

“...what comprises the temple for me is the place or awareness of a feeling of comfort, of understanding – a place where man has staked his emotional circle, and, where he will meet for all mankind, the holy place, where all he suffers some other mind had expressed and shares.”

–Edna Manley, Excerpt from letter to David Boxer

In Laura Facey's *PORTENT*, a site-specific exhibition set against the breathtaking expanse of the Bellevue estate in St Ann, Jamaica, sculpture transcends its conventional role within Western exhibition frameworks, where it is often confined to aesthetic contemplation, to become a profound meditation on decolonial epistemologies and counter-architectures.¹ This transformation reflects how contemporary art increasingly operates at the intersection of disciplines, drawing on frameworks from philosophy, history, and cultural studies to address complex global issues. As demonstrated in *PORTENT*, this cross-pollination of ideas allows the exhibition terrain to become a site of critical intervention, suggesting new ways of perceiving and negotiating the conceptual structures that define our collective reality. These frameworks are examined through the lens of decolonial epistemologies, which are ways of knowing and understanding the world rooted in the experiences of colonised and marginalised peoples. They challenge Western claims to universal knowledge by dismantling the colonial roots of knowledge production and centring alternative perspectives, from ancestral wisdom to indigenous knowledge systems.² This intellectual tradition is deeply informed by the work of scholars like Sylvia Wynter, a Jamaican cultural theorist whose concept of the “counter”—a radical opposition to dominant systems of power and knowledge—has reshaped how we think about resistance and renewal.³ Counter-architectures extends this thinking to physical and conceptual spaces, proposing ways to transform them in order to resist colonial hierarchies and imagine new ways of being.

These frameworks provide a powerful lens for analysing *PORTENT*, as Facey's work engages with themes of embodied memory and alternative ecological cartographies, where value and knowledge are mapped through organic, sensory experiences. By structuring the physical space as a metaphor for reordering and reimagining, the works reflect Wynter's concept of the "counter," transforming *PORTENT* into a site of possibility that embodies the transformative potential of critical artistic interventions. Under the prescient curatorial vision of Melinda Brown, visual artist and founder of ROKTOWA, the Downtown Kingston-based artist collective, the exhibition materialises these theoretical propositions through its strategic transformation of agricultural space, recontextualisation of colonial artifacts, and integration of inherited cultural knowledge. These elements coalesce within Facey's radical spiritual universe to create a new language of spatial resistance that defies convention. By challenging the typical treatment of sculptural objects, often admired for their artistry or utility, Facey leverages the medium to construct a paradigm where each work engages in dialogue with its environment allowing the exhibition to serve as a conduit for exploring relationships between land, memory, and being.



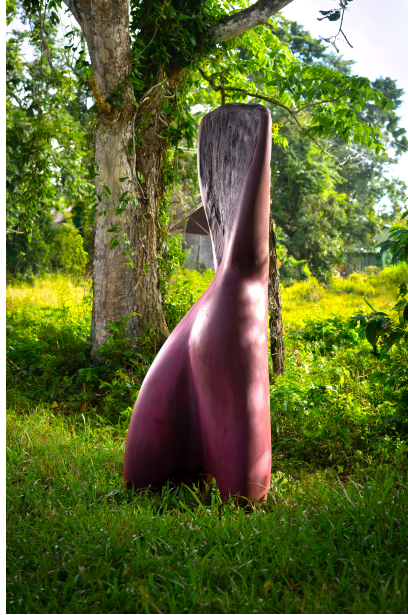
Photo showing Bee Hives (2024), Guango and Cedar, 24" installed at the ceremonial entrance for *PORTENT*. Photo by Tizzy Tokyo.



Detail of Bee Hive. Image courtesy of the artist.



Blue Comb (2023), Guango, 95" x 14" x 21"
Photo by Richard Nattoo.



Woman (2024), Cedar, 81" x 21" x 31"
Photo by Richard Nattoo.

Featuring 57 sculptures produced between 2015 and 2024 from salvaged Jamaican woods, including cedar, guango, lignum vitae, mahogany and wild tamarind, *PORTENT* spans both indoor and outdoor spaces, transforming the historic estate grounds into a dynamic site of engagement. Sculptures such as *Blue Comb* (2022)

and *Woman* (2024), nestled along the Bee Hive Boulevard, the ceremonial entrance to the exhibition, evoke a sense of quiet discovery, while monumental figures like *Walking Tree* (2015)



Walking Tree (2015), Cedar, 15'
Photo by Richard Nattoo.

and *Zinc Walking Tree* (2018) rise like textured primordial guardians from the pastoral landscape, creating a striking contrast against the endless expanse of fields. This otherworldly scene, where towering, root-like sculptures share the pasture with grazing cows and free-roaming horses, sets the tone for *PORTENT*'s promise of magical transformation. It hints at counter-architectures at work, the spaces where quotidian farm life and artistic intervention coexist, suggesting new possibilities for being and seeing.

On the inside, the exhibition unfolds across three spaces: the studio, the vault, and the blue room. The studio, a repurposed piggery with sawdust-covered

floors and a wide, open layout, presents a carefully curated interplay of sculptures that vary in scale, orientation, and presentation. Towering vertical forms stand alongside horizontal pieces, while some works are freestanding and others are mounted to the walls using specially designed frames, creating a layered and immersive spatial experience. Arranged without hierarchy, many of these works engage deeply with themes of plurality and truth.



Installation view of the studio
From Front to Back: Instrument (2024), Mahogany, 40" x 10" x 41"
For Love (2024), Mahogany, 54" x 12" x 12"
Beryl Uproot Too (2024), Mahogany, 39" x 30" x 26"
Photo by Kerry Chen.

Many of the works in *PORTENT* are abstract, marking a striking departure from Facey's typically representational sculptures. This shift to abstraction—a method of artistic expression that avoids literal depiction—allows Facey to translate complex emotional and intellectual experiences into a pure visual language. Through the strategic manipulation of formal elements

– such as form, shape and texture – the works invite viewers to engage with the essence of ideas and emotions rather than recognisable forms. This approach is particularly powerful in the context of critical interventions, as it allows for open-ended interpretations and resists the imposition of singular narratives. In *PORTENT*, abstraction becomes a tool for exploring the “pluriversal nature of knowledge,” a concept that challenges dominant, monolithic truths and embraces the coexistence of multiple, equally valid ways of knowing and being. ⁴ The fluid, abstracted forms undulate across the space in dynamic, interconnected gestures, embodying this multiplicity and inviting viewers to engage with the work on both intellectual and intuitive levels. Ironically, one of the most imposing works in the exhibition is titled *Monolith* (2023) —a



A view of the studio with *Monolith* (2023) in the background contained within the area defined by the three horizontal pieces in the mid-ground (L-R) *Instrument* (2024), *Divining Truth* (2024), and *One Way Arrow* (2024).
Photo by Kerry Chen.

towering vertical sculpture that evokes notions of authority, hierarchy, and singularity. Yet, within the space, its verticality is mediated by horizontal pieces such as *Divining Truth* (2024), *One Way Arrow* (2024), and *Instrument* (2024). This interplay of vertical and horizontal forms carries deep social implications: verticality often symbolizes power, dominance, and rigid structures, while horizontality suggests equality, connection, and fluidity. In this counter-poetic arrangement, Facey subverts the traditional associations of verticality, using the spatial dialogue between forms to challenge hierarchical systems and propose a more egalitarian, interconnected way of being. By embracing abstraction, she

creates a space where meaning is not fixed but fluid, reflecting the complexity and diversity of

post-colonial histories and identities. This interplay of vertical and horizontal forms extends beyond mere physical arrangement, creating a spatial metaphor for the exhibition's broader conceptual framework. The immersive environment, where the raw, organic textures of the space meet the smooth, intricate forms of the sculptures, becomes another physical manifestation of counter-architectures, inviting a rethinking of how knowledge is constructed and experienced. The studio becomes a site where the rigid hierarchies of colonial history are dismantled, and new, fluid ways of understanding and being are proposed.



This expansive, commanding environment gives way to the vault, which offers a dramatic shift in scale and atmosphere. In this intimate space, sixteen miniature sculptures glow within illuminated niches.

Installation view of the central wall inside the "Vault." Photo by Richard Nattoo.



Maximum Comb (2018),
Mahogany, 12"
Photo by Kerry Chen



Walking Tree (2018), Miniature, Bronze,
10" x 7.5" x 3"
Photo by Kerry Chen



Ring Dance (2024), Lignum Vitae, 8.5" x
7" x 7"
Photo by Kerry Chen

Each niche functions as a "pocket of alternative knowledge,"⁵ where small-scale works carry profound conceptual weight. This microcosmic heterotopia reimagines how knowledge can be organised and encountered. Adjacent to the vault, the blue room, with its intense colour

contrast, serves as an altar designed by Brown to exhibit Facey's 2018 sculpture *Divine*—currently on view at the Kingston Biennial—and her 2020 sculpture *Rest and Be Thankful*, a functional artwork that doubles as a chair. In *Divine* (2018), Facey presents a female form in a posture of vulnerability and openness—viewed from behind, the figure bends forward, legs apart. Yet through her treatment of this intimate



Installation view of the “Blue Room”
 At center: *Divine* (2018), Lignum Vitae, 53” x 40” x 63”
 At right: *Rest and Be Thankful* (2020), 34” x 34” x 62”
 At back: *God's Saddle* (2024), Lignum Vitae, 49” x 17” x 38”

Photo courtesy of the artist.

pose, Facey elevates the work beyond corporeal representation. The biomorphic form of the sculpture juxtaposes meticulously polished surfaces with deliberately excavated areas, creating a profound tension between flesh and spirit. The interplay of textures—smooth sections reflecting light with an ethereal luminosity, while gouged portions expose raw, primal materiality—speaks to the body as both earthly vessel and site of divine transformation. This deliberate manipulation of surface and form invites multiple interpretations, suggesting both physical vulnerability and spiritual transcendence. Similarly, in *Rest and Be Thankful* (2020), the functional yet sculptural form of the chair becomes a site of contemplation, its organic shapes and tactile materials grounding the viewer in the present moment while hinting at the sacred. Through these works, Facey harnesses abstraction to transform physical form into spiritual possibility. Here, these two sculptures serve not only as objects but as thresholds where physical form dissolves into divine presence, inviting viewers into encounters with consciousness beyond the material.

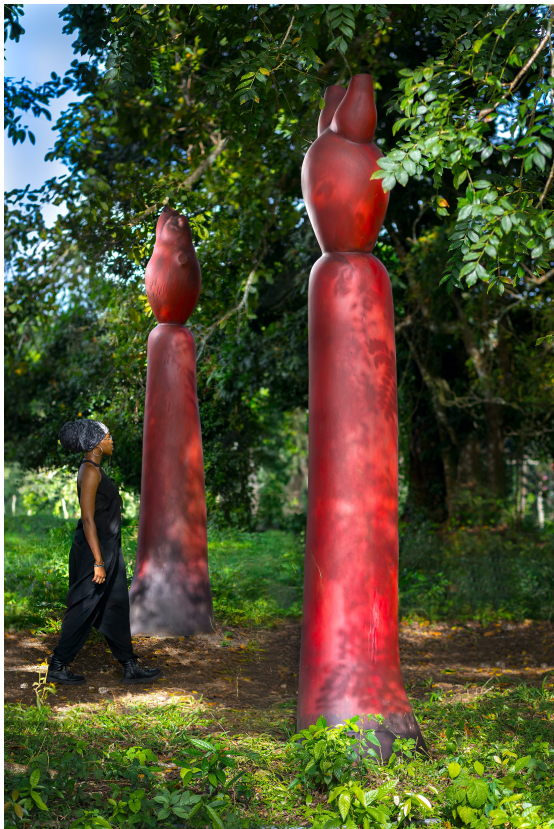
This transcendence of physical form into spiritual possibility signals a broader shift in Facey's practice. While she is widely known for her direct commemorative works addressing the trauma and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, *PORTENT* signals a striking evolution

toward more nuanced conceptual territory. The exhibition's title, drawn from Olive Senior's poem "Cockpit Country Dreams," immediately positions the work within a critical discourse where "portents of a split future" speak to both historical rupture and possibility.⁶ Just as Senior's poem navigates the tension between documented and undocumented histories – "Our river, undocumented was mystery,"⁷ Facey's sculptural interventions, as counter-architectures, challenge colonial cartographies and their legacy of singular truths, creating spaces where multiple truths and identities can coexist. The exhibition's spiritual and philosophical inquiries are most vividly expressed in works like *One Way Arrow* (2024) and *Divining Truth* (2024), both of which employ bi-directional forms to embody Facey's counter-poetic reimagining of space.



(Counterclockwise) *Divining Truth* (2024), Cedar, 34" x 24" x 133"; *One Way Arrow* (2024), Lignum Vitae, 42" x 6" x 57"; *Blue Leaves* (2024) Cedar. Photo by Richard Nattoo.

Their simultaneous pointing in multiple directions, while suggesting singular truths, engages deeply with Sylvia Wynter's concept of the "demonic ground," a metaphorical and philosophical space that challenges dominant Western narratives of humanity, knowledge, and being, and is not simply a negative or destructive engagement of space, but rather a generative one of resistance and re-imagination.⁸ Through these works, Facey not only critiques the coloniality of knowledge but also envisions a more pluralistic understanding of truth and identity, manifesting what Senior describes as rivers that, though beginning "in the clefts of separate mountains," ultimately find "their true homes/in the salt of one sea."⁹



Two of Three Graces (2022), Guango, 11' 9"
Photo by Richard Nattoo.

This vision of convergence finds powerful physical embodiment in *Three Graces* (2022), two of which stand as threshold guardians along the walkway to the entrance of the main exhibition space. Carved from local guango wood, these towering totems create a dynamic visual presence that is both imposing and graceful, embodying what Facey describes as "a gathering of women for these times"¹⁰. The material connection to local ecology grounds *The Graces* firmly in place and memory, while their dramatic verticality suggests a reaching toward divine understanding—a physical manifestation of Facey's assertion that in these figures "the head and heart has become one"¹¹.

Originally part of a triad created for Facey's 2022 exhibition, "Laboratory of the Ticking Heart," these monumental forms resonate powerfully with Wynter's project of "re-historicising" human

experience beyond colonial categorisations.¹² Just as Wynter's critical intervention works to dismantle Western representations of humanness that create hierarchies between mind and body, reason and emotion, Facey, through the installation of these soaring sentinels at the pathway to *PORTENT*, signals that she too envisions alternative ways of being human—ones where intellect and emotion, spirit and matter, find unity in form.

This unity of opposites, also embodied in the bi-directionality of truth, finds its most profound geographical manifestation in the history of the Cockpit Country. This site of Maroon resistance, where the rugged terrain becomes a physical metaphor for submerged, multilayered knowledge and a space of alternative cartographies, has challenged colonial dominance as per Wynter's vision of alternative human existence. This connection is made explicit in works like *Fragments of Land of Look Behind* (2018), which references the treacherous limestone karst terrain where Maroons established their stronghold, transforming an inhospitable landscape into a sanctuary of resistance. Similarly, *Abeng* (2023) pays homage to the cow horn instrument Maroons used as both a communication device and a symbol of resistance, its distinct calls capable of carrying messages across vast distances in the mountainous territory. These works ground *PORTENT*'s conceptual framework in specific



Abeng (2023), Cedar, 14'
Image courtesy of the artist.



Fragments of Land of Look Behind (2018),
Mahogany, Various Sizes. Photo by Kerry Chen.

historical acts of resistance and survival. Just as the Maroons carved out autonomous zones within colonial geography, Facey's sculptures construct a landscape where multiple truths can surface and coexist.

While many works in the exhibition speak to resistance on land, the centrepiece, *The Crossing* (2023), commands the studio space with an inescapable ancestral presence—a testament to trauma that persists across generations, shifting our focus from terrestrial struggle to the memory of oceanic passage. Standing as *PORTENT*'s sole explicit engagement with the Middle Passage—a departure from Facey's typically more direct approach to this history—the imposing sculpture commands not only attention but also physical passage.



The Crossing (2023), Guango and Cast Iron Pot, 68" x 96" x 125"
Photo by Richard Nattoo.

Visitors are required to traverse a ramp leading directly toward the centre of the work, integrating their journey into the narrative of the sculpture, making their own “crossing” an intrinsic part of its meaning.



The Crossing as seen from the entrance to the studio. Photo by Richard Nattoo.

Mounted atop a reclaimed sugar boiler pot, an artifact of plantation architecture, the reptilian sculpture transforms this industrial relic of colonial violence into a platform for reimagining space and memory. This act of spatial re-membling, where colonial artifacts are both physically resituated and conceptually reframed, establishes PORTENT as a counter-architectural space where alternative cosmologies can take root. The in situ installation of The Crossing at Bellevue estate, a former colonial plantation, adds a profound layer of significance to the work. The very land that once served as a site of exploitation and dehumanisation now becomes a space for reclamation and renewal, embodying Facey’s decolonial vision. The interplay between the wooden figure and its cast iron pedestal encapsulates the ethos at the

heart of *PORTENT*: the boiler, once an instrument of extraction and exploitation, is reimagined as a foundation for reclamation and survival. This multilayered act of crossing further echoes both Wynter's concept of counter-architectures and Senior's "portents of a split future," capturing both the wounds and possibilities inherent in a Caribbean history approached via decolonial epistemologies.

PORTENT articulates Facey's distinctive spiritual cosmology achieving what Tolstoy would recognise as art's ultimate potential: the authentic transmission of deeply felt truth.¹³ For audiences familiar with her more widely recognised works, such as *Ceiba* (2016), a functional 30-foot drum carved from a single cottonwood tree and featured in the 2017 Jamaica Biennial, or her monumental public installation *Redemption Song* (2003) at Emancipation Park, *PORTENT* may appear as a striking departure from her oeuvre. Yet, this exhibition represents not so much a break as an evolution, one clearly signaled in her 2022 exhibition "Laboratory of the Ticking Heart". In that exhibition, works like *Guide Their Way Home* (2021) marked a pivotal shift in Facey's approach to addressing historical trauma.



A Section of *Guide Their Way Home* (2021), Guango, Cedar, Mahogany, 30" x 20" x 14"
Image courtesy of the artist

According to her, "Many Jamaicans have experienced terror and abuse passed through generations, and as a result, trauma is carried deep in the national psyche."¹⁴ Rather than directly representing this trauma, Facey began creating what she described as "an invitation to let go [of] the suppressed pain we carry within,"¹⁵ moving toward more conceptual and spiritual

interventions as pathways to collective healing. In PORTENT, this evolution achieves its fullest expression. Through this expansive installation, Facey has manifested Wynter's vision of counter-architectural space where multiple truths and experiences coexist and flourish. Here, her long-standing engagement with histories of resistance and survival merges seamlessly with her deepening exploration of spiritual consciousness. The result is an exhibition that reconceptualises and inhabits the generative capacity of “portent”¹⁶—a magic that transforms Bellevue estate from a site of colonial extraction into sacred ground for envisioning new futures, where alternative ways of being and knowing exist in harmony with the land itself.

¹ The term “decolonial epistemologies” refers to ways of knowing that challenge the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks and centre marginalised perspectives. See Sylvia Wynter, *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument* (2003).

“Counter-architectures” is a concept derived from Sylvia Wynter’s counter-poetics to describe spaces and structures that resist colonial ordering and propose alternative ways of organising knowledge and experience. For further reading, see Sylvia Wynter, *The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism* (1984).

² Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580. Aníbal Quijano (1928–2018) was a Peruvian sociologist and critical theorist whose work profoundly influenced decolonial studies. He is best known for developing the concept of “coloniality,” which examines the enduring structures of power, knowledge, and culture established during colonialism and perpetuated in the modern world-system. His scholarship has been instrumental in shaping decolonial thought across Latin America and beyond.

³ See 1 above.

⁴ The concept of the “pluriversal nature of knowledge” draws on decolonial thought, particularly the work of Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar. Mignolo, in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), critiques the dominance of Western epistemologies and advocates for a “pluriversal” world where multiple ways of knowing coexist. Similarly, Escobar, in *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), explores how alternative epistemologies can challenge singular narratives and create spaces for diverse ontologies.

⁵ The phrase “pocket of alternative knowledge” is used here in reference to Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopias”—spaces that function outside dominant social structures while maintaining their own internal logic. See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984). In the context of decolonial theory, this concept has been developed to describe spaces that harbour and nurture knowledge systems existing outside Western epistemological frameworks.

⁶ The exhibition title, PORTENT, is drawn from Olive Senior’s poem “Cockpit Country Dreams,” which appears in Senior’s collection *Hurricane Watch: New and Collected Poems* (Carcamet Press Ltd., 2022), p. 331.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sylvia Wynter first develops the concept of “demonic ground” in her seminal essay “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man” (2003), published in the *CR: The New Centennial Review*. Drawing on Édouard Glissant’s work on poetics of relation and Caribbean epistemologies, Wynter uses the term to disrupt normative Western conceptualisations of humanity and knowledge production.

⁹ Senior, Olive. “Cockpit Country Dreams.” *Hurricane Watch: New and Collected Poems*, Carcamet Press Ltd., 2022, p. 331.

¹⁰ Facey, Laura. *Laboratory of the Ticking Heart*. 1 May - 29 July 2022, The Ormsby Memorial Hall, Kingston, Jamaica, 2022, p. 15.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2003, pp. 257-337. Through Re-historicisation Wynter seeks to create new ways of understanding human experience that are not confined by colonial categories of race, gender, and civilisation, not just as an academic exercise but a form of active resistance. By reimagining human experience, Wynter provides a framework for understanding how marginalised communities have survived, created, and thrived despite systemic oppression.

¹³ Leo Tolstoy's conception of art's highest purpose is most comprehensively articulated in his treatise *What is Art?* (1897), where he argues that the most profound art transcends individual experience to convey universal human feelings and spiritual truths. He identifies three criteria for good art: the work must be "infectious" (capable of transmitting feeling from artist to audience), the feeling must be "clear and important" (sincere and significant), and the work must be "individual" (expressing a unique personal experience).

¹⁴ Facey, Laura. *Laboratory of the Ticking Heart*. 1 May - 29 July 2022, The Ormsby Memorial Hall, Kingston, Jamaica, 2022, p. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The term "portent" derives from the Latin *portendere*, meaning "to predict" or "to indicate beforehand," originally signifying an omen or sign of a significant future event. For the exhibition, the word has been reimagined beyond its predictive function to suggest this generative potential – a threshold of possibility where the magical emerges from the liminal space between known and unknown, visible and invisible.