



# Nari Ward

## SUB MIRAGE LIGNUM

Nari Ward reveals the potential energy of unlikely objects and places, acting as an alchemist to infuse discarded artifacts and otherwise overlooked geographies with resonance and meaning. Ward has always been drawn to that which has been forgotten. For example, in his project *The Great American Revival* he collected items from yard sales outside Philadelphia and created a display that was part religious revival tent and part car showroom. Other projects like *Rites of Way* and *Diamond Gym* used dense assemblies of quotidian objects like plastic beads and fitness equipment to create surprisingly beautiful community hubs for gathering and storytelling. In focusing our attention on the discarded, he reveals complex emotional registers inherent within everyday objects, and nearly forgotten histories.

For *Sub Mirage Lignum* Ward continues to mine left-behind materials and places. The title represents the three main themes in the exhibition: sub, in the dual sense of “underneath” and “substitute for another (space)”; mirage, a false, fleeting image produced by the refraction of light, desire, and interpretation; and lignum, derived from *Lignum Vitae* (“wood of life”), a tree whose bloom is the national flower of Jamaica. Here, he focuses

on two seemingly oppositional locations, the tropics of Jamaica and the postindustrial factory town of North Adams, the former as his own place of birth and the latter as the birthplace of this, his newest exhibition. In the end, *Sub Mirage Lignum* merges place and material to create a new hybrid zone where the real and the imaginary are intermingled, where electronic capacitors and old fabric swatches found at MASS MoCA (remnants of the site’s former industrial tenants) are woven together with the material culture of Jamaica, mango seeds and lignum vitae tourist trinkets, market shanties and fish traps.

*Sub Mirage Lignum* is made up of five distinct works:

Though a relatively poor country, Jamaica is home to a vital fishing trade as well as a booming tourist business, both of which are referenced in *Stall* whose ad hoc structures recall both temporary fishing encampments and rudimentary marketplace shacks found in Jamaica. For *Stall*, Ward recorded sellers in a Jamaican market calling to him to buy their tourist wares (just as the artist seems to be inviting visitors to see his show). On the outside of the stalls are fabric patterns derived from those printed at Arnold Print Works (which occupied this space from

1862 through the early 1920s). Tucked away inside are electronic components collected from this site's second tenant, Sprague Electric Company (makers of electrical capacitors that occupied the mill complex until the mid-1980s). These industrial leftovers become a kind of treasure, standing in for Jamaican goods while also connecting the Jamaican marketplace to this place of commerce and industrial production.

The form of **Nu Colossus** comes from a small conical woven fish trap, which lures fish only to ensnare them. Typically used to catch minnows, here Ward has reconceived the delicate, basket-sized trap at immense scale. This duality of seduction and entrapment is key to Ward's idea of mirage. Suspended inside the cone, broken bits of weathered furniture appear to be stuck in the trap but at the same time become an integral part of its structure. Viewers cannot enter the structure but instead stand in front of it as it opens up before them, magnificent and revelatory. Adjacent to **Nu Colossus** a 30-foot long wooden boat is suspended midair on large sheets of clear Plexiglas, referencing glass-bottomed tourist boats. This work exists in a liminal zone between ocean and land, fantasy and reality.



**Mango Tourists'** 10-foot tall snowman shapes are encrusted and embedded with found objects and mango seeds. Drawing from the two sites of inspiration for

**Sub Mirage Lignum** — the Sprague factory complex which is now the home of MASS MoCA, and Jamaica — these towering sculptures lean into each other as if they are conversing in the gallery. Each is covered in foam and embellished with capacitors left over at MASS MoCA from the Sprague days, plus several thousand dried mango seeds, their sweet smell harkening to the tropics. The capacitors and seeds encase the sculptures like intricate beading — transforming humble materials into the jewel-like. Both the capacitors and the seeds contain potential, one for instantaneous release of high-voltage charges, the other for reproduction.



In the far gallery just beyond **Mango Tourists** are two video works: **Sweater**, a macro-view close-up of pores on Ward's skin, his sweat beading up and cascading off. The images bring to mind the ocean but also the toil of labor; **Jaunt** merges two mirage-like images — one in Jamaica and one in North Adams. In **Jaunt** the central image comes from footage of the water horizon line in Jamaica framed by an image of the car wash bays on River Street in North Adams, just around the corner from MASS MoCA (and visible outside the windows near **Mango Tourists**). This effectively places an image of "paradise" smack dab in the middle of the reality of daily life, while in the distance we can see the clock tower at MASS MoCA, yet another reminder of the transformation of site, use, and time.

Nari Ward (b. St. Andrews, Jamaica) lives and works in New York. He received a BA from Hunter College, where he teaches, and an MFA from Brooklyn College. Ward's work was included in *Prospect 1: New Orleans Biennial* (2008); *The Whitney Biennial*, New York (2006); and *Documenta XI*, Kassel, Germany (2003). He has exhibited at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit. Solo exhibitions include *LIVESupport*, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York; *Episodes*, Isabella Stewart

Gardner Museum, Boston; *The Refinery, X: A small twist of fate*, Palazzo delle Papesse Centro Arte Contemporanea, Siena, Italy; and *Rites of Way*, Walker Art Center. Ward has received commissions from the United Nations and the World Health Organization, and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

Exhibition curated by Denise Markonish  
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