

# Davin Ebanks

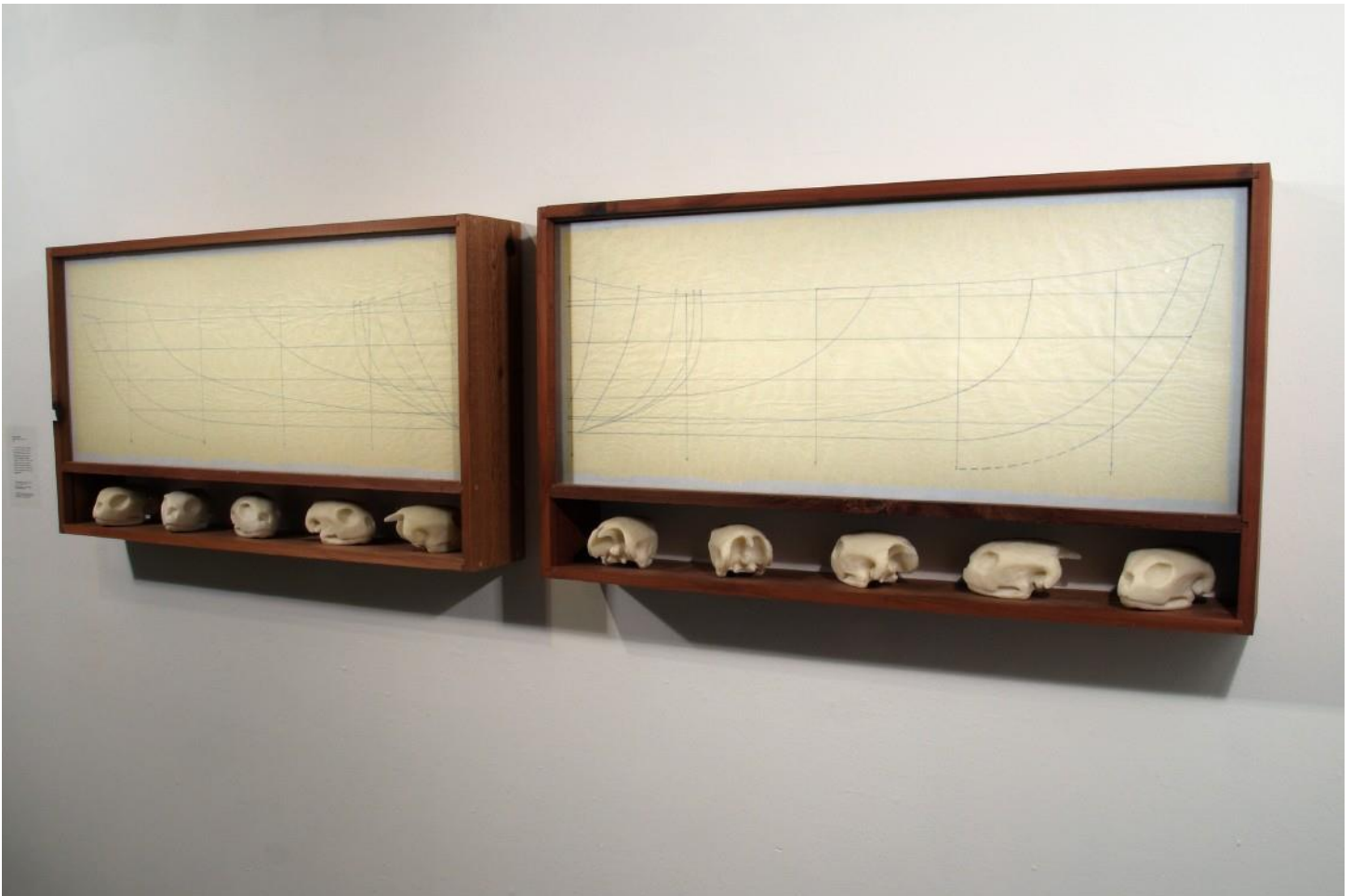


Image: Davin Ebanks (c.2006), *Death Of Ajax*, from the collection of NGCI

**“As a graphic designer [I was] trained: concept, design, execution; like a, b, c – it is very linear. But what I was never taught was that that is not how creativity works. Creativity might be like a, b, yellow. It is a quantum leap to a different thing, and you don’t get there by a planned sequence of events.”**

## The Artist

Davin Ebanks (b. 1975) is a young Caymanian artist and sculptor who primarily works in the medium of glass. In pursuing his BA in graphic design at Anderson University in Indiana, he discovered his love for glasswork. After graduating in 1998 he held multiple teaching and artist-in-residence positions at institutions such as Anderson University, Jacksonville University, and Urban Glass in New York, where he was



Photograph courtesy of:  
Cayman Compass

able to hone his glasswork skills. Ebanks' Master of Fine Arts degree in glass sculpture was obtained in 2010 from Kent State University in Ohio.

While Ebanks spends much of the year now in Maryland where he has access to the specialised facilities he needs to continue his glassmaking, his work still reflects his relationship with the natural surroundings and cultural heritage of his childhood home in Cayman. Themes of maritime heritage are prominent, including figures of catboats; the turtling which was a part of his history by way of his seafaring family; marine life; and water.

Ebanks' MFA final work, *Blue Meridian*, was shown at a National Gallery exhibition in 2010. The artist describes the *Blue Meridian* "water castings" as glass and porcelain representations of actual geographic coordinates of sections of water around Cayman. These representations pose an interesting conundrum for the viewer: the hyper-reality of the glass-as-water gives the sense of real water despite the viewer understanding that it is simply a sculpture, while also triggering memories of the water each of us may have seen in our lives previously.

Glass art describes modern art pieces created primarily from glass using a variety of techniques (glassblowing, casting, etc.). Glass has been used as a craft medium since ancient times, with some of the most famous traditional glass craft coming from Murano near Venice, Italy. Glass sculpture as practiced by Davin Ebanks began as a movement in the 1960s and 70s, with some of the most famous modern glass artists being Chihuly, and Libenský and Brychtová.

A recipient of the McCoy prize, Ebanks has exhibited at Urban Glass in New York and at the United States Glass Art Society's invitational conference 2150 Fahrenheit, and his work is in the collection of the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands.

## The Artwork

Catboats are prominent in Caymanian folklore and artwork, even in the most recent works produced by local artists. Other local artists such as Miguel Powery, Randy Chollette, Chris Christian and Kara Julian also feature catboats in their artwork.

At the centre of Davin Ebanks' *Death of Ajax* is the idea of death, its meaning and its process. The skeletal-looking blueprint of a Cayman Brac catboat, the Ajax, is painted on to wood panels and juxtaposed with glass casts in the form of turtle skulls, giving them a petrified appearance. Ebanks' pairing of the two objects indicates that their lives—and therefore their decline and scarcity in modern life—are inextricably linked, highlighting the paradoxical cultural and environmental loss.

The concept behind *Death of Ajax* is the notion of simulacrum (pl. simulacra—see social theorist Jean Baudrillard), which contends that the reproduction of an object becomes the truest form of that object, regardless of whether or not its original still exists. Ebanks uses this idea to communicate for the viewer's consideration the meaning of the history, memory, and loss of these iconic features of Caymanian culture—the catboat and turtle—and their relationship with one another in *Death of Ajax*.

Hyperrealism is an artistic movement that can be associated with Ebanks' work, due to his use of "everyday" objects as

facilitating memory recall. Hyperrealists aim to create incredibly precise, detailed reproductions of objects that is also part of an emotional narrative. Hyperrealist artists include sculptor Ron Mueck and painter Charles Bell. Ebanks also draws deeply on inspiration from his natural surroundings, much like land artist Andy Goldsworthy. In describing his own work Ebanks says, "I see my sculptures as metaphors for the subjective nature of history and personal narrative. These objects serve as stand-ins for something absent" ([www.davinebanks.com](http://www.davinebanks.com)).

## Discussion

- Sculpture comprises various artistic techniques that can include collage, installation art, land art, and assemblage. Which of these techniques would you use to describe Davin Ebanks' art? Can you think of any other terms?

- Glassmaking can be a bit of a controversial medium in the art world, at times being seen as a craft and at others as a fine art. What is the difference between art and craft? How would you classify Ebanks' work?

- Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum is complex, but examples abound around us. Come up with some examples of simulacra in your everyday life.

## Making Comparisons

- Look at Charles Bell's *Sixteen Candles*, a depiction of marbles reflecting and refracting light: <http://www.wikiart.org/en/charles-bell>. What is similar in Ebanks' water castings?

- Take a look at some examples of venetian glass here: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O3262/goblet-unknown/> to see how Ebanks was trained and perfected his technique.

## Follow Up Activities

- Use a prism or crystal to refract light onto a flat surface, creating light reflections in the same way that Ebanks' water castings do. Now try to draw or paint the refraction yourself.

- To view some Chihuly-style blown glass sculptures, take a class trip to the Ritz Carlton, Grand Cayman and view the colourful glass chandeliers on display.



Photograph courtesy of:  
the artist himself



go to: [www.nationalgallery.org.ky](http://www.nationalgallery.org.ky)

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