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*a rhizomatic and American story of art and activism, of culture and capital, of being and belonging*

# I Will Keep My Soul

Helen Cammock

with contributions by Jordan Amirkhani, Andrea Andersson, Roshanak Kheshti, Kristina Kay Robinson,  
an interview by Courtney J. Martin and afterword by Cameron Shaw

*A copublication of Siglio, Rivers Institute for Art and Thought and the California African American Museum*

*new publication date:* April 21, 2023.

*first serial:* *The Paris Review Daily* features a portfolio of Cammock's images with Jordan Amirkhani's essay "All Water Has a Perfect Memory" from the book.

*book launches* in NYC and London:

In New York City, Friday, March 31 at 7 p.m. at CARA (Center for Art, Research and Alliances). The evening includes a reading by Helen Cammock and a conversation between Cammock and writer and art historian Re'al Christian. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Free. 225 W. 13th Street, NYC 10011.

In London, Tuesday, April 11 at 6 p.m. at the Kate MacGarry Gallery. A reading by Cammock will be followed by a conversation with Andrea Andersson, director of the Rivers Institute. The gallery will also exhibit a selection of Cammock's text-based works. The event runs 6 - 8 p.m. Free. 27 Old Nichol Street, London, E2 7HR.

## *about the book*

Convening polyphonous voices from past and present, *I Will Keep My Soul* is an orchestral layering of photography, historical documents, poetry and interviews, all rooted in the social history, geography and community of New Orleans.

In this prismatic artist's book, UK-based artist Helen Cammock traverses the city, rendering her observations and encounters into reverberant texts and percipient photographic images that tender the city's invisible histories. She weaves these contemporary sequences with archival materials from the Amistad Research Center to sustain the city's complex past. The book object itself—its flexibility, its tactility, its use of transparent paper to layer images and texts—invites the reader into a capacious experience in which multiple and sometimes competing truths can be seen and heard.

Among the newspaper clippings, instructions for activists, a nineteenth-century publication on Creole slave songs that speak the long struggle for Civil Rights, the

*Art is, and has always been, an expression of the historic conditions of people and should be part of humanity's wealth.*

—Elizabeth Catlett

*I may use the words of a novelist, philosopher or poet interwoven with my own, questioning the difference in meaning and impact when various people use the same words ... It's important to me to intentionally democratise text, to cross time and place, to ask questions about the cyclical nature of history, rhetoric, perspective.*

—Helen Cammock

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most persistent historical voice in *I Will Keep My Soul* belongs to sculptor Elizabeth Catlett whose observations punctuate each section of the book. Cammock also draws on correspondence and photographs that articulate Catlett's participation in the Civil Rights movement as well as her struggle for agency, autonomy and support during her 1976 commission to create a bronze monument to New Orleans musician Louis Armstrong, sited at Congo Square, a place laden with histories of immense oppression as well as celebration.

The textual contributions by Jordan Amirkhani, Andrea Andersson and Kristina Kay Robinson are not positioned as traditional art criticism, but instead further deepen the reader's knowledge, experience and understanding of the opposing forces—geographical, economic, historical, cultural—that have formed the city New Orleans.

Summoning, holding and arranging these voices with extraordinary deftness and acuity, *I Will Keep My Soul* coalesces into a rhizomatic and particularly American story of art and activism, of culture and capital, of being and belonging.

### *about the artist*

Helen Cammock uses film, photography, print, text, song and performance to examine mainstream historical and contemporary narratives about Blackness, womanhood, oppression and resistance, wealth and power, poverty and vulnerability. Her works often cut across time and geography, layering multiple voices as she investigates the cyclical nature of histories in her visual and aural assemblages. In 2017, Cammock received the Max Mara Art Prize for Women and in 2019 was the joint recipient of The Turner Prize. She has exhibited and performed worldwide including recent solo shows at the Whitechapel Gallery, The Photographer's Gallery (London, UK), STUK Art Centre (Leuven, Belgium), Collezione Maramotti (Reggio Emilia, Italy), VOID (Derry, Northern Ireland), the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin, Ireland), Kestner Gesellschaft (Hamburg, Germany) and group shows at Serpentine Galleries, Tate Britain (London, UK), and Hamburger Kunsthalle (Germany). Other upcoming solo shows include Oakville Galleries (Toronto, Canada) and Amant (New York).

### *about the exhibition*

This artist's book is published on the occasion of an eponymous and multifarious exhibition in Los Angeles at Art + Practice, in partnership with CAAM, February 11 – August 5, 2023. In New Orleans, from October–December 2023, the exhibition will figure across multiple sites and include Cammock's film installation, outdoor text-based work, a roving music series and her selection of working materials by New Orleans artists who shaped her experience in the city. Each, including the artist's book, is a primary site of *I Will Keep My Soul*.

“Finding and nurturing the sites of shift and movement—the places where they come into contact, pose gaps, interrupt, form connections, become liquid—remains Cammock's most powerful methodological tool both inside

*Advance is difficult,  
and departure from  
the accepted path is  
dangerous, but difficulty  
and danger are old  
acquaintances.*

—Elizabeth Catlett

*I have a sense of  
tenderness for a place  
where I can walk down  
the street and feel seen  
and unseen in the same  
moment.*

—Helen Cammock

*Being in New Orleans  
has always been  
inextricably bound  
to belonging in New  
Orleans. And the  
answer to the question,  
“Outsider?” which is  
usually a challenge, has  
often been confused with  
or reduced to a choice  
between binaries—  
insider or outsider,  
French or American,  
Black or white....  
What “separates  
[New Orleans] from  
the world” is its  
sheer impossibility to  
exist apart from the  
“infinitely larger fabric”  
from which it comes.*

—Andrea Andersson

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the archives and in the materialization of her films and writing. Harnessing the power of water, the churn of history, and the spirit of memory that haunts both, Cammock seeps and soaks into historical record, offering and opening space for the flow and traces of the past to link, return and remember.” —Jordan Amirkhani

*I Will Keep My Soul* is curated by Jordan Amirkhani and Andrea Andersson (Rivers) in partnership with Essence Harden (CAAM).

*about Siglio's co-publishing partners*

*Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought* is a non-profit institute for research, publishing, and exhibitions. Based in New Orleans, Rivers commits to work at the confluence of diverse bodies of knowledge and to art informed by diasporic experience and exchange. Working together with Amistad Research Center, Rivers welcomes artists from around the world to New Orleans to advance contemporary art that makes a study of history. [riversinstitute.org](http://riversinstitute.org)

*California African American Museum* has a strong mandate to support the work of under-represented artists of color and to think expansively about the way African American artists have contributed to American culture and the world at large. Its mission is to research, collect, preserve, and interpret for public enrichment the history, art, and culture of African Americans with an emphasis on California and the western United States. [caamuseum.org](http://caamuseum.org)

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*siglio* publishes uncommon books that live in the rich and varied space between art and literature. Driven by its feminist ethos, siglio champions uncategorizable, unwieldy, and expansive works by artists and writers who invite readers to see the world anew by reading word, image, and page in unfamiliar ways. For siglio, “the book” is many things, above all, a space for heterodoxy, ambiguity, wonder, and play.