

# RENA BRANSTEN

## GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Lewis Watts: Mining the Archive*

July 1 – August 19

Rena Bransten Gallery is pleased to present *Lewis Watts: Mining the Archive*. Made during his residency at The Amistad Center for Art and Culture in Hartford, CT in 2016, these works are the artist's response to the archives housed there. The collection consists of books by well known and unknown African American authors, slave narratives, artifacts and advertising, as well as books that contain stereotypes and propaganda denigrating black people and professing justifications for slavery. Watts cataloged several books held in the collection, and the resulting high detail prints show rich textures of the worn book cloth, torn paper, and deterioration caused by time. In one large print, Watts shows the double title page of Frederick Douglas' *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which includes his portrait. Frederick Douglas was the most photographed person of his time – surpassing even Lincoln in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Douglas recognized the power of photography in shaping public opinion, and used it in the hopes of presenting a more positive image of African Americans in society.

The physical attributes captured in these prints, together with the content, explore how an archive can function in preserving multiple facets of history – not just the poignant and beautiful, but also the shameful and grotesque.

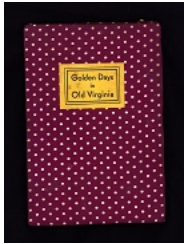
**The Amistad Center for Art & Culture** is an independent not-for-profit cultural arts organization, housed at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, CT. Both organizations are partners in a unique collaboration designed to inspire and bring enjoyment of art and culture to diverse audiences in Greater Hartford, the state of Connecticut, and the region. The Amistad Center manages a multi-disciplinary collection of fine art, photography, historical artifacts, memorabilia, and rare books that document the African American experience.

**Lewis Watts** is a photographer, archivist/curator and Professor Emeritus of Art at UC Santa Cruz. His work centers around the "cultural landscape" primarily in communities occupied by people of African descent. He is the author of *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (2006, 2017) and *New Orleans Suite: Music and Culture in Transition* (UC Press, 2013). His work has been exhibited at and is in the collections of The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Cité de La Musique, Paris, France; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, LA; The Oakland Museum of California; The Amistad

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Center for Art and Culture, Hartford, CT, among others. He is currently working on two photographic projects, "the Black Presence in France," and another on migration throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa which is an extension of his earlier work on the Great African American migration in the 20th Century.



### *Golden Days in Old Virginia*

2016

archival pigment print  
39 3/4 x 29 1/2 inches  
Edition of 10



### *Inner cover of John Henry*

2016

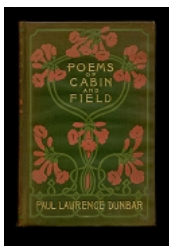
archival pigment print  
15 1/2 x 20 inches



### *Crisis*

2016

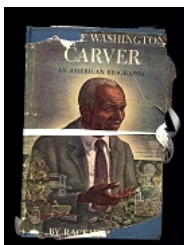
archival pigment print on canvas  
49 1/4 x 38 1/2 inches  
Edition of 10



### *Poems of Cabin and Field*

2016

archival pigment print  
20 1/4 x 14 1/4 inches



### *George Washinton Carver: An American Biography*

2016

archival pigment print  
20 1/4 x 16 inches

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*Books from the Collection*

2016

archival pigment print

15 1/2 x 19 1/4 inches



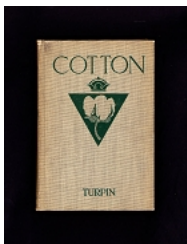
*My Bondage and My Freedom*

2016

archival pigment print on canvas

42 1/2 x 51 3/4 inches

Edition of 10



*Cotton*

2016

archival pigment print

20 x 14 1/2 inches



*The First Book of Jazz*

2016

archival pigment print on canvas

20 x 15 5/8 inches