qui écrit que la survie de l'humanité dépend de notre capacité à reconsidérer les récits de l'origine, à « déconstruire les

systèmes de violence raciale et les connaissances qui y sont associées » et à rééduquer le « regard intérieur<sup>3</sup> » – terme que Wynter utilise pour faire référence aux préjugés qui à la fois façonnent les perceptions et déshumanisent les autres. Raiford propose une telle rééducation de la perception à travers des œuvres qui abandonnent la figuration et analyse la manière dont l'abstraction peut offrir des moyens de remettre en cause la suprématie blanche. Elle conceptualise le « retrait » à la fois dans son sens visuel – réduire ou retirer des éléments d'un sujet afin de révéler une expression essentielle de la forme – et, plus radicalement, comme un lieu de pouvoir qui conteste la suprématie blanche surtout en s'éloignant des représentations du corps. Ainsi, la technologie – en tant que système de commandement qui maîtrise, fait bouger, contrôle ou discipline le corps – est une source importante de critique, implicite dans le choix de Campbell d'utiliser la cartographie, la schématisation et les systèmes de visualisation afin de transcender les limites du savoir en une forme expérientielle. L'artiste transforme les données et les indicateurs technologiques (ce que l'on pourrait appeler « les structures visuelles qui forment la perception ») en installations complexes dans lesquelles la résolution de l'œuvre n'est pas déconnectée de ses sources mais provient de celles-ci. Les espaces ainsi produits se situent à côté des récits abordés ou s'y entremêlent. En art contemporain, on peut voir des parallèles dans les pratiques d'artistes comme Mark Bradford, dont les peintures conceptuelles comprennent des cartes, des affiches, des calendriers ou d'autres documents qui regroupent des données dans ce qu'il appelle des « abstractions sociales », ou de Julie Mehretu, dont l'approche de la peinture

est de superposer des plans architecturaux, des représentations schématiques et des références cartographiques afin de créer des œuvres qui produisent une « dynamique expérientielle temporelle, une expérience viscérale<sup>4</sup> ».

Cette méthode, qui consiste à penser le retrait comme une riposte aux technologies qui conditionnent nos vies, fonctionne dans ce que la théoricienne féministe Tina M. Campt appelle une « pratique du refus » : une pratique qui rejette l'adoption d'un statut de sujet diminué et utilise « la négation comme une source productive et créative de pouvoir désordonné<sup>5</sup> ». Elle reconnaît cela dans une visibilité noire émergente mise en œuvre par des artistes « qui créent des modalités radicales de témoignage qui refusent les formes autoritaires de visibilité dont le fonctionnement refuse la condition noire elle-même<sup>6</sup> ». De tels actes de refus productifs au service du témoignage pourraient bien décrire le travail actuel de Campbell, qui récupère le pouvoir de la respiration comme une force collective. Les œuvres de sa série en cours, des portraits de souffle, peuvent ressembler à des abstractions *color field*, mais elles sont réalisées à partir de motifs de respiration de membres de la communauté noire ; elles constituent donc une forme non figurative et non monumentale de portrait et de reconnaissance. Ces œuvres font partie d'un plus grand projet sur le récit ancestral, *Black Breath Archive* (en cours depuis 2022), dans lequel Campbell dirige les participant·es à travers une méditation guidée qui les connecte à des ancêtres connus ou imaginés. L'artiste enregistre leur respiration durant les pauses de deux minutes entre les instructions. Il a mené ces séances avec des proches, des collaborateurs, des collaboratrices et des collègues à Victoria, Vancouver, Surrey, Nanaimo, Toronto et Montréal. D'autres personnes ont également dirigé des séances, notamment avec un groupe de jeunes Noirs·es, à Vancouver, et avec les poètes de *spoken word* Joshua Watkins (alias Scribe) et David Delisca, à Toronto. En tenant compte à la fois du chagrin et du réconfort, la pratique offre aux participant·es une connexion avec leur lignée, une invitation à vivre le moment présent et un symbole significatif de la résistance collective noire. Elle pourrait aussi être perçue comme une pratique du retrait, dans laquelle des éléments qui représentent une personne (sa voix et son discours) sont retirés afin qu'une forme d'identité moins lisible (sa respiration) apparaisse et soit rendue publique. Elle constitue une puissante humanisation de l'ascendance et du patrimoine noirs, en opposition aux traumatismes anonymisés du Passage du milieu et à la violence systémique actuelle contre les Noirs·es. L'expérience de l'abstraction peut aussi être profondément poétique. À l'automne 2024, la commissaire Sarah Edo a organisé une adaptation scénique d'*A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2002) de Dionne Brand dans l'installation de Campbell à la Power Plant, performance qui a donné lieu à un échange remarquable entre les deux œuvres<sup>7</sup>. Dans son ouvrage innovant, Brand parle de la Porte du non-retour à la fois comme un lieu précis – l'emplacement physique d'un départ violent auquel les Africain·es

réduits – à l'esclavage ont été contraint·es – et comme un lieu qu'on ne peut localiser, une présence et une absence simultanées : « La cartographie est une description et non un chemin. La porte, bien entendu, n'est pas sur le continent, mais dans l'esprit ; ce n'est pas un lieu physique – bien qu'elle le soit –, mais un espace qui se situe dans l'imagination<sup>8</sup>. » Tout comme l'océan : un site de métaphore et de rupture violente, réel et spéculatif. Sous un fond marin géométrique, à travers les portraits de souffle et les membres du public, les performeurs et performeuses parlent comme des personnages ou des ami·es, des parent·es ou des ancêtres, qui traversent le temps et l'espace pour raconter le sentiment d'éloignement, la nostalgie ou les diasporas. Les œuvres de Campbell fonctionnent de la même manière : elles sont au service d'une expérience qui interrompt les idées reçues et les récits, particulièrement en élaborant des pratiques, en public, pour que les communautés noires puissent transmettre leurs histoires et revendiquer et préserver l'espace par des actes de refus productifs. Dans une forme élaborée de retenue esthétique, le travail de Campbell pose une exigence somatique et expérientielle qui permet aux gens de transformer ce qu'ils portent en eux grâce à de multiples interprétations ou critiques indirectes, tout en évitant de présumer que tous les publics aborderont les paramètres des sources des œuvres de la même manière – c'est ce qui relève de la provocation dans son travail.

Traduit de l'anglais par Catherine Barnabé

1 — Dominique Fontaine et Miguel A. López (dir.), *Precarious Joys*, Toronto, Toronto Biennial of Art and Art Metropole, 2024, p. 41. [Trad. libre]

2 — Leigh Raiford, « *Burning All Illusion: Abstraction, Black Life, and the Unmaking of White Supremacy*, *Art Journal*, vol. 79, n° 4 (hiver 2020), p. 77-91, accessible en ligne. C'est Raiford qui souligne. [Trad. libre]

3 — Sylvia Wynter citée dans *ibid.*

4 — JaBrea Patterson-West, « *Julie Mehretu: On Black Abstraction, Futurity and Opacity as a Space of Liberations*, *Flash Art*, 21 mai 2021, accessible en ligne. [Trad. libre]

5 — Tina Marie Campt, « *Black Visibility and the Practice of Refusal*, *Women & Performance*, vol. 29, n° 1 (2019), p. 80, accessible en ligne. [Trad. libre]

6 — *Ibid.*, p. 79. [Trad. libre]

7 — Adaptée par Jaye Austin Williams et interprétée par Amaka Umeh, Courtney McFarlane et Patrick Teed, qui récitaient des extraits du texte de Brand tout en se déplaçant dans l'installation de Campbell.

8 — Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2011, p. 97. [Trad. libre]



# Charles Campbell

Artist, Curator, Writer and Educator

## EDUCATION

Goldsmiths College - University of London, London - MA Fine Art, 1999

Concordia University - Montreal PQ - BFA - distinction, 1992

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS & COLLABORATIONS

- 2025     **An Ocean to Livity**, Goldfarb Gallery, York University, Toronto
- 2024     **How many colours has the sea**, Toronto Biennial/Powerplant contemporary Art Gallery
- 2023     **An Ocean to Livity**, Surrey Art Gallery and Nanaimo Art Gallery
- 2022     **Black Breath Spectacle**, Surrey Art Gallery.
- 2020     **as it was, as it should have been**, Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver.
- 2019     **The Ground Above Us**, Legacy Art Gallery, Victoria, Charles Campbell & Farheen HaQ with Yuxwelupton Qwal'qaxala (Bradley Dick).
- 2017     **Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong - The Bog**, Flotilla, PEI.
- 2015     **Double Dutch: A Calendar of Conditioning**, National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, Nassau, Charles Campbell & John Cox.
- 2013     **Transporter II**, Open Space, Victoria BC & Modern Fuel, Kingston Ontario.
- 2011     **Transporter**, Jameson Gallery, Duke University, North Carolina.
- 2010     **Actor Boy**, Polychrome Fine Art, Victoria.
- 2005     **Perpetual Symmetry**, Mutual Gallery and Art Centre, Kingston.
- 2004     **Real . Beauty**, Xchanges Gallery, Victoria.
- 1997     **Black Horse**, Grosvenor Galleries, Kingston.
- 1995     **Standing Back**, Life of Jamaica Centre, Kingston.

## SELECTED PERFORMANCES & COMMUNITY ACTIVATIONS AND PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS

- 2025     **Current Unbroken**, Goldfarb Gallery. Community activation
- 2024     **If there was a Nine Night**, Toronto Biennial/Power Plant Gallery. Ceremony and community activation.
- 2023     **Current Unbroken**, Surrey Art Gallery & Nanaimo Art Gallery. Community activation
- 2022     **Arrivals in Birdsong**, Campbell River Art Gallery. Performance.
- 2021     **Black Breath Spectacle**, Vancouver Art Gallery. Group performance & community activation.
- 2020     **Time Catcher: The Fruiting of Chaos**, Victoria International Airport. Permanent commission,.

- 2017     **Song Catching: The Bog**, Art in the Open, Charlottetown. Solo performance.  
           **Song Catching: Census**, Legacy Gallery, Victoria B.C. Solo performance.
- 2016     **Elletson Road**, O K'inadas Residency, Kelowna B.C. Solo Performance.
- 2013     **Declaration - Maroon**, Victoria B.C. Temporary public sculptural interventions.  
           **Declaration - Maroon**, Kingston Ontario. Temporary public sculptural interventions.  
           **Declaration - Resistance**, London U.K. Temporary public sculptural interventions.
- 2014     **Actor Boy: Fractal Engagement**, Kingstons Jamaica. Community and participatory performance.
- 2011     **Night Object**, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Temporary public sculptural interventions.  
           **Actor Boy**, Kingston Jamaica. Unannounced public performances.

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024     **How Not to Be Seen**, Remai Modern, Saskatoon, SK  
           **The Chorus is Speaking**, Legacy Art Gallery, Victoria BC.
- 2023     **New Forms**, Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver BC
- 2022     **The Chorus is Speaking**, Campbell River Art Gallery.
- 2021     **Fragments of Epic Memory**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.  
           **Vancouver Special: Disorientations and Echo**, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver.  
           **Interior Infinite**, Polygon Gallery, Vancouver.
- 2019     **The Other Side of Now: Foresight in Contemporary Caribbean Art**, Perez Art Museum, Miami.
- 2017     **Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago**, Museum of Latin American Art, Los Angeles.
- 2016     **Turning Tide**, Memorial ACTe, Guadeloupe FWI.  
           **Colonial Afterlives**, Salamanca Arts Centre, Tasmania AU, & Mildura Arts Centre, Victoria AU.
- 2015     **En Mas': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean**, CAC, New Orleans.  
           **Offerings**, Open Space, Victoria.
- 2013     **Otherwise Black**, Biennale d'art contemporain de la Martinique, Martinique.
- 2012     **Contemporary Jamaican Art: Circa 1962/Circa 2012**, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, Ontario.
- 2011     **Act 5**, Alice Yard, Port of Spain.  
           **Wrestling with the image**, Art Museum of the Americas, Washington DC.  
           **About Change**, World Bank & IDB Cultural Centre, Washington DC.  
           **Global Caribbean**, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, San Juan.
- 2009     **X Bienal Internacional de Cuenca**, Cuenca, Ecuador.

- Decima Bienal Habana**, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wilfredo Lam, Havana.
- Global Caribbean**, Little Haiti Cultural Centre, Miami.
- DiasporArt**, Rideaux Hall, Ottawa.
- 2008 **Atlantis of Caraib**, Habitation Clement, Le François.
- Impulses of the Jamaican Soul**, ARTA Gallery, Toronto.
- 2007 **Infinte Islands: Contemporary Caribbean Art**, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn.
- Influences Caraibes**, Festival, Le Cri du Peuple, Paris.
- Mastering Slavery**, National Gallery of Jamaica/Institute of Jamaica.
- 2006 **National Biennial Exhibition**, National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.
- 2005 **Curator's Eye II**, National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.
- 2004 **Rousings - Progressive Jamaican Art**, National Gallery of the Cayman Islands, George Town.
- 1999 **Soon Come, The Art of Contemporary Jamaica**, Exhibits USA, National Touring Exhibition.
- Identities Artists of Latin America and the Caribbean**, IADB, Paris.
- Salon Grande et Jeunes d'Aujourd'hui**, Paris.
- 1998 **XXXo Festival International de la Peinture**, Château-Musée Grimaldi, Cagnes-sur-Mer.
- 1997 **Black as Colour**, National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.
- 1996 **Tercera Bienal de la Pintura**, Museo de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo.
- 1995 **Young Talent**, National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.
- 1993 **Young Generation**, Mutual Life Gallery, Kingston.
- Annual National Exhibition**, National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.
- Pied-à-Terre**, Galerie Article, Montréal.

#### **PUBLIC COMMISSIONS**

- 2020 **Time Catcher: The Fruiting of Chaos**, Victoria International Airport. Permanent commission.
- 2025 **Those that pass through, remain, return**, Concordia University. Temporary (3yr) commission to be completed Spring 2025.
- Day Portal (Our Ancestors Meeting)**, Public Archives, Research and Collections Campus, Royal BC Museum, to be completed Fall 2025

#### **AWARDS, PROGRAMS & SCHOLARSHIPS**

- 2025 **Sobey Art Award Long List**, National Gallery of Canada/Sobey Art Foundation
- 2023 **Lehan Family Activism and the Arts Lecturer**, University of Victoria
- 2022 **VIVA Award**, Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation.
- Canada Council Concept to Realization Project Grant**

- 2020 **City of Victoria Creative Builder Award**, ProArt Alliance of Greater Victoria.
- 2018 **Canada Council Explore and Create Grant.**  
**BC Arts Council Project Assistance Grant.**
- 2016 **O K'inadas Residency**, UBC Okanagan.
- 2015 **Canada Council Travel Grant:** New Orleans.
- 2013 **Canada Council Production Grant.**  
**Artist in Residence**, Open Space, Victoria: Three month artist residency.
- 2012 **Canada Council Travel Grant:** Kingston Jamaica.
- 2011 **Canada Council Production Grant.**  
**Canada Council Travel Grant:** Washington DC  
**Act 5**, Alice Yard, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Three week artist residency.
- 2009 **Canada Council Travel Grant:** Havana Cuba.
- 2005 **Canada Council Travel Grant:** Kingston, Jamaica.
- 1997 **Artist Residency**, Gasworks Studios London: Three month residency.
- 1995 **Xayamaca International Artists' Workshop**, Buff Bay, Jamaica.
- 1994 **Life of Jamaica Sponsored Artist**, Kingston. Twelve month artist sponsorship program ending in solo exhibition.

#### **PUBLISHED ARTICLES AND BOOKS**

- 2023 "As We Rise: Photography from the Black Atlantic" C Magazine, Issue 155, Autumn 2023. <https://cmagazine.com/articles/as-we-rise-photography-from-the-black-atlantic>
- 2020 "Hummingbirds and Sleeping Buffalo: Charles Campbell reflects on a Primary Colours residency", Rungh Magazine, Vol 7, No 3. <https://rungh.org/hummingbirds-and-sleeping-buffalo/>
- 2019 "On Trutch Street" Primary Colours, <https://www.primary-colours.ca/projects/115-on-trunch-street>.
- 2018 "The Trees Are Innocent: Sandra Semchuck and Ayumi Goto at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria", Rungh Magazine, Vol 6, No 1 (September 2018). <https://rungh.org/the-trees-are-innocent/>
- 2014 "Context and Community", Anything With Nothing: Art From the Streets of Urban Jamaica, pp 4-7, National Gallery of Jamaica.
- 2012 "Memento Mori: Excess and Impermanence in the Work of Hew Locke", ARC Magazine, Issue 5, pp 88-95.
- 2011 "Thank you Ms. Darling - the work of Tavares Strachan", ARC Magazine, Issue 3, pp 6-13.  
"The View from Victoria", Galleries West, Spring 2011, pp 43-45.  
"Transformation Set", Small Axe, Vol 9 No1, Indiana University Press, artwork & article.
- 2005 "Clastic", Lousy Art & Editions, Israel, catalogue entry.
- 2000 Front, Don Projects, London, Co-editor with Suhail Malik.



- 1997 "Petrona Morrison", Sexta bienal de la Habana: el individuo y su memoria, Paris: AFAA / Centro Wifredo Lam, catalogue entry.
- 1997-98 Various reviews and articles on art for the Sunday Gleaner, Jamaica.
- 1995-97 Various reviews and articles on art for the Sunday Herald, Jamaica.

#### SELECTED REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

- 2024 Taylor, K. "Artists Charles Campbell and Camille Turner evoke souls lost to slave trade", Globe and Mail, October 18, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/article-artists-charles-campbell-and-camille-turner-evoke-souls-lost-to-slave/>
- 2023 Lim, K., "Charles Campbell's 'An Ocean to Livity' at Surrey Art Gallery", West Coast Curated, April 27, 2023, <https://westcoastcurated.com/charles-campbells-an-ocean-to-livity-at-surrey-art-gallery/>
- Dick, T., "Charles Campbell, Artist - Victoria" Akimbo, May 17, 2023. <https://akimbo.ca/akimblog/charles-campbell-artist-victoria/>
- Zillich, T. "Echoes of George Floyd death in Charles Campbell's new 'Ocean to Livity' art show in Surrey, Surrey Now-Leader, April 14, 2023. <https://www.surreynowleader.com/entertainment/echoes-of-george-floyd-death-in-charles-campbells-new-ocean-to-livity-art-show-in-surrey/>
- 2022 Atkinson, J. "A world of possibilities: Victoria artist wins Shadbolt Foundation VIVA Award" Boulevard Magazine, Victoria June/July 2022. [https://issuu.com/boulevardlifestylesinc/docs/2022\\_06\\_blvdvic\\_lr](https://issuu.com/boulevardlifestylesinc/docs/2022_06_blvdvic_lr)
- Atkinson, J. "In Studio with Charles Campbell", Victoria News, July 4, 2022. <https://www.vicnews.com/life/in-studio-with-charles-campbell/>
- 2021 Parahoo, K., "On Charles Campbell and the Underrepresentation of Caribbean Art in Canada", Canadian Art, March 11, 2021, <https://canadianart.ca/reviews/charles-campbell/>.
- Smith, J., "VAG's vast Vancouver Special: Disorientations and Echo exhibition amplifies diverse new voices on the local scene", Stir Arts and Culture, June 2, 2021, <https://www.createastir.ca/articles/vag-vancouver-special-disorientations-and-echo>.
- Woodend, D., "What's So Special About Vancouver Anyway?" The Tyee, June 11, 2021, <https://thetyee.ca/Culture/2021/06/11/What-Special-About-Vancouver-Anyway/>.
- 2020 Muchet, M., "Q & A: Charles Campbell, Artist explores the resilience of the African diaspora and his own roots in Jamaica." Galleries West, October 19, 2020, <https://www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/q-a-charles-campbell/>.
- "Preview: Charles Campbell" Canadian Art, Chroma, Fall 2020.
- 2019 Uszerowicz, M., "The Revolutionary Potential of a 'Caribbean Future'" Frieze, October 27, 2019, <https://frieze.com/article/revolutionary-potential-caribbean-future>.
- Murray, N., "World-class artist creates next installation for Victoria International Airport", Victoria News, February 20, 2019, <https://www.vicnews.com/news/world-class-artist-creates-next-installation-for-victoria-international-airport/>.
- 2017 Waxman, L. "'En Mas' at DuSable takes a different look at Caribbean carnival", Chicago Tribune, June 7, 2017, (9:56 am), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-ent-0608-en-mas-review-20170607-column.html>.

- 2015 Frank, P., "Where Caribbean Carnivals And Contemporary Performance Art Meet", Huffington Post, 13 February, 2015 (3:59 pm EST), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/13/en-mas-carnival-and-perfo\\_n\\_66744468.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/13/en-mas-carnival-and-perfo_n_66744468.html).
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#### **MAJOR COLLECTIONS**

National Gallery of Canada

Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, Canada.

World Bank, Washington DC.

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria B.C.

Surrey Art Gallery

RBC Art Collection, Toronto, Canada.

TD Corporate Art Collection, Toronto, Canada.

Greater Victoria Airport Authority.

Burnaby Art Gallery

#### **RELATED WORK & VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

President, Open Space Arts Society, 2018-2021.

Sessional Instructor in Art Theory, University of Victoria - 2017-18.

Contemporary Artist, Canada, UK, Jamaica – 1993-Present.

Chief Curator, National Gallery of Jamaica – 2014.

Instructor, Vancouver Island School of Art, Victoria – 2004-2005.

Gallery Coordinator, Xchanges Artists' gallery & studios – 2003-2005.

Arts Coordinator, The Art Reach Project, Greenwich U.K., 2000-2002.

Art Instructor, MultiCare Foundation, Kingston Jamaica, 1995-1998.

Contributing Editor, Sunday Herald, Kingston Jamaica, 1995 – 1997.

Instructor, Edna Manley College of the Visual & Performing Arts, Kingston, 1994 – 1995.