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Through mixed media collages and digital compositions, **Giana De Dier**'s work examines the experiences of Afro-Caribbean migrants in the segregated Canal Zone at the beginning of the 20th century.

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The excerpt below is part of a text and collage exchange between Jenise and Giana. It is inspired by family memory and the [Museo Afroantillano de Panamá](#) installation (right).



The Glass Cabinet

Text by Jenise Miller | Collages by Giana De Dier

The Glass Cabinet

1. (In Panama) a piece of furniture in the dining room installation of a Panama Canal worker's home at the Museo Afroantillano (West Indian Museum)
2. (In Trinidad) storage for a "mother's treasured collections... delicate china, dinner sets and tea sets she used only on special occasions"ⁱ
3. a representation of "...a poetics of space, the joy of thinking imaginatively about one's dwelling"ⁱⁱ

See also:

- a. (In London) drinks cabinet: "...pride of place in the front room with glass shelves neatly filled with rows of shining, gold-rimmed glasses that... provided a sense of achievement."ⁱⁱⁱ
- b. (In Compton) glass shelf: "a small space solution... held her collection of family photos, crystal glasses... remnant and reminder of the home left in the home made... something kept for and to herself."^{iv}



ⁱElizabeth Nunez, *Not for Everyday Use* (New York: Akashic Books, 2014), 243.

ⁱⁱbell hooks, "Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice" in *Art on My Mind: visual politics* (New York: New Press, 1998), 148.

ⁱⁱⁱMichael McMillan, "The 'West Indian' Front Room: Reflections on a Diasporic Phenomenon," *Kunapipi* 30, no. 2 (2008): 63.

^{iv}Miller, Jenise. "The Glass Shelf" (Unpublished essay, 2022).

My mother placed minor objects on glass and elevated them, brought them together with her hands and gave them new meaning. She arranged the display with what she had, found, or could afford – wine glasses and decanter sparkling high from the top shelf, family photos placed close on the lower shelf, ceramic elephants faced away from the front door, marching in good luck. She paid attention to detail, shape, orientation, and color, decided, considered what to add and include, where to place it, what looked or felt good, decided, in the moment and over time, what old pieces to move forward, what to leave behind. If work took her time, home was one place she reclaimed it. When not submitting to the demands of children or lover or job, she curated parts of life that pleased only her.

*A small recreation gave re-creation;
a glass shelf, an altar and blessing.*



*I hold many things.
Treat the pieces I am
as fragile, valuable.
Handle me with care.
What do I have that is mine?
That no one tries to touch?
I am an object to those I labor,
far less than my worth,
to those I am responsible,
to love even at my expense.
It costs so much.
Here are pieces of me
you can admire
but cannot touch.
See, I am beautiful to behold,
but I am not yours.*

