



VIRTUAL SLOW ART DAY

4 April 2020

INTRODUCTION

At The Power Plant, we are keenly aware of the role art plays in fostering a sense of community. As we self-isolate, it's more important than ever to slow down, take notice and engage in meaningful dialogue. It is with this in mind that we share our [Slow Art Day](#) program! Slow Art Day is a global event with a simple mission: help more people discover for themselves the joy of looking at and loving art. This year, The Power Plant offers virtual opportunities to engage in and appreciate the conversations contemporary artworks inspire.

In this document you will find detailed perspectives of four artworks from our Winter 2020 exhibitions: Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's *God's Reptilian Finger* and *Cacaxte no. 2 (Sarvelia)*, a Power Plant commission; Dawit L. Petros' *Spectre (La Teleferica)* and Rashid Johnson's *Anxious Audience*, a site-specific commission for the Fleck Clerestory. We invite you to take your time in viewing images of these works and to respond to the written prompts.

We'd love to hear from you! Please feel free to share your thoughts and converse with others via [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), or email responses and ideas to media@thepowerplant.org.

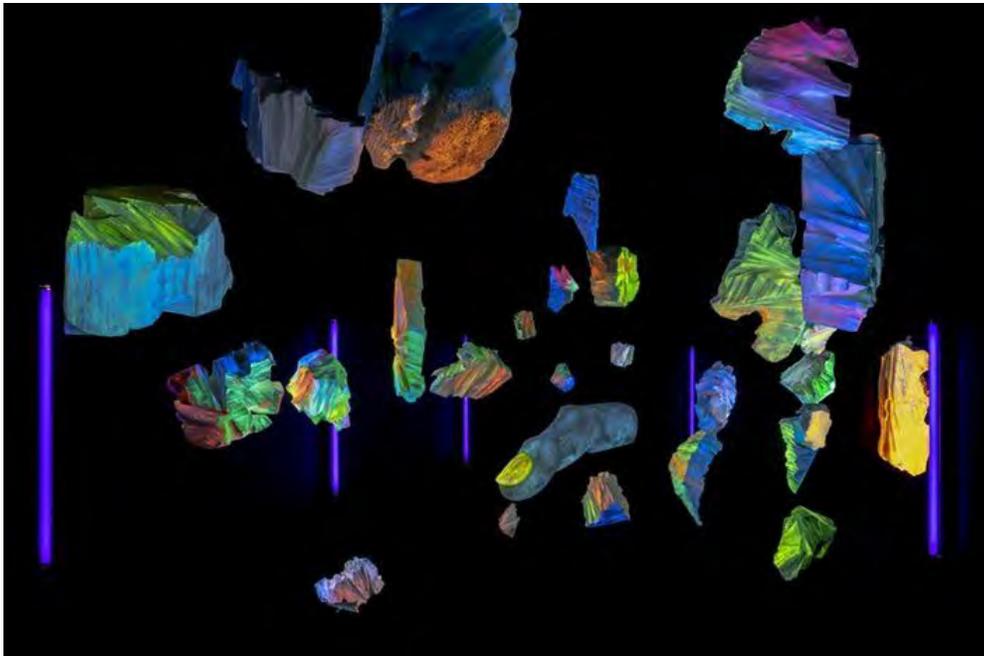
#SlowArtDay #TPPTogether

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God's Reptilian Finger, by Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa

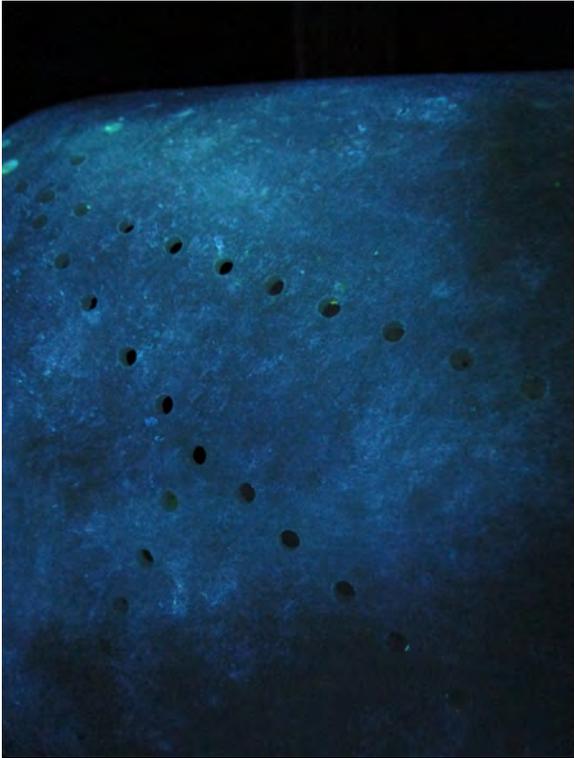


Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, *God's Reptilian Finger*, 2015-20. Installation view: The Power Plant, Toronto, 2020. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

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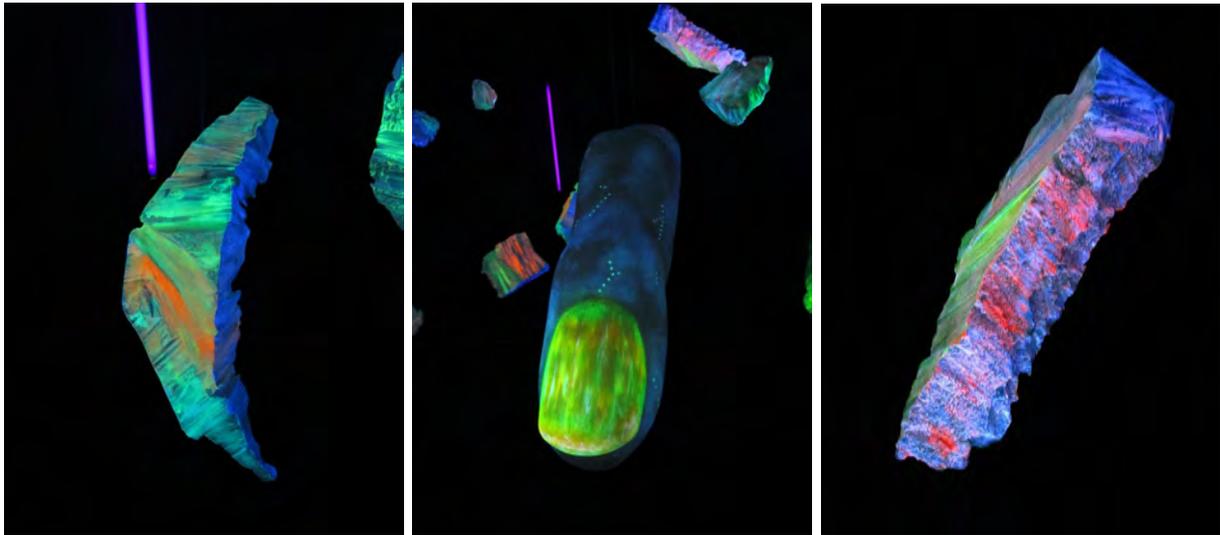
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In *God's Reptilian Finger*, a giant glowing finger — perhaps alluding to God's extended index in Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* — hovers in a darkened gallery, solely illuminated by blacklights. The severed digit is surrounded by floating stone fragments painted in phosphorescent colours that can be read variously as the exploded ruins of Mayan temples or as the glowing rocks from the Book of Ether, which chronicles the Mormon creation story. This immersive installation hints at the mythologies disseminated among pre-columbian civilisations in Guatemala by Mormon missionaries, who sought to conjure up evidence of Christian influence in the creation of ancient Mayan pyramids. It also appropriates popular conspiracy theories about the Babylonian Brotherhood, a shape-shifting race of reptilian humanoids that control humankind. *God's Reptilian Finger* offers up a vision of a critical, hybrid mythology that blurs the boundaries between religion and delirious speculation, and evangelism and imperialism.

We invite you to look at the above images for 5-10 minutes.

- Consider the materials chosen by the artist: polystyrene, fiberglass, fluorescent pigment, resin, UV blacklights. How do these contribute to the mood and atmosphere of the installation?



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- Consider the aesthetic choices made by the artist: the use of bright colours, the varied textures, the placement of objects in the space, the fact that the objects are floating in mid-air, etc. Think or write about what you find to be effective creative decisions, in terms of conveying a message or a feeling.
- Light some patchouli incense, or use a diffuser to disperse patchouli essential oils into your living space. At The Power Plant, the artist chose to use this fragrance to further activate the room. How does this sensory addition change your experience of the work? Why do you think the artist decided to include this fragrant component?
- Imagine an alternative conspiracy theory based on the elements in this installation. Write it down and share it over social media or by email.
- Learn about ancient Mayan creation stories by reading the [Popol Vuh](#).
- Share your reflections, in whichever form, on any platform.



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Cacaxte no. 2 (Sarvelia), by Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa



Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, *Cacaxte no. 2 (Sarvelia) (Detail)*, 2020. Cast aluminum, carved polystyrene, epoxy resin, fiberglass paste, mineral pigments, linen and raw silk, metal clothing pins. The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada. Photos: Toni Hafkenscheid.



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The Guatemalan Civil War was fought between the government of Guatemala and various leftist rebel groups supported chiefly by Indigenous people and peasants, who together made up the rural poor, from 1960 until 1996. During these difficult and violent times, Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa left Guatemala as a child, accompanied by his grandmother. The two migrated to Vancouver, where Ramírez-Figueroa would later study visual arts at Emily Carr University. The aluminum objects, which are attached to silk straps spread out before the *cacaxte* sculpture, represent items that remind Ramírez-Figueroa of his grandmother's life trajectory as a refugee in Canada, the United States and Mexico, among other places.

The *cacaxte* is a traditional method for transporting goods throughout the Americas, and is still the cheapest means of transport for some Indigenous populations. In the 19th century, European rulers exploited this tool — which functions like a rigid backpack — and the labour of those who carried it. Carrying goods using a *cacaxte* has since become a taboo in contemporary Guatemala because of its association with colonial oppression.

We invite you to look at the above images for 5-10 minutes.

- Consider the materials chosen by the artist: cast aluminum, and raw silk. How do these materials give meaning to this sculpture? Do you notice metaphors or symbolisms in this work?
- Consider the aesthetic choices made by the artist: the selection of personal objects, the decision to cast them in aluminum, the decision to rest the *cacaxte* on the wall, etc. What do these creative decisions communicate to you (i.e. are they conveying an idea, a message, a story or a feeling?).
- Why do you think this piece is of special relevance in the context of Ramírez-Figueroa's largest solo exhibition in Canada?
- The *cacaxte* is a carrying device that is attached to the body, and the artist often uses his own body in the context of performances. Write a few sentences, thoughts, or a short poem on the notion of "carrying" as it relates to the body.
- Make a list of meaningful "daily use" objects that you might attach to your *cacaxte*, were you to make a similar artwork. Share stories about these objects with your friends. Ask them about their list of objects. Share your list.
- Share your reflections, in whichever form.

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Spectre (La Teleferica), by Dawit L. Petros



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Dawit L. Petros, *Spazio Disponibile*, 2020. Installation view: The Power Plant, Toronto, 2020. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

Dawit L. Petros scrutinizes historical gaps in our collective memory. From archival documents that attest to the Italian presence in Ethiopia and Eritrea between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Petros has developed a series of works—photographs, serigraphs, video, sculpture, and soundscape—that reflect on the lingering effects of colonial memory.

The *teleferica* depicted in this work is a ropeway conveyor (similar to a gondola lift), from which containers that carry goods and materials are suspended. Ropeway conveyors are typically found around large mining projects or massive construction sites, and can cover long distances. In Eritrea, the Italians built the Asmara-Massawa Cableway in 1936, which was 75 km long. This structure was essential to the transportation of heavy materials that would serve to “modernize” both Italy and Eritrea. The teleferica has since been dismantled, but the scars it left on the colonized landscape remain visible. Here, an image of the teleferica has been mechanically engraved on the back of a dark reflective surface. The varying depths of the engraving give the image its wide range of tonalities, akin to a black and white photograph.



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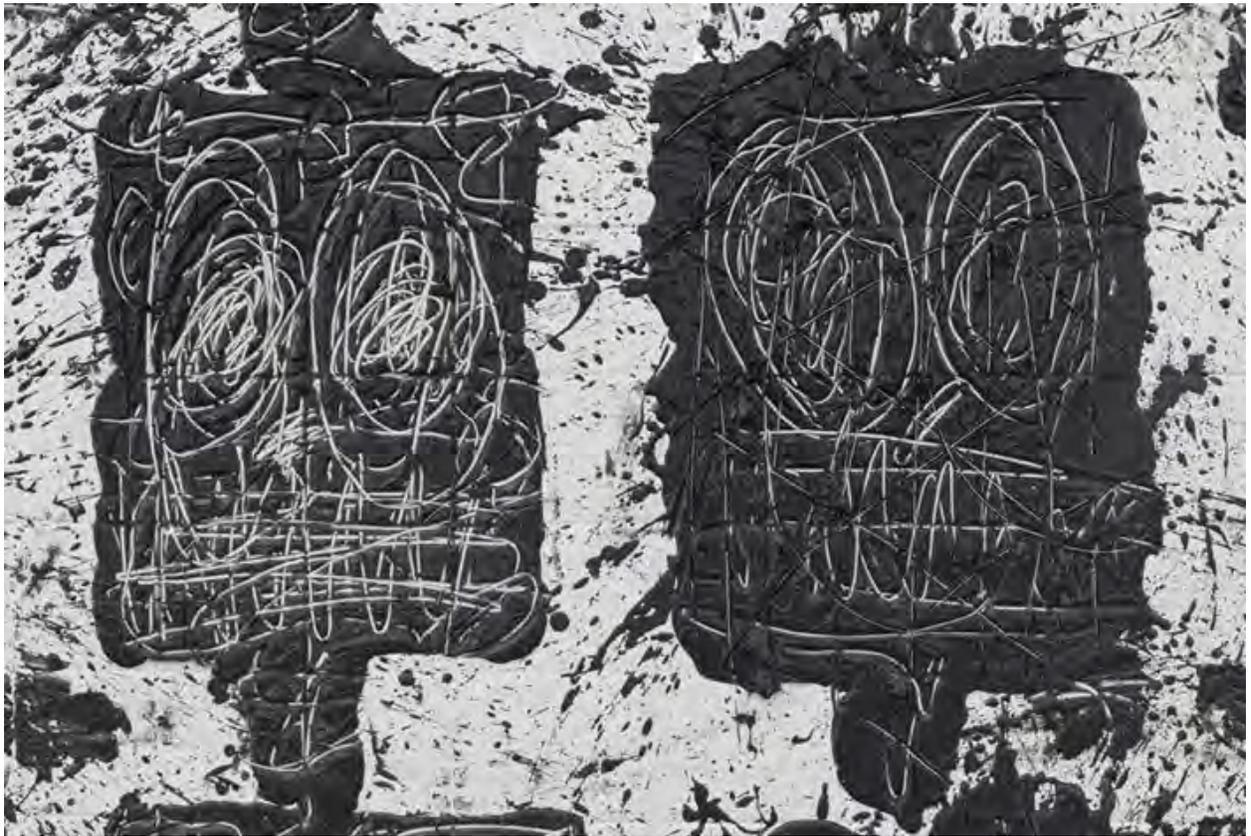
- Consider the aesthetic choices made by the artist: the reflectiveness of the dark plexiglass, the choice to engrave a historical photograph on its surface, the choice to divide the image into 3 panels, etc. What sensations are evoked by the material properties of the wall piece? What do these creative decisions communicate to you (i.e. are they conveying an idea, a message, a story or a feeling?).
- Why do you think the artist chose to immortalize a structure that no longer exists? What do you make of the 4th, empty (not engraved) pane? Share your thoughts.
- Notice the landscape. In this piece, the rigid industrial structure at the forefront of the image is in stark contrast with the sinuous mountains in the background. Think about the place where you grew up, or find a photograph of a landscape that is meaningful to you. Write about this place or vista. Share your words.
- During your next walk, try to picture your surroundings as they might have appeared in the past, before the construction of condo towers, major thoroughfares, industrial facilities, and other large infrastructures. Make note of your observations.
- At The Power Plant, this piece is surrounded by ambient sounds of heavy machinery: grinders, jackhammers, drills and other powered construction tools. The noises are muted; they seem distant. Imagine this soundscape. In a few sentences, describe the sensations that arise as you transport yourself to this place. Share your thoughts.
- In light of current industrial developments that destroy and transform the face of our Earth in the name of "progress," what can this piece teach us? Share your reflections.



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VIRTUAL SLOW ART DAY: *Anxious Audience*, by Rashid Johnson



Rashid Johnson, *Untitled (Anxious Audience)*, 2016. White ceramic tile, black soap, wax. Courtesy of artist, Hauser & Wirth and David Kordansky Gallery. Photo: Martin Parsekian.

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Anxious Audience is the result of what Rashid Johnson has described as “drawing through erasure.” Here, the gesture of scratching reveals faces within thickly layered black surfaces. Johnson’s work harnesses the rich histories of materials that hold meaning within the African-American cultural identity. Black soap (made from the ashes of burned plant matter and commonly used in West Africa) is mixed with wax and applied onto the white tiled surface. Johnson’s *Anxious Audience*, the culmination of the *Anxious Men* series, came about from a desire to transmit his personal experience of anxiety, especially heightened by a political climate of increasing division in the United States. “It’s about how the body becomes accustomed to the conditions of stress and anxiety,” [explains Johnson](#). “How does the black body function in space when it’s being witnessed, versus when it’s not?”

We invite you to look at the above images for 5-10 minutes.

- Consider the materials and aesthetic choices made by the artist: the expressiveness of the materials, the choice to engrave anxious faces into wax, the decision to depict the faces in a grid formation, the monumental scale of the works, etc. What sensations are evoked by this wall piece? What do these creative decisions communicate to you (i.e. are they conveying an idea, a message, a story or a feeling?).
- What do you make of the empty spaces in the grid? Share your thoughts.



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- Johnson's work frequently references collective emotions and collective aspects of his cultural identity. If you were to depict your own community, or a predominant sentiment shared by its members, how would you do it? Using what materials?
- What are some helpful tactics you've used to deal with day to day anxiety?
- Imagine a dialogue taking place between the figures depicted by Johnson. Share a few lines.
- The faces are assembled as an audience; what are they witnessing? Share your thoughts.
- Rashid Johnson is influenced by hip hop. Send titles of songs that could accompany this work and echo its message.
- This installation in The Power Plant's Fleck Clerestory features works that are the culmination of the *Anxious Men* series, made in 2016 following the American presidential elections. Do you feel that this body of work is of relevance in Toronto and Canada, in 2020? Why?
- Share your reflections, in whichever form.