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Details: p. 5: *Shipwreck* (p. 35); p. 6: *The Garden* (p. 129); p. 10: *Preserve* (pp. 48-49);
p. 24: *Cave Wall* (p. 115); p. 29: *Ready to Fly*(p. 109); p. 30: *4 Corners* (p. 87). All photos by
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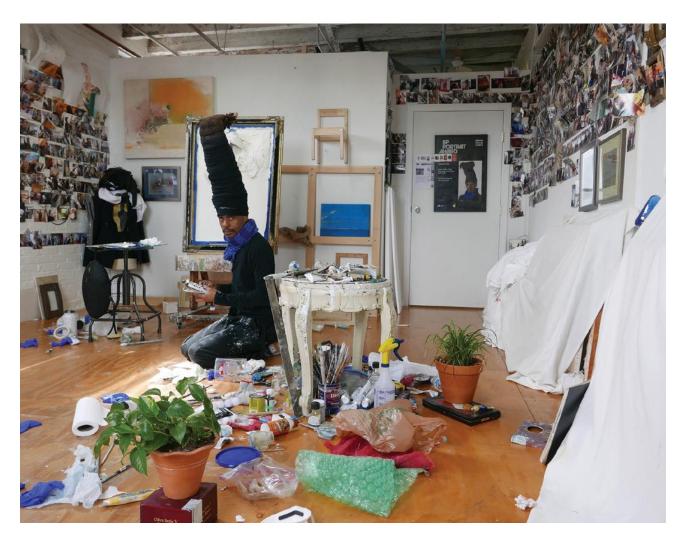
Entering Engels's Universe: My First Visit to the Studio

y first visit to the Brooklyn studio of Engels was on the afternoon of November 9, 2018. It is located in Red Hook, just off the Carey Tunnel, in an old factory that seems to have numerous studios. When I rang the bell, I was asked by Engels via intercom to walk up to the fourth floor. I had seen pictures of him, and I was eager to meet this extraordinary man with the highest dreadlocked coiffure I had ever seen. Engels was as hip as I had

envisioned him. He greeted me in French with a warm hand, and a soft and friendly tone that reminded me of the cordiality that I had encountered in the Haitian families I grew up with in Montreal. On the spot, I felt a very good vibe and I knew that we would get along. This was extremely important if we were to do everything the museum and I hoped for: an exhibition, a catalogue, and a residency in the museum space.

When we entered the studio, a very kind woman, Cindy Millin, Engels's partner, was at the door. I understood later that she was the one behind the promotion of his art, which she believes in deeply. Working full time as a psychiatrist, it is remarkable that she still finds time to reach out to curators and assist Engels—which reveals how much creative people need that kind of support.

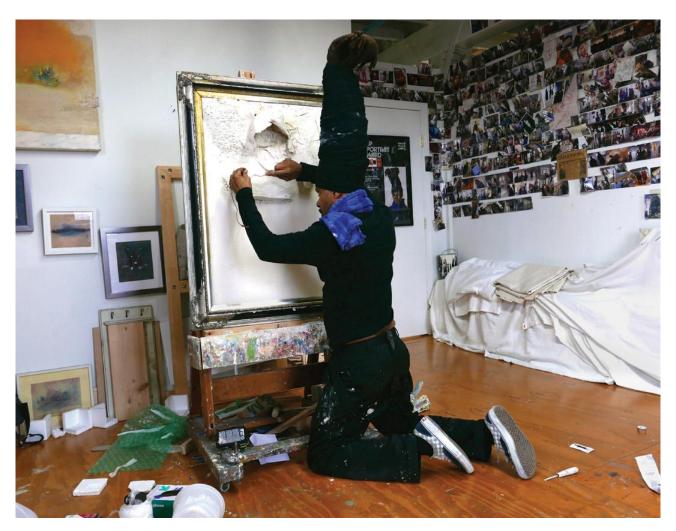
The studio walls were hung with dozens of works, some of them extremely powerful that I knew I would want for the upcoming exhibition. Others were still wrapped in cloth, and Engels slowly and diligently unpacked them, one after another, in a sort of ritual. This slow pace, so rare in places like New York, forced us to stop and consider the singularity



Engel working in his studio in Brooklyn. Courtesy of the artist

of each work, with which Engels had engaged and lived for weeks—he usually spends two to three weeks or more on a single work. The artist spoke about each piece, explaining the process and the idea behind every one. I saw in them powerful lines, grids, scars, colors, pigments, pieces of fabric, staples, and splashy signatures.

The titles of the works were particularly evocative. One of the most powerful works was his large sculptural painting *Cotton Pearl* (2017), which refers to the history of slavery in Haiti, then called the Pearl of the Caribbean, when hundreds of thousands of people of African descent were suffering in the cotton fields. Engels has been living in the US for more than three decades, but as he explained to me, Haiti remains important to him and still motivates many of the themes of his works, as well as his process—making the best out of found objects and inexpensive materials. Engels had on his wall a traditional Haitian painting that showed his admiration for local crafts. There was also a black-and-white family portrait, taken in a professional photo studio in Haiti called Photo Nouvelle, featuring his mother and his four siblings.



Across the whole gallery were also hundreds of more recent photos showing people visiting the studio and engaging with Engels. Among them, pictures of well-known figures including the famous artist Tom Otterness, a friend of Engels and who wrote an entry in this catalogue.

I left the studio filled with ideas for the installation, for the catalogue, and for the residency. I hope to evoke in the museum gallery at least some of the profound feelings I experienced in Engels's studio, so that the artist will feel comfortable when he comes to work in our space.

My first visit to the studio was followed by another one at his home in Brooklyn, on March 31, 2019, during which I conducted an interview with the artist, which appears in the following pages.



Engels as a child with his family in Haiti in the photographic studio *Photo Nouvelle* (Engels is sitting to the right of his mother)