

Boz Deseo Garden
Harriet

NOVEMBER 8 – DECEMBER 20, 2025

In May of 1851, a legal injunction temporarily prevented Kentucky planter James Martin from selling his slave, Harriet. The injunction was filed by two other planters, Jesse Baker and G.W. Dozier. The case survives only as a single document in the Chicago History Museum's archive from the Julius Frankel collection: a bond, scanned as two separate files of its recto and its verso. This bond is evidence of a court ruling that determined the injunction was wrongfully issued. Ergo, Baker and Dozier agreed to pay Martin \$800 as compensation for the damages caused by the halted sale.

The exhibition, however, bypasses the legalities implied by the bond and turns to its archival digitization, to the moment where it was physically *turned over* to scan—and split into two files—both recto and verso. This mundane act is magnified and recast as the primal scene of an archival scopic drive: the unrelenting desire to see the object *from all sides*. But what does the bond allow us to see? The document produces more confusion than clarity. Why did Baker and Dozier intervene? What was Harriet to them? Was she payment for a debt Martin owed? Did they mean to buy her freedom? Or was she coveted for reasons the bond does not specify? Answers to these questions are left to speculation but three things remain apodeictic about the story: first is that Harriet would remain for sale; second, that this trace of Harriet may be the only one left; and third, that we have no way of confirming which Harriet this document could refer to. "This" Harriet thus appears to us as a vast ensemble, the crystallization of all possible Harriets.

The movement from recto to verso and back extends the scene described by the bond where Harriet is twice turned over (to the market). But, to be sure, the protagonist of the exhibition is not Harriet, but the *inseparability* of Harriet and the bond. The bond becomes the necessary lens that coterminously permits *and* prohibits Harriet's visibility. Her appearance *in* the document is identical to her disappearance *by* the document.

Garden combines a Hartmanian ethics of the periphery (that refuses the brute depiction of slavery) more explicitly with Baroque optics that brings vision itself into view. The exhibition doubles as a negative portrait of the bond (qua Harriet) and an experimentation with the partial or full rotation of this negativity. Beyond merely not seeing (the bond), the work iterates on precisely *how* not to see. Within each work, the bond or the event of its rotation is reproduced or elaborated upon. The exhibition then contends with this paradox of demonstrating how not to see precisely by offering *more* to see. Surfaces are rotated, stretched, seen from above, and *invented*. The etched crystal works rotate the signature on the bond's verso in ten movements until a full 180° turn is complete, inventing a verso of the verso; the wall work transforms the *H* of Harriet's written name on the document's recto into an anamorphic distortion such that the viewer can only see its "non-distorted" form from a 180° angle in relation to the work; the floor work divides the space, producing a 90° angle in tandem with the pole in the center of the gallery to demarcate the 360° path of the viewer around the gallery; and the 1 hour video work, scored by a field recording of a thunderstorm in Kentucky, depicts a 180° turn in the rotating lounge at the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles. Though with each Baroque turn, we are no closer to the document nor to Harriet.

Harriet is then the fundamental problem of vision and its vestibule. To amend Christine Buci-Glucksmann writing on the Baroque, the exhibition posits that "[a]nimated by all or nothing," the scopic regime of slavery "possesses a *conatus*, an *energetic of expression*...which allows it to [be] engage[d] [from] all possible points of view," to be exhibited, to be concealed, and to "self-destruct" (Madness, 14). However, for Garden, the combination of these infinite views, of all possible angles, does not grant the slave a continuous, representable form nor intelligible interior. Rather, the slave is, to borrow from Rizvana Bradley, a structural dehiscence, the "phantasmatic presencing of an absence, of the corporeality which is phenomenology's constitutive negation" (Anteaesthetics, 59). The structural and infinite violability of Black feminine flesh is articulated here as the scopic technology required—à la Emanuele Tesauro's "*la forma informe*" (the informing form)—to see (in) the modern world at all. Or, to borrow from Benjamin's meditation on panopticism, through the slave "not only *does one see everything*, but *one sees it in all ways*." (Arcades, 531).