

Fall 2018

## **OTHERED: Displaced From Malaga**

USM Art Gallery

Carolyn Eyler

Daniel Minter

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/usmag\\_catalogs](https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/usmag_catalogs)

---

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the USM Art Gallery Exhibitions at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in USM Art Gallery Catalogs by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu](mailto:jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu).



**OTHERED:**  
Displaced from Malaga

U.S. COAST SURVEY  
A.D. BASCHE AND BENJN. PEIRCE, SUPERINTENDENTS  
**CASCO BAY**  
MAINE

**TIDES**

The plane of reference to which the soundings are given is Mean Low Water. Currents, Ebb and Flow, are given in feet per hour.

Month	Day	Hour	Height	Direction
Jan	1	10	1.0	SE
Jan	11	10	1.0	SE
Jan	21	10	1.0	SE
Jan	31	10	1.0	SE
Feb	1	10	1.0	SE
Feb	11	10	1.0	SE
Feb	21	10	1.0	SE
Feb	31	10	1.0	SE
Mar	1	10	1.0	SE
Mar	11	10	1.0	SE
Mar	21	10	1.0	SE
Mar	31	10	1.0	SE
Apr	1	10	1.0	SE
Apr	11	10	1.0	SE
Apr	21	10	1.0	SE
Apr	31	10	1.0	SE
May	1	10	1.0	SE
May	11	10	1.0	SE
May	21	10	1.0	SE
May	31	10	1.0	SE
Jun	1	10	1.0	SE
Jun	11	10	1.0	SE
Jun	21	10	1.0	SE
Jun	31	10	1.0	SE
Jul	1	10	1.0	SE
Jul	11	10	1.0	SE
Jul	21	10	1.0	SE
Jul	31	10	1.0	SE
Aug	1	10	1.0	SE
Aug	11	10	1.0	SE
Aug	21	10	1.0	SE
Aug	31	10	1.0	SE
Sep	1	10	1.0	SE
Sep	11	10	1.0	SE
Sep	21	10	1.0	SE
Sep	31	10	1.0	SE
Oct	1	10	1.0	SE
Oct	11	10	1.0	SE
Oct	21	10	1.0	SE
Oct	31	10	1.0	SE
Nov	1	10	1.0	SE
Nov	11	10	1.0	SE
Nov	21	10	1.0	SE
Nov	31	10	1.0	SE
Dec	1	10	1.0	SE
Dec	11	10	1.0	SE
Dec	21	10	1.0	SE
Dec	31	10	1.0	SE

**LIGHT HOUSES**

Name	Location	Height	Color	Light	Order
Pearl Harbor L.H.	42° 27' 12" N 69° 12' 00" W	110	White	100	10
Pearl Harbor Redoubt L.H.	43° 20' 18" N 70° 13' 48" W	65.5	Red	25	10

**OTHERED:**  
Displaced from Malaga

**OTHERED:** Displaced from Malaga  
An exhibition by USM Artist-in-Residence Daniel Minter  
USM Art Gallery, Gorham, Maine  
October 4-December 9, 2018

**Thanks** to USM Maine history professor Libby Bischof for her assistance with the Malaga Island panel discussion and related programming and for providing exhibition maps as the new Executive Director of the Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education at USM. Also thanks to Dean Adam Tuchinsky of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences for his general supportive enthusiasm and grant stewardship efforts along with Leadership Gift Officer Eileen Olberholtzer.

USM is deeply grateful to the **Warren Memorial Foundation's Visiting Artist Series** for their support of the 2018 Daniel Minter artist residency.

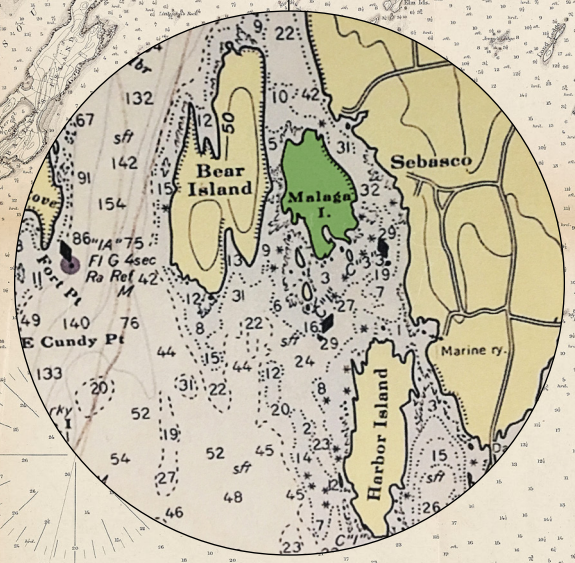


WARREN MEMORIAL FOUNDATION



Catalog design by Montgomery Design.  
Printed by J.S. McCarthy Printers  
©2019 University of Southern Maine  
Henry J. Drewall essay ©2019.  
Daniel Minter artwork and installation photography by Tim Greenway.

MAP: U.S. Coast Survey (A.D. Basche and Benjn. Peirce, Superintendents), Casco Bay, Maine, 1870. Osher Map Library Sheet Map Collection. Image courtesy of Osher Map Library, University of Southern Maine.





*Malaga Island, Maine: [photo by Daniel Minter]*

## Foreword



The global themes and regional focus on Malaga Island in Daniel Minter's art have been brought to fruition at USM. His 2018 Department of Art artist residency was initiated a few years ago when I was chatting with USM Professor Rob Sanford at a faculty coffee klatch about his and Professor Nathan Hamilton's longstanding research on Malaga Island. When Rob casually mentioned Daniel Minter's involvement, I suddenly forgot my coffee cup in hand. That Daniel, a Portland artist I admire, had an ongoing working relationship with USM professors on a vital Maine subject was extraordinary. It seemed that an artist residency could uniquely position USM to generate multidisciplinary programming about Malaga Island with Daniel's art installation as a centerpiece.

While Daniel ceaselessly worked to produce paintings in his campus studio during the fall 2018 seven-week artist residency, it was rewarding to help coordinate the exhibition and connect with the Malaga panel speakers who have been engaged in research and artistic projects concerning Malaga for years, often in collaboration: Rob Sanford, Nathan Hamilton, Kate McBrien, Kate McMahan, and Myron Beasley. Their insightful essays, alongside the writing about Daniel's installation by nationally recognized art writer Henry J. Drewall, will ensure this catalog serves Maine's teaching communities, Malaga descendants and other Mainers, and art enthusiasts everywhere to see the past in new ways so we may move forward.

—Carolyn Eyler,  
USM Director of Exhibitions and Programs  
[usm.maine.edu/gallery](http://usm.maine.edu/gallery)

## Contributors and Table of Contents

**Kate McMahon** received her B.A. in Art History and M.A. in American and New England Studies from USM. She completed her Ph.D. in History at Howard University in 2017. She is employed as a Museum Specialist at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, D.C.

*A Traffic in Human Suffering* ..... p8

**Kate McBrien** is an historian and independent museum professional. In 2012, she curated the award-winning exhibit Malaga Island, Fragmented Lives for the Maine State Museum in Augusta, Maine. She continues to research this history and works with community descendants to uncover and document their past.

*The Story of Malaga* ..... p10

**Robert M. Sanford** is Professor of Environmental Science & Policy at the University of Southern Maine. His primary field of study is environmental planning. He is also a Registered Professional Archaeologist and collaborates with Professor Nathan Hamilton on the archaeology of Malaga Island and Casco Bay.

*Archeology, Malaga and Minter* ..... p17

**Nathan D. Hamilton**, PhD is Associate Professor of Archaeology in the Geography-Anthropology Program. Nate has excavated numerous sites representative of all towns surrounding Casco Bay. In the past 10 years he has taught for the Shoals Marine Laboratory and excavated the 17th century European cod fishing station on Smuttynose Island at the Isles of Shoals.

*Archeology, Malaga and Minter* ..... p17

**Henry John Drewal** is currently the Evjue-Bascom Professor of African and African Diaspora arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has written many books, catalogues, and articles, curated exhibitions, and created a series of artful documentary films. He is interested in the multi-sensorial aspects of the arts, both ancient and contemporary, in Africa and in its many diasporas. [www.henrydrewal.com](http://www.henrydrewal.com)

*Revelations: Bitter History, Enduring Spirit in the Art of Daniel Minter* ..... p20

**Myron M. Beasley**, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at Bates College. He is scholar and international curator. July 2018, he curated Re.Past: Malaga a public memorial in the form of a performative dinner on Malaga Island. He has been awarded fellowships and grants from the Andy Warhol Foundation, the Whiting Foundation, and NEH. [myronbeasley.com](http://myronbeasley.com)

*Memorializing Malaga* ..... p41

### Daniel Minter

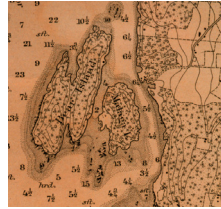
*About the artist* ..... p43

## A Traffic in Human Suffering: Slavery and Malaga Island, Maine

By Dr. Kate McMahon

The history of slavery in Maine, and the state's connections to the broader slave societies of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, has long been absent from the historical narrative of the state. Yet Maine's rise as a state of shipbuilding, fishing, and by the nineteenth century, as a center of fabric production, cannot be divested from the history of enslavement. Slavery was the gasoline in the economic engine of the American republic, and was central to the economy of Maine. Ships constructed across the state were utilized to transport enslaved people from the Upper South to the Lower South in the intercoastal domestic slave trade. Other ships were taken to Africa, transporting captive Africans to slave societies across the New World. Even after the United States abolished its participation in the transoceanic slave trade in 1808, New England ships—and Mainers—continued to traffic in human suffering. Ships like the *Porpoise*<sup>1</sup> and the *Malaga*, hailing from Brunswick, Maine and constructed by Joseph Badger in the 1830s, traveled to Africa to transport enslaved people to Brazil, with mortality rates aboard the ship as high as thirty-five percent, with many enslaved people suffocating before the ship left coastal Africa.<sup>h</sup> The people living in Maine's black communities persevered despite these deep connections to global slavery and racism in the state, forming enclaves like Malaga Island where they could live outside of the racism present in many white towns. Malaga Island became a critical place for black, mixed race, and poor white New Englanders to move to and form deep family bonds and mutual uplift.

On July 1, 1912, the state of Maine completed its formal eviction process of the residents of Malaga Island, institutionalizing (and even sterilizing) several community members and displacing the rest. While the island and its residents were deeply impoverished, the community fostered deep bonds of kinship, family, and mutual progress, relying upon each other for their physical, social, and spiritual needs. The



*Slave ships the Porpoise (above) and the Malaga hailed from Brunswick, Maine and traveled to Africa to transport enslaved people to Brazil [courtesy of Historic New England]*

tragedy of Malaga Island did not come out of nowhere; the actions of the state and local officials in the eviction and institutionalization of the islanders was mediated through hundreds of years of slavery and racism. What happened on Malaga Island follows a long trajectory of the history and afterlives of slavery, racism, science, and politics in Maine which have all contributed to the lack of diversity in the state in the modern day. The tragic story of Malaga Island has deep resonances today, as modern African-descended communities wage new fights to keep their lands, cultures, and traditions despite ongoing racism, violence, and disenfranchisement that has become an increasingly global crisis in recent years.

<sup>1</sup> See Kate McMahon, *The Transnational Dimensions of Africans and African Americans in Northern New England, 1776-1865*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Howard University, 2017), chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Congress, Ex. Doc. No. 61 House of Representatives: *Correspondence Between the Consuls of the United States at Rio de Janeiro, &c., with the Secretary of State, on the Subject of the African Slave Trade*, 30th Congress, 2nd sess., July 21, 1847, 11-12. See also *The Malaga Lovett Et. Al. v. Bispham*, United States Case No. 8,985.



Lobstering on Malaga Island  
[Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]

## The Story of Malaga

By Dr. Kate McBrien

For years, the story of Malaga Island was buried, lost to history and denied by the few who lived it. But today it is a story told repeatedly among families, schools, and communities. It is a story to learn from and remember.

In July 1912 the State of Maine evicted the multi-racial group who called Malaga Island home, to clear the small coastal island of “It’s Shiftless Population of Half-Breed Blacks and Whites” as one 1911 newspaper article described it. Today we know so much about this island’s history due to the notoriety of the community. Because they were different, and visible, many myths quickly grew about this secluded, mixed race community. Consistent with racism in Maine at that time, stories about theft, inbreeding, and illiteracy spread across the nation through newspaper and magazine articles as well as postcards. Christian missionaries who worked on the island documented and spoke about the people who lived there.

Reality was quite different however. Families struggled to meet their basic needs but built homes on the small island off the coast of Phippsburg, Maine, educated their children as much as possible, and interacted with the mainland community peacefully and as needed.

A rapidly changing economy severely influenced the lives of the Malaga Island residents early in the 20th century. During the late 1800s, Maine experienced a decline in its

Looking North [Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]



House made of tar paper, Malaga Island [Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]

dominant ship building industry at the same time as a serious decline in fish stocks. As jobs disappeared, more and more people like the residents of Malaga turned to their towns for financial assistance. Most coastal towns looked to tourism as the new industry that would save the coast of Maine. At the same time, the Eugenics Movement began to thrive in America at the turn of the 20th century, adding to the already existing racism and driving social and state-sponsored practices aimed at breaking up communities and families.

The eviction process for the island community, as documented by the State of Maine, shows evidence of this consistent following of eugenics theories and the overall belief that those living on the island were degenerate or immoral. In 1905 the Island residents were made wards of the State, managed by the state’s Executive Council. In 1911

Students gathered at the school flag pole, Malaga Island, circa 1910  
[Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]





*House on Malaga  
[Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]*

George Pease, the assigned overseer of care for the Malaga residents, submitted a report to that Council with his recommendations for what should be done with people on Malaga Island. The report uses difficult, racist terminology to describe the various families living on Malaga Island. In his report, Pease described the race, health and his opinion of the work ethic of individual Malaga Island residents. He then made

recommendations for eviction, with no help for finding new homes. Some, he suggested, should be institutionalized in the Maine School for the Feeble Minded. While not all his recommendations were followed, many were.

In the Reports of Committee of the Council for the State of Maine

*Unidentified children on Malaga Island, circa 1910 [Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]*



*Malaga Island residents [Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]*

(1911-1912), an entire section is devoted to Malaga Island. The report states: “There has been heretofore, and some are existing at the present time, certain pauper colonies that have been for years a disgrace to the adjacent communities and a blot upon the state. We refer particularly to Malaga Island, Athens, and Frenchboro.” The report described the decision to evict the islanders this way: “After viewing conditions it was decided at a Council meeting shortly after, that the good of the State and the cause of humanity demanded that the colony be broken up and the people segregated....” To prevent further “squatting” the State decided it should hold title to the island.

*The Eason house on Malaga Island  
[Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts]*

On December 9, 1911, a local doctor and member of the state’s Executive Council signed papers committing Anna Parker and the entire Marks family to the newly formed Maine School for the Feeble Minded at West Pownal, Maine.







House on Malaga  
[Courtesy Peter K. Roberts]

When Agent Pease arrived on the island on July 1st to evict everyone, he found the island deserted. All houses had already been removed or dismantled. The remaining residents of Malaga Island scattered to nearby towns, setting up home where they could. Some found available space in the Sebasco area of Phippsburg, others went to Cundy's Harbor, Brunswick, or Bath. Today,

Malaga Island is a nature preserve, owned and maintained by the Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

*About the author: Kate McBrien serves as the Director of Public Engagement and Chief Curator for the Maine Historical Society. In 2012, she curated the award-winning exhibit Malaga Island, Fragmented Lives for the Maine State Museum in Augusta, Maine. She continues to research this history and works with community descendants to uncover and document their past.*



School children [Courtesy Peter K. Roberts]

THE LITTLE SCHOOL  
ON MALAGA ISLAND.

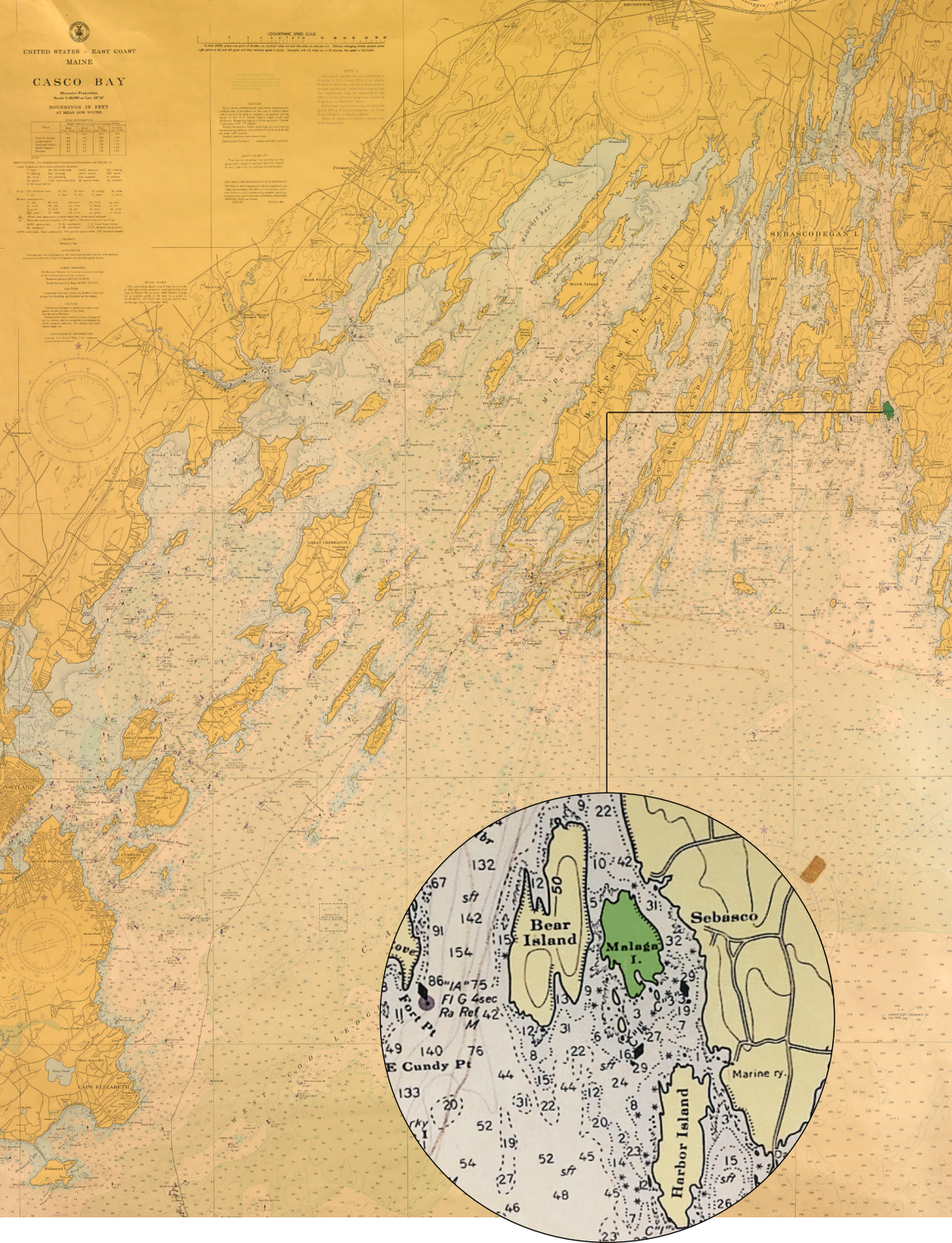


Aug 8-1907  
Mrs. Mc Kinney's where the Malaga school is held. The house has two rooms down stairs - The largest room she gave up for school-room - There are 8 scholars: 5 colored and 3 white. Colored: - Lizzie - Lottie - Sadie - EHa and Abbie - White Stella and Harold - Johnnie - Range from about 10yrs to 23 yrs of age Mrs. Lane and Cora teach. Every pleasant forenoon from 10 1/2 to



This is a view taken of the School in session in Mrs. McKinney's house. I visited the school and island four times in week of Aug 3-10, 1907

Scrapbook page [Courtesy Peter K. Roberts]



MAP: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, United States--East Coast, Maine, Casco Bay, 1973. Osher Sheet Map Collection [Image courtesy of Osher Map Library, University of Southern Maine, Portland]

## Archaeology, Malaga, and Minter

By Rob Sanford and Nate Hamilton

As the archaeologists who led the excavations on Malaga Island near the mouth of the New Meadows River in Phippsburg, Maine, we took an inclusive, collaborative approach. One consequence of this approach was among the many members of the public we took to the island was a young artist, Daniel Minter and his family. More than ten years later, in the fall of 2018, one outcome arguably traced to this experience was an artist-in-residence exhibit. This exhibit, entitled “**OTHERED: Displaced from Malaga**” included public presentations and gatherings in which archaeologists, historians, social scientists, artists, activists, and Malaga descendants came together at the University of Southern Maine.

The inclusive nature of our approach meant we treated the archaeology as a public matter in which we focused on heritage stewardship in addition to the professional field, laboratory, and archival aspects of archaeological work. We involved the NAACP of Portland, the

*BELOW: NAACP members excavating at the McKinney home and school site on Malaga Island [Photo credit ?]. ABOVE: Core sampling by the USM team*





Maine Coast Heritage Trust, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the local community of lobstermen, and area residents and businesses. It meant we gave over 50 talks and tours about Malaga. And it meant inevitably there were artists in the mix. Artists bring a sense of wonder as do the rest of us, but they also bring sensitivity and a creative energy that cannot help but inform the work we do as archaeologists—people who use physical science methods to answer social science questions about how people live and cope with their environments.

Everything about Malaga reflects an interpoled, conglomeration of people, behaviors, and environment; an intriguing parallel to our own approach as interdisciplinary archaeologists. Our study eventually led to numerous test excavations and specific field schools in 2006 and 2007 that pulled out over 56,000 artifacts from the inhabitants of this small community between 1860 and 1912. The island itself reflected its history in the stone foundations, wells, shell middens, trees, shrubs, and vegetation.

Daniel made numerous visits to the island. We stuck him into excavation pits of soft-shelled clam, blue mussel, univalves, bones, nails, and glass with our field school students. He worked the landscape with us as it yielded its story. We met with him in his studio as he planned his exhibit. Delighted at his interest in incorporating archaeology into his art, we helped him select artifacts for the exhibit.



Daniel shared a plan to

*ABOVE: Excavation pit by the USM archaeological team*

*LEFT: Nails found on the island surface were incorporated into the exhibit*

*RIGHT: Tarpaper house*

construct a symbolic Malaga house in the gallery. Anyone would be able to walk through it; placing them in the art and by extension, in the Malaga community. Piles of artifacts, grouped by type—buttons, fishhooks, bone, nails, would be placed as if a paper bag holding them burst, leaving them as residue. This is an excellent analogy to how we found so many artifacts on the surfaces of Malaga features, and in the excavations. Over 50,000 common everyday bits and pieces that told a story of community and survival, from which Daniel extracted the essentials, informing his art and making Malaga briefly whole again through his interpretation.



*Bones, remnants of everyday life, reflect the community's diet: duck, beef, pork, and fish*



## Revelations:

### Bitter History, Enduring Spirit in the Art of Daniel Minter

By Henry John Drewal, Evjue-Bascom Professor  
Departments of Art History and Afro-American Studies  
University of Wisconsin-Madison. ©2019



Daniel Minter's exhibition/installation entitled **OTHERED: Displaced from Malaga** is a meditation on the concept and meaning of home in histories of genocide, enslavement, racism, oppression, segregation, disenfranchisement, and incarceration – all manners of denigration and dis-place-ment -- part of this country's past and present that we forget, diminish, or deny. How and when do we feel "at home" with ourselves and with others and what are the forces that cause

us to feel adrift, rootless, disrupted and displaced from "home"? These are central questions at the heart of Daniel Minter's art and the saga of the Malaga Island community, an interracial community marked by difference, by its blackness and hybridity. Its otherness, feared and judged a threat by the dominant, white community, had to be "disappeared." Yet Daniel's art has made it immortal.

The story of the Malaga Island community is but one local episode revealing the depth and pervasiveness of abiding racism in this country, whether south or north, east or west, past or present. The racism that destroyed the lives of those families on Malaga Island occurred during the rise of the pseudo-science of eugenics, the false belief that genes (and head size and shape measured with calipers) determined a person's intelligence or attributes, and that immoral or criminal behavior was hereditary. Such thinking shaped the post-Civil war period misnamed



*Method One*

“Reconstruction” which in reality was one of grave danger and destruction for African-Americans and others (Native Americans, Asians, Jews) with the rise of white terrorists of the KKK, widespread lynching, unfulfilled promises of land and support (“40 acres and mule”), America’s Apartheid named “Jim Crow,” and its present iteration as mass incarceration. Nationally, all these developments and social forces, plus local political and economic issues in Maine, conspired to doom the Malaga community. Internationally, the Malaga community shares a history not unlike those countless African communities in the Americas (known as maroon (Engl.), cimarron (Sp.) or quilombo (Bantu) who resisted bondage and struggled to maintain their freedom and independence. They too were destroyed physically, but their stories are beginning to be told. The Malaga story may in fact be directly connected to this global history of African diasporas for a ship named *Malaga* was built not far from the island in 1832 and was active in the illegal trans-Atlantic slave trade for many years (see McMahan essay).



At Malaga, that resistance came from the inner spiritual strength and endurance of the people themselves. Like those who survived the horrific “Middle Passage,” they may have come empty-handed, but not empty-headed. They may have been deprived of their material culture or physical homes, but not their spiritual essence – a concept

that Daniel Minter envisions in his art that comes from his knowledge of Yoruba philosophy as lived by Yoruba descendants in Brazil where they are known as *Nago*. In Yoruba/Nago thought, one’s spiritual essence resides in the head, or more precisely the “inner spiritual head” (*ori inu*). It is this inner spirit that guides and shapes one’s path and possibilities in life. Holding true to one’s beliefs, one’s center, is crucial, for that spiritual essence is eternal, ever-present. At initiations, heads are painted with sacred chalk, marked with the signs and symbols of the deities that govern and guide one’s life and *ori inu*.



*A Removal of all Visible Presence for 100 Years- Two*

## The Paintings



It is this invisible inner spiritual head that Daniel Minter makes visible in a number of his paintings. In ***Removal of Visible Presence for 100 Years – One***, fish swim in the head of one Malaga ghost. She embodies the water goddess Yemoja, “Mother of Fish,” her head filled with sea life, her collar with unborn babies in wombs. Buttons cover her collar and dress, a reference to the labor of Malaga women as laundresses and seamstresses for the whites on the mainland. A tear-

shaped bundle at her womb holds the gathered bones of ancestors. They are gone yet ever-present -- a reference to those buried at the bottom of the Atlantic’s watery grave, as well as those bones that were disrespected, disinterred, and moved to a mass grave on the mainland where some Malaga residents were incarcerated.



In ***Removal of Visible Presence for 100 Years – Two*** a different but related spiritual head displays a spiral sea shell. The spiral is an African cosmic sign that heralds ever-changing life, afterlife, and possible return. And in a Yoruba/Nago context, a child born with “seashells on the head” (a full head of tightly curled or spiraling hair) is a child born through the intercession of Olokun, like Yemoja,

an African deity of the sea. His spirit essence is linked with the sea. He is an *omo Olokun*, a “Child of the Sea God.” A bird within his garment may suggest a fluttering heart, a dream of freedom and flight, for he is dressed in a garment with a grid of vertical and horizontal stripes (or bars) that emerges from light below and rises to his shoulders cloaked in a sea of four-eyed buttons, also made from shells. Below, a bundle of bones evokes the departed.



*A Removal of all Visible Presence for 100 Years- One*



These spirit figures are both real and unreal, they haunt us just like the histories they embody.

In **Method One** (page 21) and **Method Two** Daniel Minter reminds us of our racist history. A caliper, an instrument used in the pseudo-science of eugenics to measure head/brain size and the supposed mental capacity of a person, floats in space. In the past, it determined a person's life. It

continues to haunt the present. Turn that instrument up-side down and the outline of a boat's hull appears, evoking the nightmare of Middle Passages, those trans-Atlantic journeys into America's "heart of darkness" and chattel slavery.

In **Method One**, Malaga Island (at dawn or sunset) tops the canvas. Just below, a boat floats submerged under the surface of the water, reminding us of that painful burden and memory of passage. As Daniel Minter once explained in an interview:

*There is always this weight on us, and the boat is a weight you cannot escape. It's colonization, and everything is viewed through that lens – the difficulty of escaping it and almost the impossibility of escaping it .... You can pretend it doesn't exist. It doesn't matter if you know it's there. It doesn't matter if you acknowledge it. The weight is always there. In some form, you're always going to carry it.* (Minter interview with Bob Keyes)

Below the boat, a caliper hovers menacingly over a ghostly silhouette of a head. This ethereal head consists of translucent white patches and soft, delicate curly lines of hair (and mind, brain waves?) that float up and out. They contrast with the sharp, inward-curving metal caliper attempting to measure and stifle a person's thoughts, dreams and hopes.

In **Method Two** Minter powerfully summarizes the history of slavery and racism and its impact on the Malaga Island community. That burdensome boat-memory floats in dark waters at the top; in the middle, a menacing caliper used to control and destroy; and below, an uninhabited Malaga Island with only the memory of its human community.



Method Two



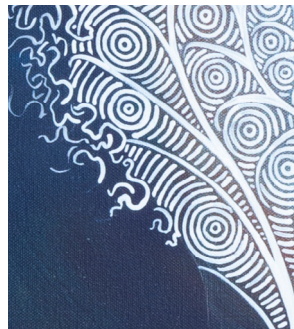
## Color

One of the first things one notices in this series of eleven canvases is the presence of certain colors -- a sea of blues and blacks and delicate white lines. Various shades of blues and blacks permeate his figures and fill entire canvases, conjuring up the depths of the ocean, and a state of mind. There is a reason we say we have “the blues,” that feeling of sadness or longing, regret or nostalgia for something

lost, perhaps tinged with anger. As music, the blues were created out of the hardships and struggles of African American life. It’s about being wounded or bruised, being “black and blue.”

For Daniel Minter, those indigo blues evoke multiple dimensions both historic and cultural. One is the horror of those tragic trans-Atlantic journeys that killed so many millions of souls, where only the strong survived and the bones of those who perished (or committed suicide) remain scattered on the ocean floor. Those same blue ocean waves lap the shores of Maine, the coast of Brazil, the beaches of Malaga Island, and the canvases of Daniel Minter. Yet, even as they evoke these heavy histories, those same blues honor the eternal spiritual presence and protection of *Yemoja* “Mother of Fish,” the Yoruba/Nago water goddess carried to Brazil and the Americas in the hearts and minds of enslaved Africans and celebrated today in countless places around the globe.

Blues of many hues are her colors, for indigo is loved and praised. It is “cool and bright” as well as “deep and dark” like the unfathomable depths of the ocean. The myriad feelings and memories conjured by these blues are what give such power and resonance to Minter’s work.

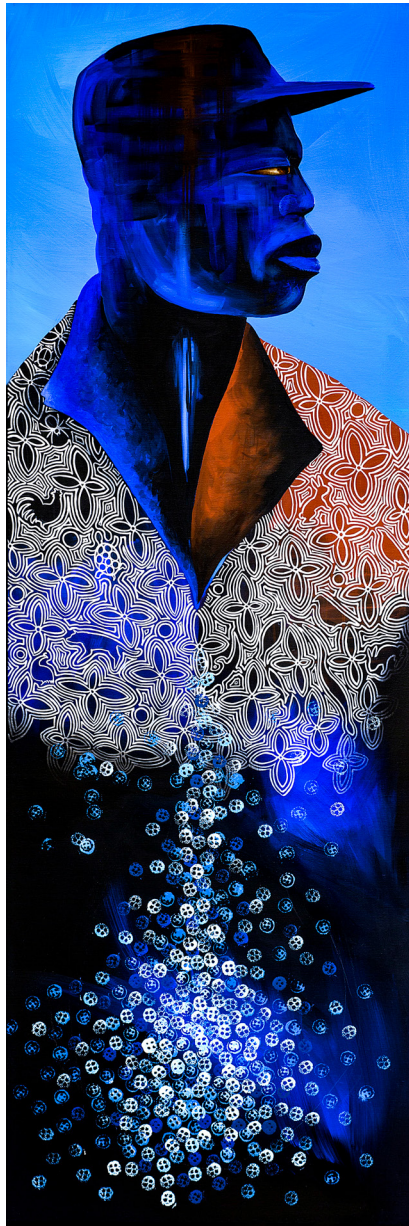


The pervasiveness of blue is balanced with white – another sacred color of *Yemoja*. Her presence here may have been



*Witness to the Unseen*  
*-Two (Cheyanne’s Fire)*





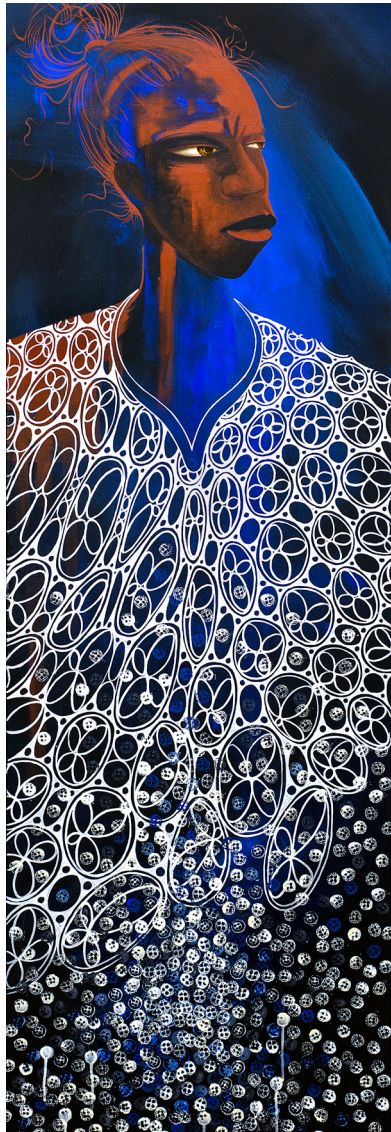
*Witness to the Unseen -Three*

inspired by Daniel Minter's time in Bahia-Brazil among the Afro-Brazilian descendants of Yoruba/Nago people (and others from Africa). White is coolness and composure, a sanctifying, cleansing color of rebirth and renewal of body, mind, and spirit. It is also the color of ancestral spirit presence. For all these reasons, Minter's ethereal figures epitomize the persistence of the spiritual presence of those Malaga souls – scattered from their home, departed from this world, yet ever-present.

Red is another color that appears, but rarely – sometimes with striking force, at other times subtly. Dark red is the color of blood in our veins. It turns bright red in air. Red connotes heat and anger, action and energy. For Yoruba/Nago, it is the color of one's life force, "performative power" or *ase*. Note the striking red in the T-shirt worn in *Witness to the Unseen-One*, the collar of the man with a cap in *Witness to the Unseen-Three* and the subtle red in the eyes or throats of other figures. Perhaps red is the "fire" in Nyanen's and Christina's and Cheyanne's songs?



*Witness to the Unseen  
-One*



*Christina's Song - Two (Christina's Fire)*

of quatrafoils, a four-leafed plant motif that covers her garment. In an African diaspora religious context, such an image references a four-part kola nut, four cowrie shells, or the four-eyed sacred palm nuts (*ikin*), all of these used in Yoruba/Nago divination. Quatrafoils also visualize

## Imagery

In this colorscape of blues, blue-blacks, white and flashes of reds, certain imagery appears repeatedly. The humans have an ethereal quality. They are partial, translucent figures that seem to emerge from a watery world. They are like apparitions, phantoms of the past come to remind us of souls displaced that still wander among us. They are the “haints,” the haunting ones, ghosts. Their profiles recall the art of that ancient African civilization of Egypt, as well as the 20th century imagery of Aaron Douglass.

Many figures wear or hold buttons. For example, in *Witness to the Unseen - One*, a woman possesses a pendulous, tear-shaped bundle of buttons at her womb. Mostly made of bone or shells, buttons were found on Malaga in large numbers – evidence of the labor of girls and women who did the laundry and sewing for white families on the mainland. With layered meanings, these four-holed buttons recall the form



*Nyanen's Song - One*



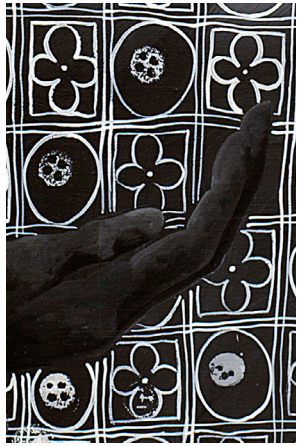
the leaves of a watery plant (*ewere*) that symbolizes *Olokun*, deity of the sea. And too, a variant of this circular motif may be inspired by the inside cross-section of okra, an African plant brought to Americas to make *gumbo* (its Bantu African name), and used as an offering in religious ceremonies. The figure's muted blue presence contrasts with the bold red T-shirt and the hint of red in her staring eyes. Her blue and white headscarf is covered in birds in flight, as free as her flowing hair on the wind.

Buttons and plants fill *Witness to the Unseen – Two (Cheyanne's Fire)*. Cheyanne is a descendant of the Tripp family that lived on Malaga. Her "fire" is the burden she still carries, the powerful emotions she felt during her first visit to the island. The medallions on Cheyanne's dress are circles filled with images for sustaining life: leaves, vines, plants, and okra interiors. A heavy bundle of buttons hangs below. Her large, heavily lidded eyes gaze off into the distance, remembering the past with sadness, and the future with concern. In *Witness to the Unseen – Three*, the profile of a man with billed cap, wears a large cape with quatrefoil leaves interspersed with a spider, turtle, lizard, rabbit, rooster, dog, bird, and fish – the flora and fauna on Malaga Island. Buttons cluster down the front, his shirt colored blue, black, and red. A subtle vertical red streak in his head turns to blue in his neck. A somber stare marks his facial expression..

Works entitled *Nyanen's Song – One, Nyanen's Song – Two (Nyanen's Fire)*, and the two versions of *Christina's Song -- (Christina's fire)* refer to visitors to Malaga Island in the summer of 2018 who were deeply moved by the experience. They felt the invisible presence of those Malaga souls who made a life and built a humble community on the island. As Daniel Minter explained to me: "Christina is a descendant of one of Maine's oldest African American



*Christina's Song -One  
(Christina's Fire)*

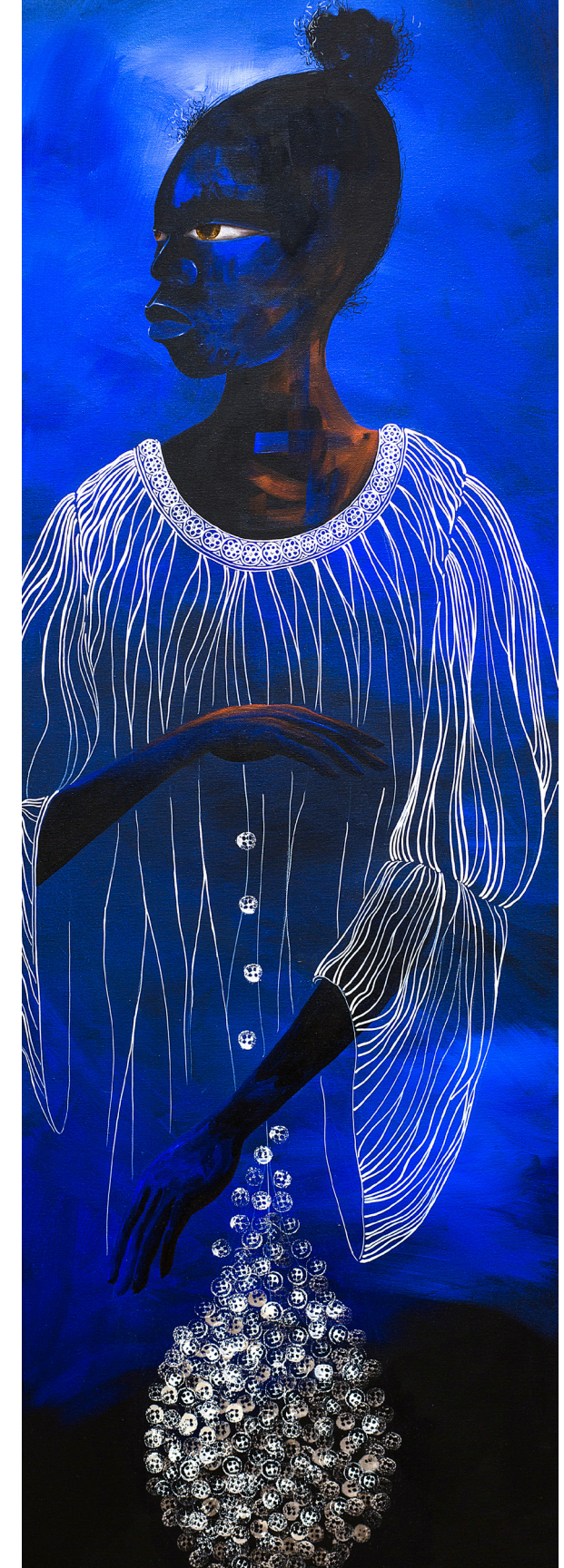


families and Nyanen is a first-generation immigrant from Africa who came to Maine as a child.” He wanted to honor their presence and make the narrative in his work “more contemporary and less historical” – a history that lives in the present and must not be forgotten.

In *Nyanen’s Song – One* – She performs a gentle but firm gesture, cradling and protecting memories and dreams. Her gray and white garment is a grid of alternating squares of buttons and quatrafoils, each playing off the other.

Her ephemeral presence emerges from the broad gray brush strokes of the background suggesting waving grass or water currents. Her blue face with eyes in an intense and solemn gaze conveys a strong resolve – she holds her center with strength and dignity despite the challenges. And in *Nyanen’s Song – Two (Nyanen’s Fire)*, she hints at a gathering gesture with her right arm and hand and left reaching down toward a bundle of buttons. The okra motif fills her garment’s collar as her topknot coiffure rides high on her head, loose strands flying outward.

Daniel Minter has painted two versions of *Christina*, one in blue face with glasses, the second with reddish brown face. In one, fish, shells, birds, okra, and plants cover her garment. Her hand seems to shelter buttons below and her hair is a tangle of flying strands. In the second version -- *Christina’s Song - Two (Christina’s fire)* – she is shown without glasses, her face in what appears to be a frown, her forehead wrinkled and her stare strong. Her transparency suggested in her brown emergence from a blue background make her an apparition.



*Nyanen’s Song - Two  
(Nyanen’s Fire)*



## The Installation

Daniel Minter has created a multi-sensorial experience to make real and tangible the presence, spiritual as well as lived, of the Malaga Island community. They are named and known individuals, the result of a long-term interdisciplinary project of archival, oral history, and archeological work by many valued colleagues.

This presence is evident in everyday objects from Malaga – fish hooks, nails, iron stakes, fishing lines and weights, pottery shards, buttons, clay pipes and pipe stems, glass bottles, fish and animal bones – evidence of the hard-working lives of individuals. They help us imagine the touch of a sharp hook, the smell of pipe smoke, the taste of fish or chowder in a bowl, or the sound of a hammer striking iron. Displayed on rough wooden shelves or pedestals in and around an enclosure that evokes a Malaga home, along with photographs and captions, such objects not only attest to daily life, they embody those exiled souls. These objects, some made and handled over generations, possess accumulated, intensified spirit because of repeated human thought, touch, and action. They hold histories and lives. As Daniel Minter explained about tools he incorporated in an earlier exhibition called “Distant Holla,” “they held too much power... too much energy had been placed into them over the years... those tools were made for creating things, and should be honored.” Brought together by Minter, such objects make visible and tangible the invisible spiritual presence of those Malaga folks. That invisible human spirit, transferred to and embodied in the things they made, used, or consumed, makes this a restorative project. It recalls a shameful past and makes present those who were wrongfully exiled and shunned, reminding us they are still with us. Daniel Minter’s art reveals the spirit force of his ancestors and those of Malaga, the wise ones who managed to guard their spiritual inner heads and balance their anger and bitterness with the strength, determination, and will to survive and endure.



*LEFT: Fish hooks recovered at Malaga’s surface*

*ABOVE: Tar paper house built by Minter frames historic photos and artifacts collected on the surface including clay pipes and pipe stems, and bottles*



The RePast performative dinner memorial [Photos by Daniel Minter]



## Memorializing Malaga

By Myron Beasley

*“Any historical narrative is a bundle of silences.”* -Michel-Rolph Trouillot<sup>1</sup>

*“We experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with past events and objects, and hence with reference to events and objects which we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present.”*-Paul Connerton (1989)<sup>2</sup>



[Photo: Jop Bloom]

**RePast** and **OTHERED** are creative actions that commemorate the narrative of Malaga Island. **RePast** is a public memorial in the form of a performative dinner. As a public memorial, the performance acknowledges the complexly mediated interplay between public memorializing with history and everyday life. The essence of performance messy the line between life and art, “denying the line, crossing it, bringing art into life and life into art.” **OTHERED** is a collection of artifacts from bones, charred glasses and dining ware and other archeological debris, which are the remains of the life on Malaga prior to the eviction. The futuristic paintings of Daniel Minter surround the artifacts. The questions pondered with **RePast and OTHERED** are: How do we memorialize, and what is a monument? “Every memorial in its time has a different goal,” according to Maya Lin<sup>3</sup>, who suggests that the nature of memorials is not fixed. Monuments are unsettling, never representing one monolithic story but rather multiple narratives crisscrossing and wrapping tightly around the memorial, some are hidden and buried underneath. To unearth is to reveal pain, trauma, public secrets, more importantly, it leads to and participates in an on-going dialogue that destabilizes the very thing it seeks to memorialize.

**RePast and OTHERED** are imaginative endeavors that haul from a particular African and African American tradition that honors a meaningful way to remember the dead and to acknowledge the life and the living. However, in many African traditional religious practices, death is not a cessation, but rather a commencement. A celebration of life is to usher the dead into new beginnings, to the privileged position of the elders. In the West, to memorialize is to remember the “dead.” In Africana cosmologies, to memorialize is to contemplate the future. **RePast** and **OTHERED** are invitations for audiences to participate in the (re) memory of a significant moment in the history of Maine and this country for the sake of not repeating them. We remember to move forward, to aspire transformation as not to forget.

[Photo: Daniel Minter]



To consider the monument as performance is to appreciate its potency and its poetics fully.

**RePast**, as the title signals, was a moment when time, patience, and contemplation were enacted as the participants walked the hallowed island, engaged in gastronomy, and listened to stories of the descendants.

The performative dinner and **OTHERED**

gracefully disrupt the monolithic history that public art, monuments in particular, has come to represent. Instead, assembled in both productions are objects that play with the concept of the memorial and participate in an ongoing dialogue about the precarious domain of public memory. The potency of performance works alongside the poetic yet also considers the porous character of the monument and thus allows for a range of possibilities for engagement.

Monuments, like the memories which they are said to represent, are contested performances, unsettled, unfinished.

A video of *The RePast* performance can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvzbJfZdpvk&t=3s>

<sup>1</sup>Trouillot, Michel-Rolph *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Connerton, Paul *How Societies Remember*, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Lin, Maya *Making of a Monument*, New York Review of Books, 2000.

ABOVE: Actors disassemble art installation representing the demolition of the homes that belonged to the islanders before they were evicted in the early 1900s. [Photo: Jop Bloom]



## Daniel Minter About the artist

Minter's artwork reflects abiding themes of displacement and diaspora; ordinary/extraordinary blackness; spirituality in the Afro-Atlantic world; and the (re)creation of meanings of home. Minter's paintings, carvings, block prints and sculptures have been exhibited both nationally and internationally at galleries and museums including the Portland Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, Bates College, Hammonds House Museum, Northwest African American Art Museum, Museu Jorge Amado and the Meridian International Center.

Minter began his career as an artist in the city of Atlanta before moving to Seattle in 1992 where his professional stature grew. In 1994, Minter received a travel grant from the National



Endowment for the Arts enabling him to spend a year in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil where he established relationships that have continued to nurture his life and work in important ways.

Minter also lived in Chicago and New York before moving to Portland, Maine where he now resides. From his base in Maine, Minter uses his art as a tool for dialogue with his community. He is the co-founder and creative visionary of the Portland Freedom Trail, a system of granite and bronze markers that constitutes a permanent walking trail highlighting the people, places and events associated with the anti-slavery movement in Portland. Minter's work also marks the Malaga Island Trail commemorating the Black, European and Native American residents of the island who were forcibly removed by the state of Maine in 1912.

**Daniel Minter Art & Illustration** 207 321-9748 [www.danielminter.net](http://www.danielminter.net)

ABOVE: Minter working in USM studio [Photo: Maureen Puia]

