

ENGINE  
FOR ART  
DEMOCRACY  
& JUSTICE  
**EADJ**

SOMEWHERE...  
WE ARE HUMAN

SPRING 2025



Between Rivers and Revolutions

The 2024-2025 Public Programs and Engagement Series of the Engine for Art, Democracy & Justice (EADJ) at Vanderbilt University is organized around the thematic north star—**Somewhere We Are Human**—a collective vision for a time and space where no one's humanity is ever in question. The year-long series looks at the city of Nashville and the American South through a lens of migration, exploring the ways immigrant communities have shaped the region's history and are envisioning its future through art and activism.

Via exhibitions, conversations, community meals, film screenings, readings, research, and education programs, **Somewhere We Are Human** gathers local and global artists, curators, writers, filmmakers, educators, scholars, chefs, and community leaders invested in being catalysts for equity, democracy, and justice. **Between Rivers and Revolutions** (on view March 28 to June 13, 2025) is the third and final exhibition in the series curated by Grace Aneiza Ali.

\*Somewhere We Are Human takes its title from the anthology gathering voices on migration, survival, and new beginnings, edited by Reyna Grande and Sonia Guñansaca.

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**Somewhere We Are Human** is conceived and organized by Curator Grace Aneiza Ali with the leadership of María Magdalena Campos-Pons, EADJ Founder and Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Art and support of the EADJ Team, Simon Tatum and Danielle Myers.





**Vanessa Charlot** is a Miami-born, Haitian American photographer known for her evocative black-and-white photography. Her award-winning work challenges preconceptions of Haiti, capturing narratives of power and vulnerability with deep empathy. Charlot's images explore the intersectionality of race, politics, culture, socio-economics, and gender expression. She serves as an Assistant Professor of Creative Multimedia at the University of Mississippi School of Journalism and New Media.

*Between Rivers and Revolutions* (installation view)

# Vanessa Charlot

## Between Rivers and Revolutions

The river remembers—carrying the echoes of those who fought for liberation. Vanessa Charlot's lens moves between the waters of the Mississippi Delta, the tides of Haiti, and the currents off Florida's coast. She traces the spiritual, cultural, and revolutionary ties that bind these landscapes—a journey shaped by her own lived experience as a Miami-born Haitian American, now rooted in Mississippi.

With a visual aesthetic both documentary and poetic, Charlot juxtaposes the Mississippi Delta—shaped by the labor of the enslaved—with Haiti, the first free Black republic, forged in revolution. Between them, Florida's waters serve as both passage and threshold—for migrants, refugees, and dreamers. Spiritual traditions—Vodou, Candomblé, and Catholicism—form an unbroken current of reverence, resistance, and survival. A devotee offers prayers to Oshun; a Candomblé priestess kneels before Yemaya's waves; a woman bows in Good Friday prayer, her faith intertwined with generations before her.

Charlot's images also capture the sacred pause between past and future, stillness and movement. In Morgan City, Mississippi, an elderly man gazes over land that once enslaved his ancestors but now belongs to his family. In Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, a man watches resistance unfold, his steady eyes reflecting a nation gripped in protest and mourning.

Each frame collapses distance, showing how these spaces—and the waters that connect them—speak to one another. In *Between Rivers and Revolutions*, Charlot reminds us that these places are bound not only by struggle, but by the enduring spirit of those who move through to reclaim them.

—Grace Aneiza Ali, Curator



*Rivers of Reverence*, 2019

## **Rivers of Reverence**

Virginia Key Beach, Miami, Florida, 2019

In *Rivers of Reverence*, Charlot captures an Ifá practitioner in the warm, golden rivers of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, as she venerates the Orisa Oshun—the guardian of rivers and life-giving waters. Her face veiled, she is adorned in flowing fabric, cascading beads, and a crown of flowers and thorns. In Fort Lauderdale's waterways, rituals to Oshun continue as part of the diasporic spiritual practices carried from West Africa to the Americas. Here, the body is an altar, the water a conduit of memory—linking past and present.

Whether through the ritual devotion of the priestess we see here in *Rivers of Reverence*, or through the Candomblé priestess kneeling at the water's edge in *Reverence, By the Sea*, or the playful self-adornment of a child bathing with flowers in *Petals of Youth*, Charlot's images witness spiritual connection through water. In each, water is a space where the body is tended to with reverence. These moments remind us that the everyday and the divine are intertwined, that rituals—whether personal or spiritual—flow across generations and geographies, shaping how we honor ourselves.



top *Prayers in the Sacred Space*, 2021

bottom *Reverence, By the Sea*, 2019

## **Prayers in the Sacred Space**

Notre Dame D'Haiti Catholic Church, Little Haiti, Miami, Florida, 2021

## **Reverence, By the Sea**

Virginia Key Beach, Miami, Florida, 2019

Charlot's work explores the fluid interplay of Catholicism and Vodou in Haitian spirituality. A common saying in Haiti is that the country is "90% Catholic and 100% Vodou," a reflection of how these traditions coexist. These two images embody acts of devotion—one within church walls, the other at the water's edge; one seeking solace in Catholicism, the other honoring Yemaya in the ocean's embrace—revealing how Black diasporic spirituality moves seamlessly between African and Christian traditions.

In *Prayers in the Sacred Space*, a Haitian woman bows in deep prayer, arms resting on a pew, fingers gently curled. Draped in white, she is both tender and resolute. Photographed on Good Friday at Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church in Miami's Little Haiti, this moment speaks to the interwoven legacies of faith, migration, and cultural identity. In the stillness of this sacred space, Charlot captures both vulnerability and strength.

In *Reverence, By the Sea*, a Candomblé priestess kneels at the water's edge, crowned in flora, hands extended, head bowed in devotion. She venerates Orisa Yemaya—mother of all waters, protector of life, and guide to those who cross them. Captured on Virginia Key Beach in Miami, this moment frames the ocean as both a site of spiritual refuge and historical remembrance, recalling its role as a sanctuary for Black people during Jim Crow-era segregation.



*Between Rivers and Revolutions* (installation view)



*Between Rivers and Revolutions* (installation view)



*Exhale*, 2021

## **Exhale**

Miami, Florida, 2021

A woman finds rest in the cascading water of her shower. In the foreground, a soft yellow peony is in sharp focus, while the silhouetted woman remains blurred. Here water is both cleansing and revealing—a space where exhaustion meets renewal. The contrast suggests both fragility and resilience, the ways in which beauty and labor, visibility, and erasure, coexist within the lives of Haitian women.

“There’s something illuminating yet vulnerable in watching my mother age,” notes Charlot about this portrait, “a quiet testament to the strength found in the daily grind of survival.” Charlot’s mother is a woman of migration, carrying the weight of movement across lands and generations. *Exhale* speaks to migration as a journey inscribed on the body—the labor of building a life elsewhere, the quiet resilience of survival, the longing for rest.

Paired with the image, *Petals of Youth*, where Charlot’s son bathes with bougainvillea flowers, *Exhale* becomes part of an intergenerational reflection on rest. One body, young and weightless, revels in the beauty of self-adornment; another, weary and shadowed by a peony, carries the imprints of time and labor.



top *Voices of the Ancestors*, 2019  
bottom *Rhythms of Resistance*, 2021

## **Voices of the Ancestors**

Durham, North Carolina, 2019

## **Rhythms of Resistance**

Little Haiti, Miami, Florida, 2021

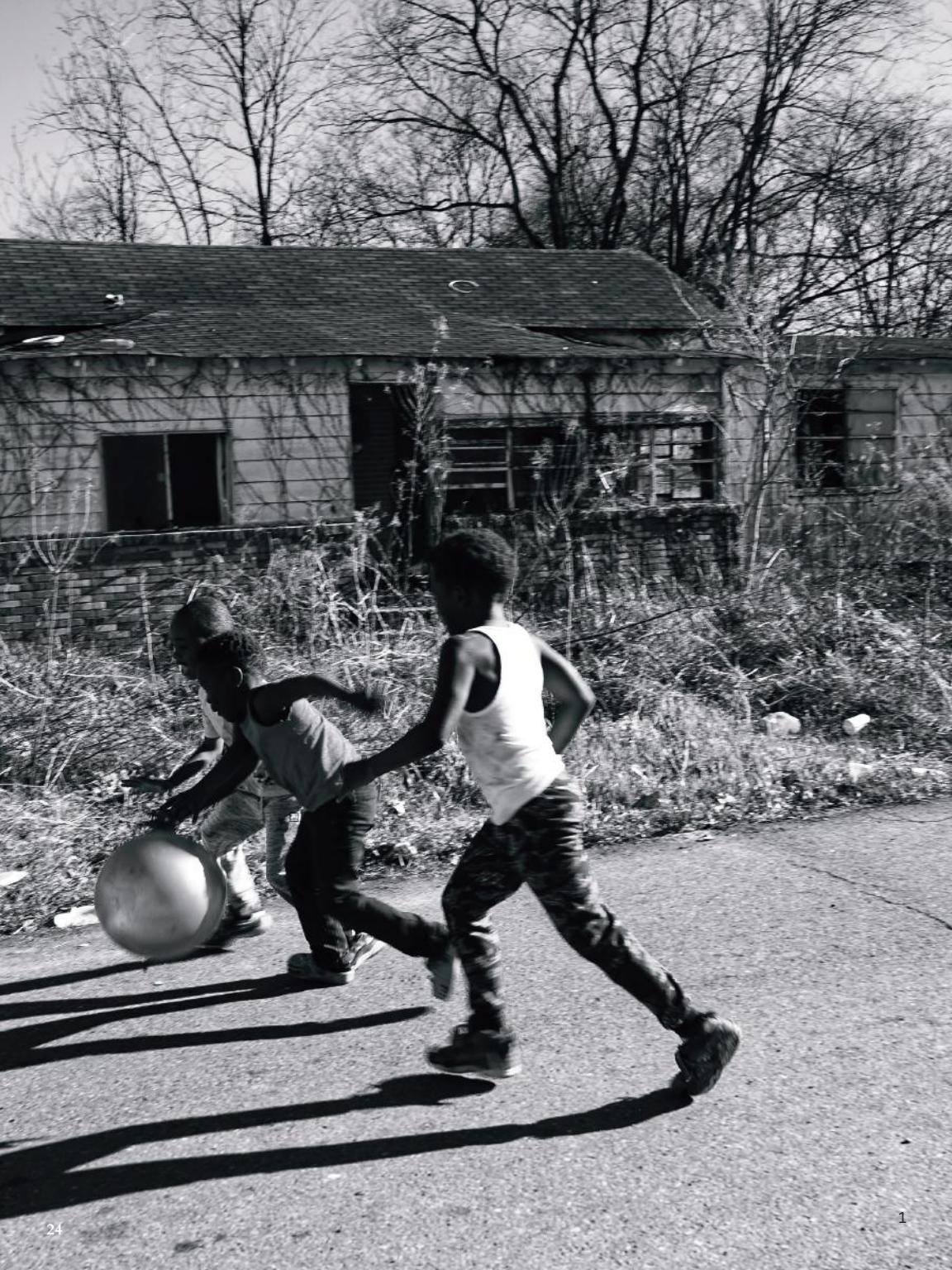
Across sacred sites in North Carolina and Miami, Charlot documents Haitian women at the heart of worship, resistance, and ancestral communion. From whispered prayers to ritual dances, stillness to movement, Charlot reveals how these gatekeepers help Haitians remain connected.

In *Voices of the Ancestors*, two Vodou priestesses lean into one another, hands cradling an enamel cup. Their quiet exchange embodies reverence, wisdom, and shared understanding. Captured during a Vodou ceremony in North Carolina, this intimate moment shows faith moving through touch, ritual, and presence.

In *Rhythms of Resistance*, Haitian women move with the heartbeat of Vodou. Captured in Little Haiti, Miami, an enclave where Haitian spiritual traditions are fiercely protected, this image speaks to Vodou as both spiritual practice and embodied resistance. Charlot's lens lingers in the blur of motion and stillness, honoring dance as a living archive of liberation.



top *Between Rivers and Revolutions* (installation view)  
right *Children of the Fields*, 2021





## Petals of Youth

Miami, Florida, 2022

In this image we are shown a private act of joy—a child bathing in petals, claiming his own beauty. “There’s something about seeing my son adorning himself with flowers that makes my heart smile. His self-care,” notes Charlot. Here, Jacob, at ten years old, bathes in the golden light of late afternoon. His skin glistens with water, his hair adorned with delicate fuchsia bougainvillea petals. Known for its resilience and beauty, bougainvillea thrives in the tropical landscape of Miami, just as it has across the African diaspora. Captured in the family’s home in Miami, this image speaks to the gentle, unguarded rituals of childhood. Charlot’s lens, intimate and observant, honors this fleeting moment where Black boyhood is allowed to be tender, unburdened, and whole.

Whether through the playful self-adornment of a child or the ritual devotion of the priestess in *Rivers of Reverence*, or in the Candomblé priestess kneeling at the water’s edge in *Reverence, By the Sea*, Charlot’s images witness spiritual connection through water. In each, water is a space where the body is tended to with reverence. Through Charlot’s lens, these moments remind us that the everyday and the divine are intertwined, that rituals—whether personal or spiritual—flow across generations and geographies, shaping how we honor ourselves.



*Shadows of the Fallen*, 2021

## **Shadows of the Fallen**

Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, 2021

Across Haiti's streets, Charlot traces the intersections of resistance and resolve. In *Shadows of the Fallen*, Charlot photographs a Haitian man on the boardwalk in Cap-Haïtien, his gaze locked onto the scene of protest before him, which is outside the frame. Captured in the aftermath of President Jovenel Moïse's assassination in 2021, this moment speaks to Haiti's cycles of unrest and resilience. The air is thick with grief and fire—a nation is in mourning. The man's posture, weary yet resolute, echoes the cycles of revolution that have shaped Haiti since its birth as the world's first free Black republic. It is a portrait of Haiti beyond headlines—a land of revolution and ritual, protest and grief, and the quiet presence of those who remain.



top *Echoes of the Enslaved*, 2021

bottom *Children of the Fields*, 2021



top *Paid in Full*, 2021

bottom *Picking Cotton Dreams*, 2021

## **Down in the Delta Series**

Quito Plantation, Morgan City, Mississippi, 2021

Charlot's project, *Down in the Delta*, is a visual archive of Roosevelt Davenport (b. 1937), a former sharecropper, and his family, who worked on and now own land on the Quito Plantation in Morgan City, Mississippi where their ancestors were enslaved. In these photographs, Charlot reveals a diasporic thread—from the plantations of Mississippi to the Lakous in Haiti to the enclaves of Little Haiti, Miami—Black communities transform places of pain into sites of permanence.

### **Echoes of the Enslaved**

The abandoned quarters of the enslaved stand in quiet decay—weathered wood, broken doors, and barren trees bearing witness to histories not yet laid to rest. The Mississippi Delta, once the epicenter of forced labor, now holds both its ghosts and its heirs. This land carries the weight of survival, the unspoken stories of those who labored under oppression. Yet, just beyond these walls, a new generation moves freely, shaping a different future.

### **Children of the Fields**

In fields where their ancestors once toiled, children run, their playfulness rising like a counterpoint to the land's brutal history. Their bodies stretch long against the earth. In contrast to the silence of the past, their movement embodies reclamation—a reminder that joy, too, is an inheritance. The Mississippi Delta remains haunted by its contradictions, but here, in the dust-kissed air, there is proof that life persists.

## **Paid in Full**

At 87 years old, Roosevelt Davenport stands on his porch, his hand resting on the doorframe—a steady hold on past and present. Before him stretch the fields where his ancestors were enslaved. Now, he owns the land that once bound them. Similar to Haiti's Lakou, where enslaved Africans created spaces of freedom, Davenport's home is now the foundation of his family's future.

## **Picking Cotton Dreams**

Standing alone in the cotton fields, Terrence Davenport, a retired Army veteran, and the son of Roosevelt Davenport, carries both the weight of history and the dignity of reclamation. His bare chest meets the same sun that once bore down on his ancestors. The land that claimed their labor now belongs to him.

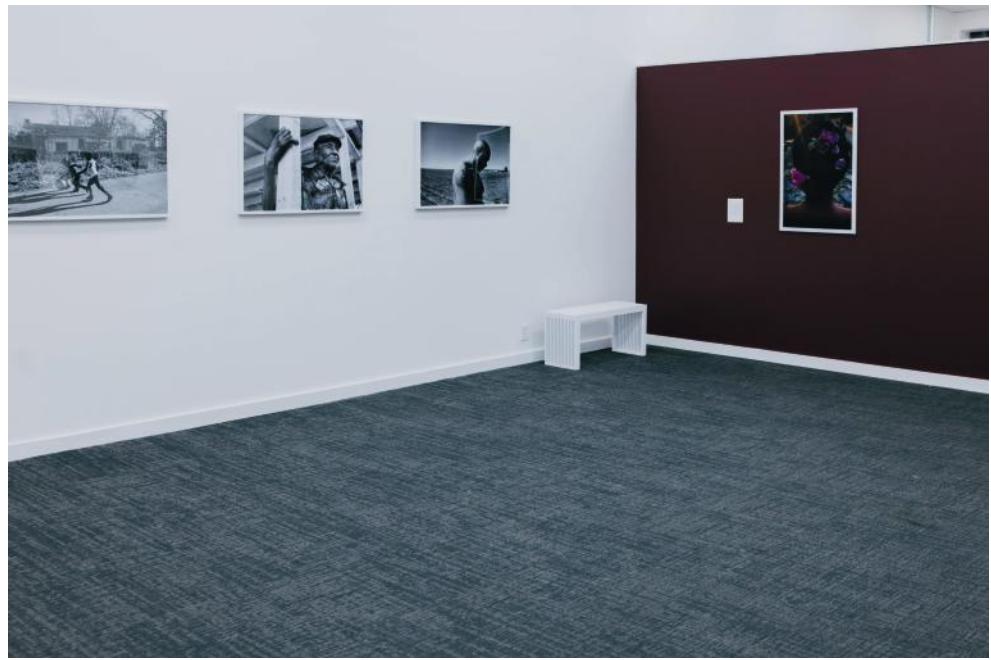
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*Echoes of the Enslaved*, 2021 (detail)

*Picking Cotton Dreams*, 2021 (detail)







*Between Rivers and Revolutions* (installation view)

## Works in the exhibition

### *Rivers of Reverence*

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 2019

Digital print on vinyl, 154 in. x 177 in.

### *Prayers in the Sacred Space*

Notre Dame D'Haiti Catholic Church, Little Haiti, Miami, Florida, 2021

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 30 in. x 40 in.

### *Reverence, By the Sea*

Virginia Key Beach, Miami, Florida, 2019

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 30 in. x 40 in.

### *Exhale*

Miami, Florida, 2021

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 24 in. x 36 in.

### *Voices of the Ancestors*

Durham, North Carolina, 2019

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 24 in. x 36 in.

### *Rhythms of Resistance*

Little Haiti, Miami, Florida, 2021

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 24 in. x 36 in.

### *Petals of Youth*

Miami, Florida, 2022

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 36 in. x 24 in.

### *Down in the Delta Series*

Quito Plantation, Morgan City, Mississippi, 2021

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 36 in. x 24 in. (all images)

#### *Echoes of the Enslaved*

#### *Children of the Fields*

#### *Paid in Full*

#### *Picking Cotton Dreams*

### *Shadows of the Fallen*

Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, 2021

Digital print on Epson glossy paper, 36 in. x 24 in.

All artwork images © Vanessa Charlot, courtesy of the artist

Installation images by LeXander Bryant

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Founded by María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Art, EADJ explores creative approaches to living together in the Global South(s) through a platform for academic, creative and social exploration at the intersection of art, democracy and justice. It is a trans-institutional initiative among Fisk University, Frist Art Museum, Millions of Conversations and Vanderbilt University.

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