

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

PODCAST
"I'VE SEEN THE WALL"

TRANSCRIPT
EPISODE 3 "ZWISCHENTÖNE"

Paola Malavassi and Jason Moran in conversation with Tina M. Campt

Recorded at the Louis Armstrong Center in Corona, Queens, New York, in November 2023

[Music playing] *Apex Variations*, a performance by Jason Moran to *APEX* by Arthur Jafa, Berlin 2018

Paola Malavassi:
Welcome back. This is the third episode of our four-part podcast accompanying the exhibition *I've Seen the Wall. Louis Armstrong on Tour in the GDR 1965*. We are Jason Moran and Paola Malavassi, curators of the exhibition.

Paola Malavassi:
We're very happy to have Tina M. Campt with us here today. Tina M. Campt, Roger S. Berlind Professor of Humanities at Princeton University, is an author, Black Feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art, and also a contributor to the catalog of our exhibition. Welcome, Tina.

Tina M. Campt:
Thank you.

Paola Malavassi:
Applause.

(applause, laughing)

Tina M. Campt:
Round of applause. You made it sound like there's a lot of people in the room. I like that.

Paola Malavassi:
Thanks so much for being with us, Tina. And thanks, everybody for tuning in. Today, we

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want to talk about the political background of the show and about the issues of discrimination within this tour and in the mid 1960s in the US and in Germany.

We all met years ago in Berlin. It was the first time that Jason and I collaborated. He improvised actually to the piece *APEX* by Arthur Jafa, and the title of the performance was *APEX VARIATIONS*, and you came all over from New York to see that performance, Tina. So that was a moment where we all three were in the same room, right?

Jason Moran:
Well, that's true!

Tina M. Campt:
Yeah, that was great. It was really profound. I had never seen anybody attempt to accompany A.J. or AJ's work, and so I had enormous respect for you because I mean, "Apex" is an intense...

Jason Moran:
... assault!

Tina M. Campt:
Yeah, it is an assault.

[Music playing] *Apex Variations*, a performance by Jason Moran to *APEX* by Arthur Jafa, Berlin 2018

Paola Malavassi:
You began playing to the sound (of Robert Hood) and it faded more and more away. And at the end, you were all alone in the very low keys of the piano. I remember every part of that performance. And it changed also the work of AJ. And that was an incredible interaction. That's an interaction that only a friend of an artist can make. It changes the color of the work.

Tina M. Campt:
That was one instance where the visualization of sound was unmistakable because these were black and white images. But you were giving them colors and you were transforming how we interacted with those images by transforming, quite literally, the temperature of the room. And so, to go from that, that kind of techno house beat, and as that diminished and fell away, we were all with you. And so, the color, the temperature, the timbre of the images did something to me differently, by virtue of the fact that you had actually changed the temperature and the color of the images through your improvisation.

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Jason Moran:

I mean, I guess that's a part that musicians talk about a lot. Sometimes they want to study it and sometimes they just want to let it be what it's going to be, is this color. Some musicians, like Elvin Jones, often talked about the colors that he saw when he hit the cymbals behind John Coltrane. "This is purple!", you know, like he saw it. He wasn't necessarily talking about synesthesia either. He's talking about temperature, too, because he knew what making heat was for a musician as voracious as John Coltrane was. And I think Armstrong understands this part, too, like trying to figure out what are the ways that a band can create friction off of the counterpoint with one another that then gets to the audience, so the audience feels that, "Oh, wow, you mean this band can move this nimble? All these notes, some prepared, some not, and all of that friction and the heat that it makes", that then makes us like wonder why we like the music or disdain the music too, because that would happen in what Armstrong and his bands over the years tried to figure out with audiences. And that maybe leads us to the title of your essay. I'm going to practice my German: Zwischen-töne.

Paola Malavassi:

Very good.

Tina Campt:

Perfect.

(Applause)

Jason Moran:

But I wonder, maybe you can talk about how this term opens up.

Tina M. Campt:

Well, I have to give credit where credit is due, which is Paola, actually, it slipped into our conversation when we were first talking about the exhibition and when she was inviting me to contribute a piece for it. And she said, you know, what is sort of the core of this exhibition is not simply the occasion of Armstrong's tour, but the kick-off of that tour, which was this extraordinary press conference where he was introduced to the East German press. And this tour was really lauded as historic, which it was. It was absolutely historic, but it was painful. Talking about the temperature of the room that must have been nearly unbearable on the one hand, because he was being asked, to my mind, the same question over and over again: "So, who is your audience? Is your audience Black? Is your audience *white*?" And it was also in translation, right? So they were asking some questions in German. Some questions mostly were in English. But he was being translated to by an interpreter standing right next to him. And you would see him get agitated because they wanted him to say something

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about race.

They really wanted him to talk about discrimination, to talk about what it meant to be in conversation with and a *white* audience as if it were different for him, but it wasn't different for him. And he kept giving them answers that they didn't want to accept about the relationship between him and his audience being about the music. And as you would listen to him say this over and over again in different ways, what Paola asked me to do is she said, "I would really love to hear what you think about the *Zwischentöne*." "*Zwischen*" is a preposition meaning between, "*Ton*" means sound or color and "*Töne*" is the plural of either the sound or the tone, ,color. Literally, it means the sounds in between or the colors in between. So, it's the hue or the tint between red and blue, for example. And so more colloquially, it either means subtext or subtleties or undertones or even overtones, right? It's everything that is being said without being said.

And so the invitation, again, to listen to this press conference for what is being said without saying it, was extraordinary to me. And also thinking about it as the color of a conversation. We just, you know, in talking about the ways in which sound can and is always colored and you're responding to it based on the intensity of those colors or based on the subtlety of those colors.

I've been writing quite literally a piece on the idea of after images and after images is the sensation that you see something when it's no longer there. So, for example, if you're looking at the sun and you look away, or if you look at something that's brightly lit and then you look away and you still see the outline of that person, that's an after image and an after image is both something that occurs in your retina that your retina does, but it's also your memory. It's your remembering who was right there before the color of the room changed.

But I'm interested in this actually goes to the something that I've been writing about or in that essay. I'm actually interested in shifting the idea of after images away from the bright colors to the blue colors, because I think that blue does the same thing, but it does it in darkness. It does it in terms of creating ghosts.

And so one of the pieces in the show is Glenn Ligon's piece, *Untitled (Bruise/Blues)*. And it is a piece that puts together two words "bruise" and "blues" in blue. And it emanates that blue and that blue signifies that blue signifies as blues, that blue signifies as a bruise, that blues signifies as the uniforms of police and the brutality that they can inflict on Black communities. And he actually curated a show in relationship to black and blue and everything was about blue and how intense blue is, the multiple hues of blue. And to me, I'm trying to actually understand or think about how it's not just the bright colors. It's really those sort of subliminal colors that can impact us and actually provoke us in ways that, you know, are actually more subtle and more

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intense, you know, than the bright lights that are supposed to solicit after images.

Paola Malavassi:
Now.

Jason Moran:
Oh, my goodness. You're ready to sit down for this feast? This blue feast.

Paola Malavassi:
We have been talking about Zwischentöne and these tones in between. And I personally love that song you, Jason, wrote during the pandemic for your record *The Sound Will Tell You*: "Toni Morrison said Black is a Rainbow."

Jason Moran:
Tony talks about potential sound all the time. You hear her novel as much as you read it, and in a very dark place of which I felt we were all in the pandemic, I felt she brought up so much layers of the darkness that I wanted to write something that would live at the bottom of the piano. And so this piece, "Black as a rainbow," kind of taken from the novel *Song of Solomon*, starts to pull at the pace of what I like reading her text, which is kind of slow and deliberate. And so it's one of the slower pieces that I've written, but it's as if I'm reading the text in my mind.

Paola Malavassi:
What is the quote?

Jason Moran:
Oh, it's a long one. We were lost in tunnel and talk about loss. So: "You think dark is just one color, but it ain't, there's five or six kinds of black. Some silky, some wooly. Some just empty... And it don't stay still, it moves and changes from one kind of black to another. Saying something is pitch black is like saying something is green. What kind of green? Green like my bottles. Green like grasshopper? Green like a cucumber... or green like the sky is just before it breaks loose to storm? Well, night black is the same way. May as well be a rainbow."

[Music playing] Jason Moran "Toni Morrison said Black is a Rainbow (Shadow)," *The Sound Will Tell You*, 2021

Paola Malavassi:
The reason why I thought about you was listening to you at the Gropius Bau in Berlin, talking about listening to images. Now you talked about the color and temperature of the sound. That is like the other way around. What is "listening to images" and how can we listen to images? Because I loved that concept. It seems to be like, what is

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happening in between again, Zwischentöne.

Tina M. Campt:

I started writing about the idea of listening to images when I was writing about family photography, and I was writing about the family photography of Black Germans, who I had interviewed, who had lived through the Nazi period. And I would look at their photographs and their photographs looked so familiar. It just looked so familiar. And I realized I was certainly projecting into those images, images from my own family. And I am not alone in doing that. So what I'm responding to, is both what I see and more than what I see, it's what I bring to it and it's where it takes me.

And I find that naming that process of attunement, naming it "listening" is helpful to me because what it does is that it makes us think about what listening actually is. That unlike seeing listening requires contact. It requires sound to actually penetrate us physically and not just for our eardrums. Not just through that one place. It requires us to feel a vibration. That's something that I want us to actually be more attentive to when we're thinking about how we see and what we see. And by doing that, we don't take it for granted. We don't expect that an image is going to tell the truth. Right now, that's one thing we know about images, is that they're not necessarily telling you the truth, but by listening to them, you hear the multiplicity of what resonates within them and beyond them. And you ask yourself, you have to interrogate them to say, where is this coming from? Not that it's coming from that image, where is it coming from? Which makes us again much more open to the multiplicity of registers that allow us to apprehend a given image in a multitude of ways.

Jason Moran:

An image also has an ability to walk away from you. And I think the tone of the exhibition, there's a downstairs and an upstairs, a first half, a second half, with an intermission, when you walk up the stairs, is when you arrive at Glenn's piece, then there is also the space between the two vibrating neons. There's a gap in between of which Adrian Piper's card sits very near. I think as curators, we may be dependent on our audience to feel like they would see something and then felt like they felt they saw the reflection of it four works later, but may not have ever planned that they were still seeing Ligon's blue, that might still be vibrating in them. And the need, I think, for an audience to feel like they may be on the other side of that thing being apprehended, that the image is actually coming for you. Because a lot of the questions we receive at the beginning of this was about, "Oh, how like Armstrong is not the president of the UN and coming to answer these questions as if he's that guy"! That was so odd to me in this press conference to see him "play that like a song". He was like I'm gonna play the changes this way on this one. And I think he kept seeing in his mind the points when he would shift the tone to humor, or shift tone to defiance, or shift the tone to "squinting when I pull my cigaret", you know, like, I think

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for a lot of people, they had never seen Armstrong's face even look like that. Like no smile. I'm just here, you know.

Paola Malavassi:

Yes. And Jason made a new work that wasn't planned but is bringing exactly the press conference and the concert the day after together. You're putting them side by side. It is part of the concert and the whole press conference. So, actually you can see Armstrong talking while he's playing. And his own music is the soundtrack to the press conference. And the way you put those songs together, it's totally amazing because there are these moments of interaction, interplay between both of them, where you have the greatest *Zwischentöne*. And that is a work that developed out of the preparations of the exhibition and that we're really glad to have there because that is at the core, I think of the ground floor of the exhibition, figuring out how was the situation for Armstrong. We're not reconstructing the whole tour. That is not what we wanted to do. We're not getting into jazz in the GDR, this and that. No, no, it's really focused on the situation, the ambivalent situation he was into.

Tina M. Campt:

I think that's brilliant. And it's brilliant because quite frankly, it is about being in between and the *Zwischentöne*. And one of the things that you just said struck me, which is that people weren't used to seeing Armstrong's face in this particular way. And one of the reasons that I think that most people haven't seen that and which contributes to us seeing him differently, is lag time.

There's a lag time between some of the questions and when he's answering. It's a lag time of translation where he doesn't understand. Then he does understand, then he decides how to respond. That to me is the excruciating moment as you watch him understand the question, get pissed off at the question, then decide on a nice answer to it.

Or that same process and a defiant answer or dismissive answer. And so, I mean, Armstrong was known as sort of the consummate performer on and off stage. But there's some powerful moments there that aren't about what he says. It's about the lag time between him hearing something and then saying something about it.

Paola Malavassi:

And he continuously turns back to his audience. And when he's asked about the Wall, he says, "I don't worry about the Wall. I worry about my audience I'm going to play to tomorrow night." And then later, he says, "Listen to Satchmo, forget about everything else." And then he gets even clearer with the statement, "I can say what I want to say, but if you let me on say it, forget about all that other bullshit."

And there you can feel the tension in the room and the temperature going higher, the translator being nervous, not knowing how to translate that in that system. It was very stressful to watch it. Very, very stressful.

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Tina M. Campt:

I agree that it's incredibly awkward and there's a tension in that room throughout. But at the same time, he's in control. He's utterly in control. And that's part of what was so captivating to me about him. This was the first. Right? He was the first jazz musician to do this kind of tour. And he was the first as a kind of political statement, right? They were trying to instrumentalize him to put forward a sense of, you know, East German socialism being much more progressive and embracing Black folks. We embrace him so much that we're going to let Louis Armstrong and Jazz come to town. So there was this gesture that they were trying to do through him and to make him their instrument.

And one of the things that's going on at that press conference is him saying, "I'm not going to be your instrument." He's only there because he knows he has an audience. And he is dismissing these attempts to make him into a pawn. And he was criticized, historically for being too aloof at times.

And then he went all in, he went all in after Little Rock. And so this was another one of those moments when he goes all in on his own terms. If he didn't have an audience, he wouldn't play.

He wouldn't play. There's not enough money in the world for you to get Louis Armstrong without an audience. And that's the thing he keeps saying when he keeps saying, "I play for my audience", meaning I'm not even in this room. I'm required to be here. But, you know.

Paola Malavassi:

Maybe we should talk about Norman Lewis, because when we talk about *Black and Blue* and the songs that Armstrong chose for this tour, there is also something very political about that. And he even changed the lyrics of that song in the GDR. Right, Jason? Maybe you want to tell that part.

Jason Moran:

Well, it was one, that he reintroduces this song to his setlist, which he hadn't been performing, of which he was always famous saying "I'm white inside." And then on this tour he says, "I'm right inside" and it's always a slip of the tongue, but he ain't slipping.

Paola Malavassi:

That ain't slipping!

Jason Moran:

Yeah, that ain't no slip!

But then in Glenn's work, which is also what Glenn also focuses on, he focuses on

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language, even in the works where the paint crawls down the canvas and starts to distort. Like he's also focusing on this: The need for repetition and a musician deciding to replay a song night after night in the way Armstrong did at this time in his career is a real commitment to: This is a form that I'm presenting to an audience. It goes like this. This is the narrative I wanted to tell, and this is how I want to heat the room up. But *Black and Blue*, I was thinking about these great Norman Lewis paintings and Norman's devotion to abstraction, and the devotion that he has to the music, which he always is documenting from Bebop on through the Sixties, the way that counterpoint starts to emerge for his painting in the forties, but then by the sixties, it just becomes these kind of like fields of oppression that he's battling not only on the canvas, but he's battling at the Met, you know, when he stands out, "How dare you have an exhibition on Harlem – and where are the artists of Harlem?", and that he is demanding this confrontation at the time that Armstrong is going on this tour. And so Norman is in kind of like a trio with Lorna and with Glenn in this moment to bring that sensibility around color choice, you know, and when you talk about the way a color can stay in the mind, that's a thing that I felt when I saw this work of Norman Lewis, which is in the series of maybe five of which only two are around.

And I thought it would be great to have him nearby Glenn talking about the slip of the tongue of the bruise and the blues and the reason that Armstrong is reintroducing *Black and Blue*. It's kind of like one of the more overt places we stand in the exhibition, right Paola?

Paola Malavassi:

Yes. And also when you were talking about repetitions, also that Glenn Ligon is using the composition by Steve Reich that is made of repetitions and they get more and more intense. And there we have a dialog. You know, Glenn Ligon and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, that was typing in the seventies in the GDR, a homage to Martin Luther King.

And that is not the homage, you know, it's not the propaganda. It's not a commissioned work by the GDR to do something in solidarity. It was made very differently. And we have both of those versions. We have Willi Sitte who was working for the official art, you know, making up a portrait of Angela Davis. But we also have those very intimate works of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt who works a little bit like a composer.

I don't know, the show feels sometimes like there are so many musicians in it, even though they're different artists, there are musicians everywhere. In every discipline, I guess. There's a lot of music in there, a lot of sound.

Tina M. Campt:

It seems to me that, and this was in our conversation, the way in which you're asking

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visitors to inhabit both music and visual art simultaneously on different terms, it sounds like it was key to your selection, your curatorial selections, and we were talking about that a little bit earlier, which is that it is unusual to take a historical event like this tour as the occasion for a contemporary art exhibition and to organize it not as documentary. Not as contemporaneous, right? So it's not representational in any way. And what you do instead is, you ask visitors to confront their time and space in history through sound and vision. And it's a beautiful, beautiful sort of curatorial motivation, which is to bring people into a space where they're never in one place at a time. They are always in a multiplicity of places. They are trying to understand a relationship to Armstrong. And his music, but not through Armstrong and his music. So you're expanding how we understand Armstrong right in this particular moment. As well as in his own moment. And those different layers are so challenging and so beautiful, to have them combined.

Paola Malavassi:

They are challenging, indeed. I felt very lost during the preparation sometimes. And Jason, as a musician always says "It's good to be lost." You know, it's like improvising music, thinking it's great we're lost.

Jason Moran:

But really, sometimes you have to have support to be lost.

Paola Malavassi:

The thing was, as you were saying, right now, there are many different ways to navigate this show and many layers to it, to do a connection to Armstrong himself, to the tour, to the time then, to our time. There are also works, you know, I feel like Glenn Ligon, that is something that happened in the sixties, right? Just one year before Armstrong came to the GDR, '64 that happened, that incident that he's dealing with. And then you go to Lorna Simpson, it's the nineties, you know and then you go further, then you have Gordon Parks with "Invisible Man". Then you have Angela Davis coming to the GDR, there are so many layers and there is also a very metaphorical way of going through the show, too, where there are all of these metaphors for sound and for music, you know, maybe without even knowing the background of the work. There is this, you know, like Terry Adkins, you know. I was so surprised when I saw it live because it's huge and it really feels like a very big sound, like he describes it. What was that description of him like?

Tina M. Campt:

A big sound or a bright light. And the thing that is so extraordinary about that is that he's talking about divine intervention and he's talking about divine intervention in relationship to John Brown's incursion into Harpers Ferry. And so the divinity of a big sound and a big light, but it's not just the divinity of it. How divinity can lead you to

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quite literally, you know, put your body at risk for others.

I mean, when I was reading about the piece, just the multiple layers of that, which is to go all the way back to John Brown, a white man who was trying to liberate enslaved black folks. And failed.

And failed catastrophically, but to linger on what that was as divine intervention, not civil rights. Not racial justice. It was what inspired him. And then to move forward with that, to move forward with what does it mean to actually, in this moment in time, when Christian nationalism is actually supposed to be, it's directed against divine intervention towards freedom of migrants and this, that and the other? He's actually bringing us back to what divine intervention can build. How it can set people free. And, you know, to me, that choice, that selection was really gorgeous because it's not just a mute that so very much symbolizes Louis Armstrong. It's way larger than that.

And getting us to think beyond Armstrong's horn. We always think about Armstrong and his horn. But what about thinking about that horn beyond the horn, what that horn opens up? What that sound actually can call forth. That to me is the way in which the visual art and the sound of it, when we listen to it, can give us a much more fulsome understanding of the significance of both an individual and an individual in their times.

[Music playing] Jason Moran "How much more terrible was the night", *The Sound Will Tell You*, 2021

Jason Moran:

And Adkins, also his devotion to music.

Tina M. Campt:

Yes.

Jason Moran:

I mean, over the years, knowing him and laughing with him and listening to him talk shit, which he did so well, he was incredible. But all because I think he understood that, too. I feel like the past ten years have been very much a Terry Adkins made moment of watching institutions really understand that performance is necessary, is like as important as sculpture or the painting as you need performance.

And Terry has long spent much of his time investigating the sound. I felt like he planted so much in his canon that leads us to so much understanding that can happen now in a space like this that for when we were coming up with like who has to be it, it was Terry, you know, also out of deep love for what he left us, has to be here because he really also really cared about it and was not afraid to get on stage and try to make it, which I feel like is a very vulnerable place that an artist can place

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themselves when they leave their tradition.

But the tradition is to be in multiple places. The divine mute was, of course, when you, Paola, sent photographs of it being uncrated, I thought, oh my God, it's much larger than I thought.

Paola Malavassi:

Does it fit on the wall? (Laughing)

Jason Moran:

And that's Terry, too. He knows how to take up the space. Lorna has that. The work demands three walls. Glenn's demands space, and then the space between the neons, like these are works that if you just walked in you'd have to then say, "Oh wait, there's a vibration in here that I might need to listen for."

Tina M. Campt:

I mean, I also I think that it's really important that what you're emphasizing: scale. That scale also produces its own sound. But I appreciate the scale because it makes certain demands of me and having an exhibition where scale is so central both in terms of the object itself, but also the way in which sound itself takes up space, right?

Sound goes right through you. The hardest thing you can possibly do in curation is isolate sound. So you have to intentionally know what is bleeding from and into and that the pervasiveness of sound to me is also something that's important. It's very different than the visual. You have to be looking at it. But to allow those sounds to bleed into one another and make contact with you, that's both a challenge.

And at the same time, it has the potential to be transformative. So I'm so happy to hear that the intentionality of, you know, both sound and scale in terms of shaping an encounter and reshaping those who are involved in that encounter.

Paola Malavassi:

And keeping the room very open so that you, as a visitor, are able to make connections in every direction.

Jason Moran:

But I wonder because you're also teaching now, so you're dealing with a lot of young minds getting introduced to material maybe for the first time. And then they're asked to open up that session like, "Okay, now that you're out, what does timbre mean or what is tone in a room or tone in a text?" And how do you help people find strategies through that?

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Tina M. Campt:

I feel that the most challenging and the most gratifying process of teaching is when your students surprise you because they can articulate something different on different terms. And I don't ever have to test them. I have to be open to what they are allowing me to see and hear and feel about the terms that I use, like frequency, like listening.

And I am immensely gratified by what I learn from my students as opposed to teaching them. Teaching to me is a process of dialogical learning. They're teaching you what it means to make and to think while you're making.

Jason Moran:

This a band. (Laughing)

Paola Malavassi:

But that's what I was thinking, that, you know, there is so much to learn from the music. It's very much about listening to each other like feeling the room, you were talking about temperature. I think the temperature is really important, feeling the band mates, the other ones. I mean, I felt very honored and privileged to be able to do this show with you, Jason, because there's a lot to learn from the music and also the courage to take risks and to think further and, to not stay only in what you already know from the art world. It was really amazing. And I think that comes from the music, I'm sure.

Jason Moran:

Yeah. And you talked about it also within the show, about works, also having the potential for sound, so that even though works weren't actively making sound that you also had to acknowledge the potential sound in the space. But that potential part for me is so important in a museum space where the eye is turned on when you walk through the door versus a concert space where your ear is turned on, when you walk into the building of the venue and then to demand that we keep more of the senses open and less defined about how you enter a room.

And so the exhibition is relatively quiet. It's a relatively quiet show. Lorna's humming in the wall is possibly one of the more audible sounds. Even when his concert is playing downstairs, it's quite soft for such a loud individual, you know what I mean? Because we've walked into gallery spaces before, we know how they feel. I always think, like, you tell me how you want me to interact by how loud my footstep is when I walk in here, like, should I be self-conscious now because I hear my heel hit the floor or can I relax into the space? Or how the lighting is in this room. So part of it was also trying to give an audience a space to walk in and not feel like they knew the answer, which is a very hard thing in a museum.

But I felt like our favorite works were able to kind of like, step back from it, even though the context was so rich with complexity, for all artists that you were mentio-

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ning and then Gordon Parks' part about not kind of defining his own role as an artist, meaning like moving constantly, migrating between these spaces.

Paola Malavassi:

I wanted to talk about one thing.

Tina M. Campt:

Ahh, what's that.

Paola Malavassi:

We translated the text. You remember? And you insisted in keeping the German word "Rasse" in the text, the translation of race, which I was like, "Oh, oh, oh, wow. We need to comment that." And I learned a lot from you because what we were thinking about is about keeping the English term race to not forget the whole discourse and struggle and history surrounding it from the perspective of African-American history. You were thinking about the German history.

Tina M. Campt:

Yes, it's true!

Paola Malavassi:

Why did you insist in keeping the translation, the literal translation of race into "Rasse", which is a term that is avoided actually in the actual discourse in Germany?

Tina M. Campt:

I insisted on that because I insist that we confront the connotations of race in the history of racialization in all languages. I refuse to distinguish between the pejorative history of the term "Rasse" in German from the pejorative history of the term race in the United States, that everything that one is attempting to do by translating "Rasse" only into race, right?

That term has exactly the same history and perhaps even more pernicious a history in the United States. So every time you read that term, you have to confront in your own language the history of that term in that place. So displacing the complexity of race onto an English word doesn't make any sense to me. It makes absolutely no sense to me. So, I wanted that conversation to be ongoing and to be ongoing in every language.

[Music playing] Jaimie Branch "prayer for amerikkka", *Fly or Die*, live at the Moods Switzerland, 2021

Paola Malavassi:

That is so important. You know, we've been receiving some reactions from visitors. There's always different reactions. Of course, it has a lot to do with memories and

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identity. And maybe some visitors are maybe a little bit disappointed that we're asking questions surrounding this tour, which for them was just spectacular. You know, a spectacular event that they have in the memory as something very special.

And suddenly we come with works that are making it more complex. And there's one question that they're asking me again and again. And also the press. Are there any evidences for racism in the GDR towards Louis Armstrong? I don't even get the question. It feels like, why do we need any evidence in a journal or in a memoir or in his tapes that he experienced that exactly there.

And maybe that is also why I come to this question right now. Because when you say race and "Rasse", you know what I answer, I answer always: "I don't need no evidence. There was and still is racism everywhere and is a structural problem. So why are we searching outside of us?"

Tina M. Campt:

What I find most interesting is those memories always paper over things that you decide not to remember. The more that you hold on to specific memories or recollections of an event, the more you blend out all this other stuff, all the *Zwischentöne*, all the ambivalences. And part of what you're describing in terms of what the exhibition is doing is it's bringing forward all of that ambivalence, because it wasn't all positive, right? Because the context was freighted with tension. And to be able to bring people out of their comfort zone of I was there and this happened. Yes, you were there and that happened. And there's a whole lot of other shit that you decide to look away from. And so, again, that question of that which we see does not give us the truth.

And what you are trying to do in this exhibition is to challenge people to be able to contend with the multiple truths of Louis Armstrong's tour of the GDR. There were multiple truths that were going on there. There were multiple perspectives. And they're still resonant and they're still incredibly relevant today. I wouldn't make any of my arguments necessarily specific to Germany.

I think we have the same thing in the United States. But again, I spend a lot of time thinking about how societies displace their traumatic encounters and conflicts onto more available targets.

Jason Moran:

This is also part of the conversation we were having in the beginning around the press conference, when he says "I've seen the Wall", you think he's talking about that wall? This is Louis Armstrong, grew up in New Orleans at the turn of the century. He's 60 something years old when he shows up, but you think he's talking about that wall when he says flippantly, "I've seen the Wall." You think he is talking about that wall and the available targets in America that he's seen for his family, for his friends, or for his

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band mates, pawns for war.

By the time he's in that stage of his life, getting given a question like that, that's why we call the show *I've Seen the Wall*, because he's like, "Baby, it ain't that wall that I'm talking about."

Paola Malavassi:

Hearing you talking about walls and thinking of Adrian Piper. When was this made, "Break Down", this composition by you with the Bandwagon playing to the sound of the voice of Adrian Piper, breaking it all down: Break down the barriers, break down misunderstanding, break down presuppositions. The art world.

Jason Moran:

Break down the artists.

Paola Malavassi:

The audience.

Jason Moran:

Break down...

Jason Moran and Paola Malavassi:

...the general public. (Laughing)

Paola Malavassi:

Break it all down! (Laughing)

Jason Moran:

Break Down.

[Music playing] Jason Moran "Break Down", *Artist in Residence*, 2005

Paola Malavassi:

Sometimes I think if we could reach that place where we break some of them down, we've made it then.

Jason Moran:

Thank you so much for joining us, Tina. It's really been an incredible conversation and we thank you all for listening to the third episode of our podcast.

Tina M. Campt:

It's wonderful. Thank you!

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Paola Malavassi:
Thank you.

Jason Moran:
Thank you.

Paola Malavassi:
Thank you for joining us.

Tina M. Campt:
I'm glad I made it!

Jason Moran:
I'm glad you made it, too!
We were going to figure out some other way, but I'm glad. I'm glad you made it.

[Music playing] Jason Moran "Break Down", *Artist in Residence*, 2005