

Stina Baudin
Adama Delphine Fawundu
Bushra Junaid
Christina Leslie

burnt sugar blue

Curated by francesca ekwuyasi

DALHOUSIE ART GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 11 – NOVEMBER 8, 2026

Adama Delphine Fawundu, *Deep Inside I'm Blue III*, video still, 2017-2026. Courtesy of the Artist.

burnt sugar blue

francesca ekwuyasi



Bushra Junaid, *Portrait in Time I*, 2025. Courtesy of the Artist.

sugar

The history of sugar production and the transatlantic slave trade are inextricably linked. From the mid-17th century, Britain's economy was fueled by British Caribbean plantation-based economies. The production of sugar, coffee, and indigo was made possible by the brutal exploitation of enslaved people. It is estimated that over 12 million Africans were forcibly removed from their homes, transported across the Atlantic ocean (during which an estimated four to six million of them perished), and forced to labour, under inhumane conditions, on British, Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Dutch plantations.

Built on a global system of enslavement and labour exploitation, sugar has become a foodstuff that is ubiquitous in our daily lives.

I am interested in understanding how Black artists contend with this history and its consequences, as well as the role that materiality plays in this contention. This is a massive, unyielding history(ies), and each artist (and person) engages with it through a different entry point. Kara Walker created *A Subtlety*, or the *Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014), a 35 x 75-foot sphinx sculpture with the head of a "mammy" made from thirty-five tons of sugar and sugar paste, as "an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant."[1] María Magdalena Campos-Pons, in *Sugar/Bittersweet*, a mixed-media installation "contends with the sordid history of the Cuban sugar mill industry and her relationship to it in a childhood spent living in a former sugar mill plantation."[2]

In a previous iteration of this exhibition titled *Burnt Sugar*—which was birthed from the Ways of Attuning Curatorial Study Group (2022) facilitated by Liz Ikiriko and Toleen Touk, opened at Critical DIstance Centre for Curators in the fall of 2024—featured the works of artists Oluseye, Shaya Ishaq, Kosichukwu Nnebe, Bushra Junaid, and Delphine Fawundu.

Oluseye focused on the materiality of sugar in an adaptation of his 2022 installation *Hot Commodity* (originally presented at the Albright-Knox Museum) featuring antique vending machines filled with cotton, soil, afro picks, watermelon candy, brown sugar, durags, a black phallus, rum, black-eyed peas, indigo, synthetic hair, cassettes, detergent, basketball figurines, cowries, Air Force 1 sneakers, and bamboo earrings. For *Burnt Sugar*, Oluseye's installation titled *Sugar, Skin, and Everything Between* (2024) centred on the various shades of sugar in a reflection of the many shades of Blackness. Both Shaya Ishaq and Kosichukwu Nnebe had chosen to show photo series with indigo and cassava, respectively, as focal points in exploring the exhibition's themes. In *Daboya Blues* (2018), Ishaq captured the indigo dyeing process; and in *An Inheritance* (2022), Nnebe documented herself processing cassava to extract its poison. As Nnebe described, the steps in the process of producing cassava poison "are reimagined as a recipe passed down from generation to generation... to assert one's subjectivity in the face of an (un)livability that persists in the wake of transatlantic slavery. Turning to forgotten histories of resistance and refusal, the work acts as a meditation on Black rage, not as something to be choked down and repressed, but as a generative and liberatory form of affect."[3] Using similar strategies, both Ishaq and Nnebe's works were meditations on materials (indigo and cassava) to illustrate the complex histories and interconnectedness of a people and their practices, even within the crosshairs of enslavement and exploitation.

And, through self-portraiture and mixed media, Adama Delphine Fawundu's work activated Critical Distance Centre for Curators' billboard. *Sea Whispers for Mami Wata at the Shore of Guanahani* (2020/2024) references the meaning beyond the "mythology" of Mami Wata. To Fawundu, the sea represented the foundation of life on the planet. It's an extremely powerful source of life and sustenance. Fawundu did not centre this work on the trauma of the middle passage, but on the energy of the sea as an original source, in order to recognize our collective power beyond colonial structures and to imagine futures beyond colonial boundaries. Mami Wata embodies both beauty and danger, and her association with the ocean can thus be seen as a way of reclaiming the narrative surrounding the sea, transforming it from a site of historical violence into one of power, spirituality, and cultural continuity. And in the gallery space, Fawundu's mixed media work, *And it Don't Stop...and the story continues in Toronto* (2021–2024), consisting of photo lumens, cyanotypes, block prints, laser prints, raffia, hair, film, and digital negatives continued a photography-based conversation with Ishaq and Nnebe's work, while also inviting more texture to the space.

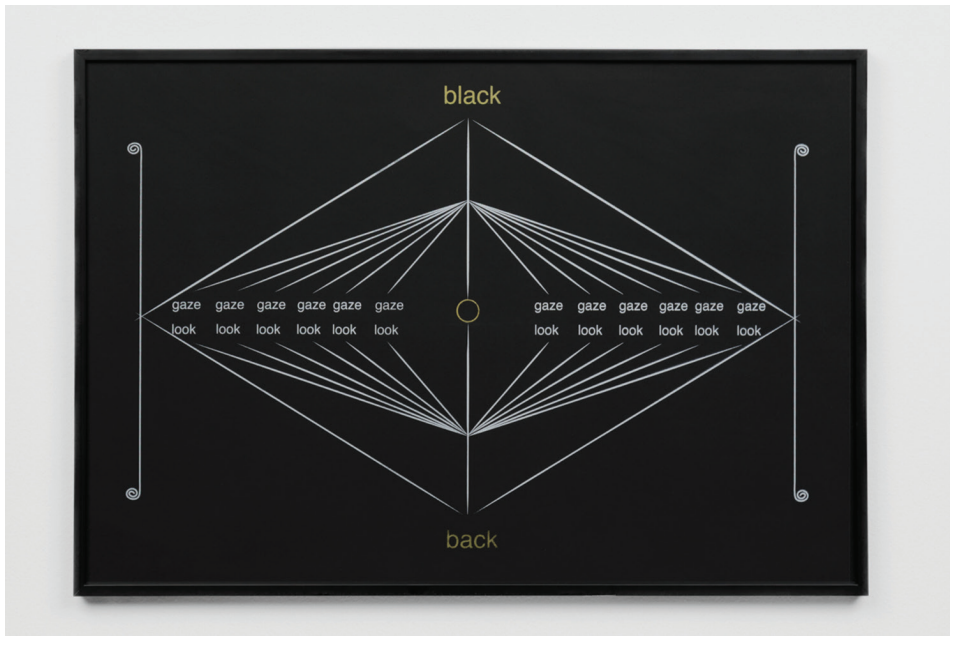
blue

In this current iteration, *Burnt Sugar Blue*, Stina Baudin's *Black Cartographies* reimagines the graph as a "mapping tool meant to visualize the dualities that lie within the association of objects."[4] The work inquires how this reimagining/repurposing might redefine our notions of history and of the self within space; how it might direct us to a new "spatial understanding of history and the Black diasporic self".

Bushra Junaid returns to *Burnt Sugar Blue* with new work, *Portraits in Time Series*—(*Portrait in Time Past and Present*, *Portrait in Time I*, and *Portrait in Time III*), which employs the format of a stereoview, positioning "the viewer between temporal, cultural, and familial dimensions."[5] In these works, Junaid pairs archival photographs of Caribbean children working in a field (Planting Cane, Island of St. Kitts) with a faded family photograph of children playing by the ocean; and archival images of Caribbean women and children working among heaps of cane stalks (Preparing Cane Stalks for Replanting, Island of St. Kitts) with archival images of men and women working with dry fish (The Battery, St. John's, Women and Men Working on Flakes, Drying Fish)—these contrasts and continuity speak to the afterlives of enslavement and the echoes of dignity and survival through to the present.

Christina Leslie's *Sugar Coat* series engages sugar both in context and materiality. Layering her personal archives of Jamaica with contemporary and historical advertisements for sugar, constructed images, and appropriations of pro-slavery literature, Leslie's work aims at redressing the disconnect between sugar and its dark history[6].

After undergoing two years of evolution since showing at the first iteration of this curatorial project, Adama Delphine Fawundu's *And it Don't Stop...*—a mixed media work consisting of photo lumens, cyanotypes, block prints, laser prints, raffia, hair, film,



Stina Baudin, *Black Gaze*, 2025-ongoing. Courtesy of the Artist.

and digital negatives returns to *Burnt Sugar Blue* along with a triptych video work titled *Deep Inside I'm Blue III* on the travels of a Mende spirit[7] through the African continent and its diaspora.

The meditation on blue in this iteration of my curatorial research and interest is informed by indigo. Indigofera tinctoria and lonchocarpus cyanescens—or Èlú in Yoruba—was in such high demand in the 17th and 18th centuries that profits from indigo surpassed those of sugar and cotton.[8] West African people, who possessed centuries-old knowledge in the cultivation and extraction of the blue pigment from the plant were enslaved and forced to labour on indigo plantations[9]. Its mesmerising colour, the alchemical process required to draw out the colour, and its inextricable and devastating connection to the transatlantic slavetrade and its afterlives have struck me so profoundly that I see blue everywhere.

FOOTNOTES

1 Doreen St. Félix, "Kara Walker's Next Act," *Vulture*, April 16, 2017, https://www.vulture. com/2017/04/kara-walker-after-a-subtlety.html.
2 Dell M. Hamilton, "Sugar/Bittersweet," The Ethelbert Cooper Gallery of African & African American Art, accessed September 11, 2024, https://coopergallery.fas.harvard.edu/galleries/mar%C3%ADa-magdalena-campos-pons-sugarbittersweet.
3 "Kosichukwu Nnebe: An Inheritance," *Coloured Conversations*, accessed August 2024, https://www.colouredconversations.com/an-inheritance.
4 Artist 2026: *Stina Baudin*. SymposiumBSP.com. (n.d.). https://symposiumbsp.com/en/artists/2026/stina-baudin-91
5 Trotz-Motayne, K. (2025, December 15). *C mag*. _Portraits in Time_ by Bushra Junaid: Text. https://cmagazine.com/articles/portraits-in-time-by-bushra-junaid-text
6 Leslie, C. (n.d.). *Sugar coat*. Christina Leslie Website. https://www.christinaleslie.com/sugar-coat
7 Fawundu, A. D. (2019, April 5). *Verify to continue*. Vimeo Interactive Video Experience Platform. https://vimeo.com/328574108
8 (2011, November 7). *Indigo: The indelible color that ruled the world*. https://www.npr.org/2011/11/07/142094103/indigo-the-indelible-color-that-ruled-the-world
9 Kendell , F. (2022). *A Short History of the Color Indigo*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDQ6p9M9g-dU&t=1s



Christina Leslie, *Hope and Present Chapter: Free*, 2021. Courtesy of Stephen Bulger Gallery.

list of works

Stina Baudin

Black Gaze 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
38.1 x 55.8

Water, water 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
38.1 x 55.8

Mapping 'x' 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
55.8 x 38.1

Double Consciousness 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
38.1 x 55.8

Time's function 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
30.5 x 40.8

Truth vs. reason 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
30.5 x 40.8

Here, but also here 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
40.8 x 30.5

Sum partial truth 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
30.5 x 40.8

Beyond logic 2025-ongoing
silkscreen with acrylic inks on cotton rag, edition of 10
30.5 x 40.8

Adama Delphine Fawundu

And it Don't Stop...Brooklyn, Toronto, Kinshasa, Lüneburg... And the story continues in Halifax 2021-2026
dimensions variable

Deep Inside I'm Blue III 2017-2026
video installation, 3:23 mins.

Bushra Junaid

Portrait in Time I 2025
digital presentation; archival photographs and text on recycled fabric

Portrait in Time III 2025
digital presentation; archival photographs and text on recycled fabric

Portrait in Time (Past and Present) 2025
digital image

Christina Leslie
Courtesy of Stephen Bulger Gallery

Hope and Present: Escape
printed in 2021
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (PP 1/1)
71.1 x 55.9

Hope and Present Chapter: Free 2021
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on archival paper, edition of 10 + 3 APs (PP 1/1)
55.9 x 71.1

Cecilia 2021
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (#1/10)
60.9 x 45.7

Sugar Ship 2022
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (#1/10)
45.7 x 60.9

Sugar Scars 2021
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (#1/10)
45.7 x 60.9

Progress of Sugar 2022
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (#1/10)
60.9 x 45.7

Samuel 2021
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (#1/10)
45.7 x 60.9

Maroon Rebellion 2021
from the series *Sugar Coat*
pigment print on sugar cane paper, edition of 10 + 2 APs (#1/10)
60.9 x 45.7

All works courtesy of the Artists unless noted.
(Centimeters, height x width x depth)

biographies

CURATOR

francesca ekwuyasi is an acclaimed writer and artist whose interdisciplinary practice engages literature, visual art, memory, family, migration, and Black diasporic experience. In *Burnt Sugar Blue*, ekwuyasi brings together four contemporary artists whose practices move between historical research, personal memory, material experimentation, and contemporary forms of image-making.

ARTISTS

Stina Baudin is a Haitian-Canadian artist and scholar based in CAN/ US. She has studied at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada and at The Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, Belgium. She is a 2025 graduate from Cranbrook Academy of the Arts in Michigan, USA.

Stina's work feature mixed media including data, sonic mappings, text, archival materials, and oral histories to tell stories about Black people and their contested histories. Bringing together these narratives through intricate patterns, her work bridges the divisions between traditional narrative and data, truth, and myth. In this way, her work seeks to give expression to the varied bodies of knowledge that emerge through geographical movement, ritual, ancestry and history. Stina is recipient of the Gilbert Foundation Scholarship (US) and the Maxwell/ Hanrahan Foundation Materials Award (US) from Cranbrook Academy of the Arts. Recent exhibitions include the Toronto Biennial of Art (2024), Cranbrook Museum of Fine Arts, and Centre Clark (CA). She has been awarded residencies at ZK/U Berlin, the Banff Centre for Art and Creativity (CA), and Pocoapoco (MX). Her work has been supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, Holon Berlin and CALQ (Conseil des Arts du Québec).

Adama Delphine Fawundu is an artist born in Brooklyn, NY, the ancestral space of the Lenni-Lanape. She is a descendant of the Mende, Krim, Bamileke, and Bubi peoples, and her distinct visual language centres indigenization and the power in ancestral knowledge and memory through photography, printmaking, video, sound, and assemblage. Fawundu is an Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at Columbia University and co-publisher of the critically acclaimed book *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*. She is a 2024 Guggenheim Fellow and her works are in the collections of the Newark Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Portland Museum of Art, amongst other private and public collections.

Bushra Junaid is a multidisciplinary artist and curator based in Toronto whose work probes themes of history, memory, identity, and place-making in the diasporas of African-descended peoples. Recent projects include *What Carries Us: Newfoundland and Labrador in the Black Atlantic* at The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery (2020) which included video, mixed media, mural, and photo-based works by Canadian and international artists as well as rare archival items, pivoting on Paul Gilroy's concept of the "Black Atlantic" while also reflecting on John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015). In 2016, Junaid co-curated *New-Found-Lands: An Art Project Exploring Historical and Contemporary Connections Between Newfoundland and the Caribbean Diaspora* at Eastern Edge Gallery. Junaid's work has been exhibited as part of *Future Possible: The Art of Newfoundland and Labrador to 1949* (The Rooms, 2018); *Like Sugar* (Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, 2019); *They Forgot That We Were Seeds* (Carleton University Art Gallery, 2020); and *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art* (Royal Ontario Museum; Montreal Museum of Fine Art; and Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2018-2019), among others.

Junaid has a Bachelor of Environmental Design and a Masters of Architecture from the Technical University of Nova Scotia. Her artwork is included in the collections of The Rooms, Carleton University Art Gallery, Tang Teaching Museum, TD Bank, and Toronto Public Library Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books.

Christina Leslie is a Toronto-based artist and independent curator whose lens-based art practice delves into decolonization, identity, migration, marginalization, and her West Indian heritage. Using experimental photography and text, she explores the intersections of history, memory, and race to create thought-provoking visual narratives. She holds a B.F.A. from OCAD University (2006) and an M.F.A. from the Savannah College of Art and Design (2022). Recently, she served as Interim Assistant Curator at the McMaster Museum of Art in Hamilton and curated their latest collection exhibition *THE GREAT UNSEEN* (May–Oct 2025).

Leslie's photographs have been shown at major institutions worldwide, including GAMU in Prague, Oakland University in Michigan, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's Pier 21, the Art Gallery of Windsor, the Caribbean Art Fair in Jamaica, the McMaster Museum of Art, Paris Photo, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Toronto, and galleries in Hamilton including Latchman Gallery and Smokestack Gallery. Solo exhibitions include *Likkle Acts* at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Nov 2024–Apr 2025), *Pinhole Portraits and Places* at Stephen Bulger Gallery (May–July 2025), and *Sugar Coat* at the Ottawa School of Art (July–Aug 2025). Her artwork is held in the permanent collections of the Wedge Collection, the Art Gallery of Ontario, TD Bank, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, the McMaster Museum of Art, and Doris McCarthy Gallery. She is a 2026 Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Award finalist award recipient. Leslie is represented by Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto.

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