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**THE Ford Family  
FOUNDATION**

**O** UNIVERSITY OF  
OREGON | Center for Art Research

*MOON*

A Publication of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program

# *MOON*





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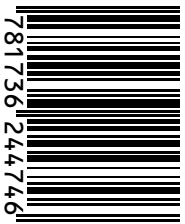


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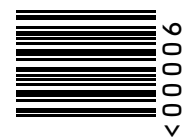
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In acknowledging the original people of the land we occupy, we extend our respect to the Indigenous people of Oregon and all other displaced Indigenous people who call Oregon home. With this publication and our collective activity, Critical Conversations recognizes Oregon's first people as the past, present, and future stewards of this land, and we pledge our commitment to make ongoing efforts to center Indigenous existence and related knowledge, creativity, resilience, and resistance in the work we do.

# *NOON*

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# NOON

 **THE FORD FAMILY  
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## Editorial Statement

Noon may be the least romanticized phase of a day. Not a beginning or an end, but a quiet tipping point. The lighting does not swoon as dawn and dusk, the energy does not pulse. But one can move without the deep shadows of other times—a body alone without the complications of its drawn shell.

This time for our world may be noon. Soft noon, lower case, not to slide into the hard High Noon of Western pastiche. We find ourselves just past history-making periods for racial justice, social networks, and women's rights. After such upheaval, these spaces are changed but not by any means resolved. Restitution has hardly begun. Sickness lingers. Losses of ground around every corner. Wars draw on with faltering attention. There is a sense still of the day ahead, but not many markers for what it will bring. Aren't we close enough to dusk for urgency?

Our project, of commissioning and gathering art writing into bound books, holds evidence of this epoch. Writers are still hit by COVID, again and again. People are torn: their attentions, families, lives of joining adjunct work with writing work with editing work, curating. They are tired from pressing very hard through the past two years, with less time even in the face of days that are far more domestic.

To return to the image of the body alone without shadow: at this noon, we are more able to see each other as we are. The writing of the hour has less arch, less bass, but more authenticity, be it a look back at an artist-run space of decades ago or a futuristic journey. These writers are working confidently, with their voices and their propositions clear.

### *Critical Conversations Editorial Board*

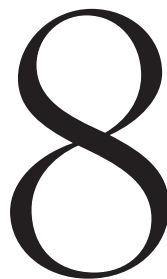
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## Care as Art Practice

Grace Kook-Anderson



What does a visual art career look like? What is it *supposed* to look like? I once heard a well-known artist and educator talk about how an artist is really evaluated through exhibitions, critical reviews, and sales of their work in just four years of their “peak” practice. I understood this to be somewhat accurate in the sense of an artist’s commercial career and in the sense of how little that is in the long arc of an artist’s life. At the very least, I understood the stark and disproportionate ratio of this particular, perhaps typical, assessment over an entire artistic practice and life work.

I have been thinking about the mounting expectations required of an artist with this “traditional” and capitalist model in mind—to be a business owner (the business being the artmaking), to manage multiple social media accounts, to grow your audience, to maintain an active mailing list and newsletter, to rigorously apply for grants, to have the most up-to-date website, to craft the perfect artist statement that’s smart but not too smart, to cultivate your “three c’s” (curators, collectors, and critics)—all while making sure you have the time to make your best work in the studio and through residencies, and while keeping your archives up-to-date and your legacy in mind. In what other field do we make such a demand on one individual? How did the individual achievements of one person become so grossly romanticized in our history that we rarely acknowledge the group efforts made, the mentorships established, the schools of learning, and the collective braintrust?

Thinking about how work and a career can look differently, and how to apply more lasting values in the process of art apart from the market-based model, I wanted to talk to artists across three generations—artists who have carved out their own space for working and sustaining, who have prioritized endless curiosity, connection, the care of others, the collective

Grace Kook-Anderson

body, mentorship, and kinship. This is the pursuit of this essay, in thinking about care as art practice or kinship (biological, or more often a chosen family) as art practice.

In reflection, there are many artists I could have selected to cover these ideas, and I think that speaks to the fortunate ecology that exists in this region. Just in the last month, I reflected on two lively encounters: Marie Watt’s collaboration with Cannupa Hanska Luger on *Each/Other* (2021), a monumental she-wolf sculpture which includes over 800 embroidered bandanas sourced from communities all over the world, exhibited at Stelo Arts in Portland. The work is a continued example of Watt’s deep engagement with communities formed through sewing together.<sup>1</sup> Even in my casual run-in with Portland-based painter V. Maldonado, we touched on so many topics in a few minutes’ time of inspiration including, for V., their engagement with students, their constant curiosity and growth, and *la familia*. In reflecting on Sharita Towne’s APEX exhibition at the Portland Art Museum that has changed over a period of a year, much of it reflecting on Towne’s BAEP (Black Art Ecology of Portland) endeavors, I am constantly inspired by all the ways she has worked with different communities, sharing resources, and shedding light on the work of others.<sup>2</sup> In the arts, our professional and personal worlds are deeply woven together. Fellow artists become friends, kids of the arts find solace in each other when dragged to art openings, and we come out for each other to celebrate shows, fellowships, and new work. Much of this care is already integral to how we thrive.

I had conversations with Judy Cooke (born 1940), Fernanda D’Agostino (born 1950), and Takahiro Yamamoto (born 1980).<sup>3</sup> Three different generations, in some ways a superficial category of separation, but in reflection of a breadth of time, and by accident in my thinking of these artists, each born at the start of a decade (’40, ’50, ’80). Cooke’s generation is known as the Silent Generation, D’Agostino’s is the Baby Boomers, and Yamamoto is at the very end of Generation X, which is also my generation. In many ways, these generational titles mean almost nothing, but certainly their experiences and becoming are influenced by their own era.

*Celebration After the Fact* (1972) was Cooke’s first tarp piece, and my introduction to the artist’s work in the Portland Art Museum’s collection. Cooke makes use of the inherent characteristics of material: the blue dye of the fabric, the curvature of the edges, and grommets that serve as a frame or hanging device. The tarp becomes a physical object in response to the wall: forms appear, reminiscent of clothing patterns, a lightbulb, stitching lines, or architectural renderings. Her collage process is also apparent, with other fabric adhered with staples, and tape added for color and materiality. *Celebration After the Fact* was an important transitional work for Cooke, a celebration not only of the birth of her child, but also her return to artmaking after childbirth.

What I admire so much about Cooke is her open-ended and curious position in all things. It seems to be her way of being in the world. Cooke told me, “You have to keep asking questions. It’s not about the answers, it’s about the questions. And I think they end up being personal...not about where a work lands, but how they question the process...” When I called her up after not much contact during the pandemic, Cooke dove right into her thinking process in a way that felt warm and familiar, as if we were continuing a conversation from just the other day, telling me she was thinking a lot about color these days, about Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, and about the film’s unusual use of color and frame-by-frame composition.





Judy Cooke (American, born 1940), *Celebration After the Fact*, 1972. Graphite, ink, tape, and pigment on canvas, 76 × 82 ¼ in. Museum Purchase: Caroline Ladd Pratt Fund. Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, © 1972 Judy Cooke, 73.5

Perhaps unusual for Cooke's generation, as a child, her mother encouraged her art interests. Cooke recalled long days in the public library while her mother would run errands in Detroit. She recalled spending a lot of time at the Detroit Art Museum, noting Jacob Lawrence as the first significant artist of influence for her.

Continuing in the direction of art at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (now part of Tufts University), Cooke was going against the grain of pop art that was surrounding her, and continued on the path of abstraction. For Cooke, her pursuit in making was about an investigation of materials and forms, where abstraction was based on concrete events: the birth of her child, play toys scattered around the house, or the impressions of Squam Lake.<sup>4</sup>

On the exterior, Cooke's initial career path may appear typical of her generation when married to another artist who is male. Robert Hanson's teaching position at the Museum Art School was what brought the couple out to Portland in 1968, and as a husband/wife teaching at the same institution was not something that happened and substitute positions were not readily available, Cooke went back to waitressing. But rather than seeing this as a point of frustration, it allowed Cooke more time in the studio and more time to focus on her work. Even slowed down by having a family and child-rearing without other family members nearby to help, Cooke maintained her practice, driven by an openness rather than a rigid timeline or set of goals or expectations. Eventually, as Cooke entered the field of teaching, she became tenured at PNCA, often teaching

the same classes as Hanson, which was and still is unusual.<sup>5</sup> Cooke's career is itself a living form, a way of being, stretching and constricting as required, but always open. Our conversation weaved in and out in the same way, whether we talked about the weather, the garden, the tarp, or the tape.

There is rupture in every generation. In Cooke's time, the Silent Generation stemmed from the Great Depression and World War II. In Fernanda D'Agostino's formative years, her career emerged at a time of other ruptures: women's rights, the Civil Rights movement, and the Vietnam war. Finding a path in art seemed difficult in a climate of so much change and conflict. Even what was considered important in art was in discord: older professors at George Washington University, The Corcoran School were pushing figure studies, while younger faculty were focused on Minimalism. Meanwhile, outside the immediate walls of "the ivory tower," the actions of loud protests and activism were more alive and present than anything taught in the classroom.

D'Agostino was coming to terms with the relevance of artmaking, as its powers were rekindled, while studying with Rudy Autio at the University of Montana. It was here that performance, installation, and body work entered the breadth of D'Agostino's visual language. D'Agostino shares that "early performance work was very transgressive. Performance work is often collaborative... there is an inherent collaborative process." This experience and the understanding of synergetic artmaking have informed the rest of D'Agostino's career.

I have had the pleasure of holding many conversations with D'Agostino over the years. Our shared experience of caregiving on both ends of our generations—mothers on one end and children on the other—helps to usher one generation at

Fernanda D'Agostino, documentation of *Borderline/Decameron*, 2019. Sophia Wright Emigh performs live with her projected image at Oregon Contemporary. (Photo: Brian Foulkes)



the end of life, while simultaneously nurture a younger life into their own place in the world. I have found solace in these shared experiences of loss, grief, and joy, and in fortunate moments, these conversations with artists were most heartening. As D’Agostino’s formal artistic career was taking off with commissions and public art projects, her personal trajectory was slowed down when her mother became ill, just at the time when her daughter was entering middle school. For D’Agostino, giving up an art practice was not an option, but neither was giving up a presence for her daughter. D’Agostino recalls these years as the “slow burn,” inching away in the studio as energy and time could afford.

Similar to Cooke, D’Agostino is someone who is constant in their work, constantly forming and stretching their visual language. Inspired by making art in-community, D’Agostino has gone from working as a performer to now working *with* performers. Her current collaborative endeavor with Mobile Projection Unit (MPU) is an example of her drive through constant curiosity and collective work. Mobile Projection Unit has been a collaboration with artist Sarah Turner, presenting experimental and site-specific projected video works as a curatorial project, and has included work by artists and curators ariella tai, Maximilliano, Jaleesa Johnston, rubén garcía marrufo, and many others.

In collaborative practice, D’Agostino found generative creativity with Johnston and Sophia Wright Emigh through their collective work called “In/Body” at Open Signal (2018), which then led to more performative explorations. In these performances, including *Borderline* (2019, premiered at the Portland Art Museum as part of the exhibition *the map is not the territory*), “the artists responded to prompts for the bodywork related to generational trauma and Earth in crisis.” These movements, as apart as they were in moments, were responsive to each other. For D’Agostino, the model for artmaking is guided by “how we can help each other, and in realizing that people have lives,” and “how not to turn your back on the kin work.”

After three years of patience, sustained rehearsals, and keeping fellow performers connected and engaged in the journey leading up to the performance of *Opacity of Performance* at the Portland Art Museum, Takahiro Yamamoto prioritized care and coexistence among his fellow collaborators and partners.<sup>6</sup> To finally see the performance at different moments felt like a quiet celebration, a joy to witness, a way to think about how to go on in the midst of a pandemic. To see Garrick Imatani’s curtain production of layers of canary yellow, fluorescent pink, sky blue, and clear bands cut diagonally across the traditionally European art galleries of the museum alone, tickled the senses. And from the institutional side, it was admirable to witness my colleague, Sara Krajewski, as the curator, keep the staff sustained and engaged internally over those years of pandemic delay.

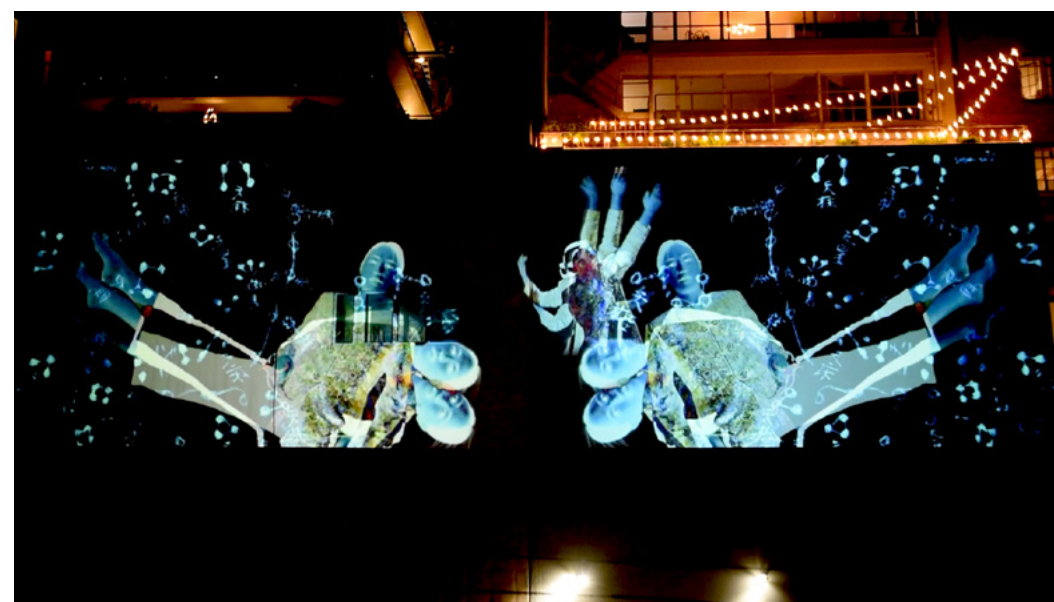
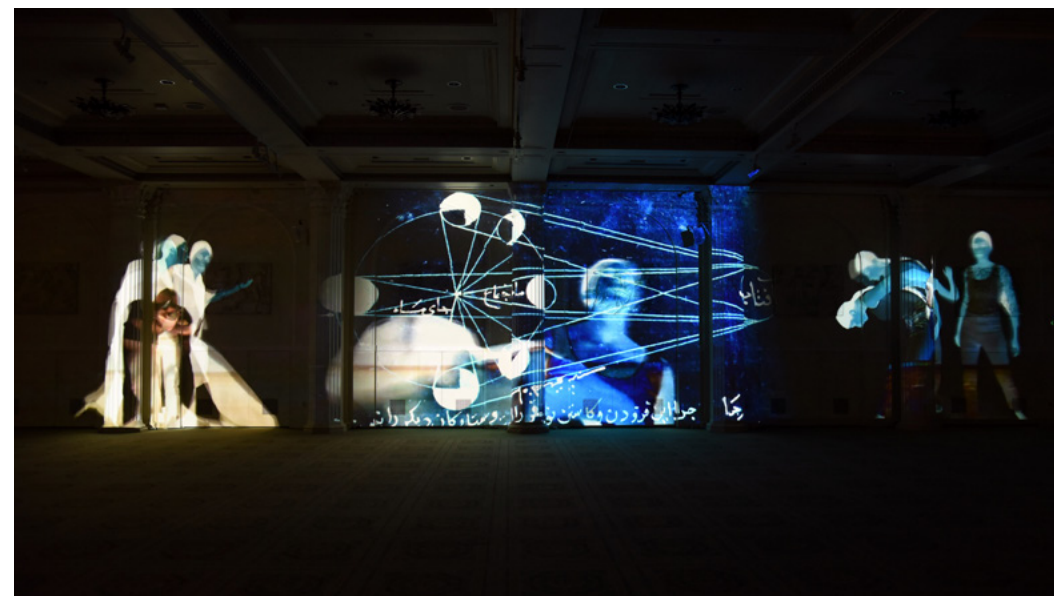
To our fortune, Yamamoto’s struggles trying to get traditional theatrical parts in the early 2000’s (where being Asian with

*Opposite:*

Mobile Projection Unit, Fernanda D’Agostino and Sarah Turner, *Letters from Earth* (Sarah Brahim footage), 2021. At Venice VR Expanded, Portland Art Museum. (Photo: Brian Foulkes)

Mobile Projection Unit, Fernanda D’Agostino and Sarah Turner, *Letters from Earth* (Sophia Wright Emigh and Jaleesa Johnston footage), 2021. At Venice VR Expanded, Portland Art Museum. (Photo: Brian Foulkes)

Fernanda D’Agostino with Felicia Lowe, Miche Wong, and Knxout, *Movement Memory Mirage*, 2022. Projection commissioned by the Chinatown Media and Art Collective, in association with Chinese Historical Society of America and Center for Asian American Media, San Francisco. (Photo: Brian Foulkes)





Takahiro Yamamoto,  
documentation of *Opacity  
of Performance*, June 2022.  
Portland Art Museum.  
(Photo: Jason Hill)



an accent limited his roles) led him to explore making work on his own terms based on movement and abstraction. Yamamoto came to the U.S. in 1999 to study English at the University of California, Irvine's extension program. He then continued his education at Fullerton College and Cal State Northridge, studying Communication Studies and Theatre Arts. In 2011, Yamamoto began study at the Pacific Northwest College of Art's (PNCA) small, interdisciplinary program in Visual Studies, which allowed Yamamoto to deepen his performance practice. Artists in the community supported his work: Arnold Kemp (the PNCA Chair in the program), Linda K. Johnson, MK Guth, Angela Maddox, and Erin Boberg Doughton served as mentors and connectors. Jeanine Jablonski of Fourteen30 Contemporary and Patrick Rock of Rocks Box offered Yamamoto a space to publicly perform, just two weeks after arriving in Portland, allowing for foundational structure in Yamamoto's work.

Yamamoto's artistic direction with *Opacity of Performance* required the largest number of people he'd worked with (Intisar Abioto, Roland Dahwen, Ben Evans, Nolan Hanson, Garrick Imatani, Sydney Jackson, Irene June, Stephanie Schaaf, and Emily Squires). Logistics and care went hand-in-hand: making sure nourishment (ample snacks) was maintained; that there were the right amount of breaks and length of time to be working together; and that their collective time built in shared meals, an allowance for talk and rest, and an awareness of when to pick the kids up from school.

For Yamamoto, these are the ways where coexistence is also the practice—how to be together while retaining individuality. With this intention, Yamamoto shared that “the idea of coexistence came when I moved to the U.S. because it (coexistence) was denied for me. I always felt like a for-eigner—maybe it was the language barrier or how I looked.” Having that immigrant experience drove Yamamoto to build this idea into the space of his work: “Coexistence calls for care, self-care, empathy, and curiosity.”

From a less patient perspective, the pandemic could be seen as derailing plans for Yamamoto’s performance, delaying the timeline more than once. However, in D’Agostino’s words, it allowed for the “slow burn” that accentuated Yamamoto’s practice and became reflected in the bodies of the performers. Perhaps the most touching movement that also served as a transitional one between performers was the gesture of brushing off each other’s clothes or bodies—the motion of care—helping to clean each other off, the exchange of glances and smiles, the familial touch that hit so close to the self. I recalled the instances when my dad used to pick lint off my clothes as his gesture of love, the way I would brush off a gray hair on my mother’s sweater, how we pick up our kids and brush them off when they have a fall, and how we do the same for ourselves.

I write this in the late summer of 2022, aware of my rose-colored glasses. I am writing to uncover or perhaps validate how I think about a different way of practicing a career that is shared between artists and curators or, more generally in the field of the arts, how we try to come out of a pandemic. Cooke, D’Agostino, and Yamamoto are artists I’ve had the pleasure of engaging with, who have developed a rich and lifted practice—shaped through their time, resistance, plasticity, and care—that is a living one rather than merely a commercial one. I write this because I have been thinking about how we can readjust our values as a culture that deeply considers our humanity and our relations with each other while deprioritizing the bottom-line and taking into account the whole arc of our volition.

- 1 Marie Watt and Cannupa Hanska Luger’s collaborative artmaking process was featured in an exhibition entitled *Each/Other*. First presented at the Denver Art Museum (May 23–August 22, 2021), the exhibition traveled to the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University (September 25–December 12, 2021) and the Peabody Essex Museum (January 29–May 8, 2022). *Gather* at Stelo Arts is the culminating core residency exhibition between Watt and Luger (August 13–November 27, 2022).
- 2 *APEX: Sharita Towne & A Black Art Ecology of Portland*, Portland Art Museum, July 31, 2021–October 30, 2022.
- 3 Phone conversations were held with Judy Cooke (August 9, 2022), Fernanda D’Agostino (August 15, 2022), and Takahiro Yamamoto (August 17, 2022). Quotes by the artists in the essay are from these conversations.
- 4 Judy Cooke’s *Squam* (1995) is in the permanent collection of Reed College.
- 5 Cooke went on to Reed College to receive her Masters of Arts in Teaching. In addition to her studio career, Cook taught at Mt. Hood Community College, Portland State University, and Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) where she taught for 18 years before retiring in 2004.
- 6 *Opacity of Performance: Takahiro Yamamoto* was a commissioned dance installation which took place over two consecutive weekends at the Portland Art Museum on June 16 to 19 and June 23 to 26, 2022.

Judy Cooke is one of the Northwest’s most influential painters, having explored abstract imagery and the structure of painting for over 30 years. She investigates the space between painting and sculpture, examining the physical nature of both in her work. Cooke has exhibited extensively, including a retrospective at the Art Gym at Marylhurst University, Portland Art Museum, and Tacoma Art Museum. She has been the recipient of numerous prestigious grants, including the Flintridge Foundation Award for Visual Art and the National Endowment for

the Arts Visual Artist Fellowship. Her work is included in the collections of the Portland Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and Boise Art Museum, among others.

Fernanda D’Agostino is a public art and new media installation artist based in Portland, Oregon. D’Agostino has exhibited nationally and internationally with video installation, large scale public art projects, and performance. Her work has been featured in numerous new media festivals and exhibitions, and she strives to share what she has learned with others. In 2018, at the invitation of curator Justin Hoover, she produced large-scale outdoor projection mapping works in San Francisco for the Untitled Art Fair, and in Hong Kong in conjunction with Art Basel Hong Kong. Her *Borderline* series of installations was exhibited in 2018–19 at 1A Space Hong Kong, Oregon Center for Contemporary Art, Open Signal, and Portland Art Museum (all Portland, Oregon). Her work has most recently been featured as part of Venice VR Expanded—a division of the Venice Film Festival and Venice Biennale. Her work is in the collections of the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, New York Public Library, and the Cyland Video Archive in St. Petersburg, Russia. D’Agostino’s work has been recognized by the Flintridge Foundation, Bonnie Bronson Fellowship, Andy Warhol Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Ford Family Foundation, 4Culture, Sacks Foundation at the University of Pennsylvania, Americans for the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Oregon Arts Commission. D’Agostino is co-founder and co-director with Sarah Turner of Mobile Projection Unit, and is a member of the InBody performance collective in Portland, and Collective Action Studio, San Francisco. D’Agostino works between sculpture, installation, creative coding, and video mapping on several programming platforms. The connecting thread in all her work is creating an immersive, interactive environment that places viewers within the work. D’Agostino is currently completing work for the 2023 Environmental Biennale in Lisbon, Portugal.

Takahiro Yamamoto is a multidisciplinary artist and choreographer based in Portland, Oregon (Cowlitz, Clackamas and Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde). His current conceptual investigations revolve around the phenomenological effects of time, embodied approach to the presence of nothingness, and the social/emotional implications of visibility. His performance and visual art works have been presented at Portland Art Museum, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, DiverseWorks, Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, The Henry Art Gallery, and GoDown Arts Centre, Nairobi, among other venues. Yamamoto holds an MFA in Visual Studies from Pacific Northwest College of Art. He is part of the Portland-based support group Physical Education with Allie Hankins, keyon gaskin, and Lu Yim.

Grace Kook-Anderson was appointed The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art at the Portland Art Museum in 2017. She is responsible for the Northwest Art Collection and galleries; the APEX exhibition series on solo exhibitions and projects; and the regional survey, most recently titled, *the map is not the territory* (2019). Kook-Anderson was the coordinating curator for *Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott*, organized by the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati before traveling to the Portland Art Museum (2020-2021). Prior to joining the museum, she was an adjunct Assistant Professor of Art in the School of Art + Design at Portland State University while working as an independent curator and arts writer. From 2008–2015, Kook-Anderson was the Curator of Contemporary Art at the Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach, California.

Jovencio de la Paz:  
Didderen and Redactions

*Sarah Diver*

# 18

Under a magnifying glass, the works of artist Jovencio de la Paz are simply warp and weft, the threading of delicate fibers under and over each other to describe striations of heathered greys, soft oranges, and plush ivories. Inherent to their creation, however, through the literal and metaphorical combination of hand and machine, de la Paz's textiles operate as portals into liminal planes, envisioning a humanistic and collaborative relationship to technology.

Born in Singapore before immigrating to Gresham, Oregon, as a child, de la Paz looked to the imagined worlds of science fiction and video games to shelter themselves from the violence of living as a queer person of color in a rural community; as they have described, "I needed other worlds as a means of survival." As an undergraduate at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, de la Paz was recommended to the Department of Textiles, which had recently purchased a Thread Controller, a computerized Jacquard loom that allows for any digitally created image to be woven into fiber. The Jacquard loom, developed at the turn of the nineteenth century, is a mechanized weaving system that originally used a paper punched card to instruct the machine on how to complete a pattern. The punched cards of the early Jacquard looms provided information to the weaving mechanism through either the presence or absence of paper; this information is now given to the loom through binary code. Using the Thread Controller, the artist taught themselves both to weave by hand and to interface with the machine on a programming level, giving rise to a multiplicity that became a launching point for years of creative investigation. They received an M.F.A. in Fibers from the Cranbrook Academy of Art and currently serve as Assistant Professor and Curricular Head of Fibers at the University of Oregon.



Jovencio de la Paz, *Didderen 1.1*, 2018. Hand-woven natural and synthetic fibers, 20 × 16 in. Courtesy Portland State University, as part of the State of Oregon Percent for Art Collection. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

*Following spread:*  
Jovencio de la Paz, *Didderen 1.6 & 1.7* (diptych), 2018. Hand-woven natural and synthetic fibers, 20 × 16 in. each. Courtesy Portland State University, as part of the State of Oregon Percent for Art Collection. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)





Jovencio de la Paz,  
*Didderen 3.1*, 2018. Hand-  
woven natural and synthetic  
fibers, 24 × 18 in. Courtesy  
Portland State University, as  
part of the State of Oregon  
Percent for Art Collection.  
(Photo: Mario Gallucci)

The Thread Controller 2 (TC2) loom remains central to de la Paz's practice as a means of visualizing technological phenomena through fiber, a hopeful vision born from the artist's early love of sci-fi. In the same way that the human hand controls the output of a textile in weaving, so does the computer in following its operational software. Each adheres to a pattern or set of instructions. Like spoken language, coding is an idiosyncratic expression that reflects onto the personality and voice of the speaker, and thus, the trace of the human author, "the ghost of the machine," can be found in the tiny infractions and inconsistencies in the software's code, as the artist describes, the "computational creativity of the algorithm." For de la Paz, these discrepancies are rich material for artistic representation in fiber, an ideal expression for visualizing the politics of language encoded in these tools.

Four works in Portland State University's collection come from de la Paz's *Didderen* series. In reference to the computer-generated origins of their content, these works are titled according to standard updates of a software, 1.1, 1.6, 1.7, and 3.1. "Didderen" is a Middle English word meaning "to tremble" and is the direct etymological ancestor of the verb, "dither." Dithering in the colloquial sense can refer to being indecisive or unsettled, but in the digital realm, it refers to a process where data noise is intentionally added to randomize quantization error. When the additional error is correlated, this allows the file to be converted, in the case of image processing, from greyscale to black-and-white. In the titular fiber works, de la Paz exploits the limits of Photoshop to reveal the failure of the machine. Photoshop's dither function fails to seamlessly convert greyscale. Relinquishing control of the finished product, de la Paz purposefully programs the TC2 to represent this inconsistency in the textile. Recalling the white noise of a television screen, the speckled texture of each work results solely from the software's mis-integration of color. Decentering authorship and queering the binary distinction between manmade and machine-made, the *Didderen* series acts as a literal representation of the imperfections inherently built into Photoshop, and thus, reveals its humanity.

Where the *Didderen* series reveals the failings of the machine, the *Redactions* series uses the loom as a means of hope and reclamation. The TC2 uses corrective software, such that when a design is uploaded, the loom's computer translates the image into code that follows industry-standard weave structures. Circumnavigating the machine's corrective properties, de la Paz hand drew the designs for *Redactions* directly into the machine, bypassing codification. The artist complicates this gesture by using text from the Oregon Exclusionary Clause, which prohibited people of color from owning property in the state of Oregon. Though the law was repealed in 1925, the legal language was not removed from most municipal documents until the 1990s due to the clerical cost of redaction. Through the visualization of redaction in weaving, where fibers obscure the written word, de la Paz reclaims the act of erasure and affirms the rights of people of color to be equal citizens. Overriding the machine, de la Paz asserts himself as author, thus also declaring the rights of people of color to narrativize their histories.

Textiles today occupy a complicated space. Handiwork has canonically been relegated to the lesser-valued realm of the domestic or ornamental and, with it, its makers, who have historically been people of color. The readymade banished the expressiveness of high modernism, eclipsing the trace of the artist's hand with the advent of postmodernism in the

mid-twentieth century. Add to this distinction the conditions of a globalized marketplace. Textiles epitomize the geopolitical hierarchies inherent to global capitalism, whereby labor is performed by former colonies; the colonized labor industry reinscribes the histories of oppression and exploitation. Insisting on the value of textiles, queering the possibilities of mankind's relationship to technology, Jovencio de la Paz offers a vision for a future where the computer becomes a tool of empathy and renewal, upsetting histories of marginalization.

- 1 "Artist Talk | Jovencio de la Paz." Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at PSU. Youtube, November 3, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gvf8n8m-sxw>
- 2 Frank Da Cruz. "The Jacquard Loom." Columbia University Computing History, April 6, 2021. <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/computinghistory/jacquard.html>
- 3 Jovencio De la Paz. "Jovencio de la Paz." <https://jovenciodelapaz.org/>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Osman Can Yerebakan. "10 Questions With... Jovencio de la Paz." *Interior Design*, June 29, 2021. <https://interiordesign.net/designwire/10-questions-with-jovencio-de-la-paz/>
- 6 "Art + Design Faculty Work: Jovencio de la Paz." College of Design, School of Art and Design. University of Oregon, 2021. <https://artdesign.uoregon.edu/art-design-faculty-work-jovencio-de-la-paz>
- 7 Ibid.

Sarah Diver is a writer and curator based in Portland, Oregon. Her work has been published by Art & About, Variable West, Denny Dimin Gallery, International Print Center New York, and Storm King Art Center. Previously, Diver graduated in 2016 from Columbia University with a Master's in Modern Art: Critical Curatorial Studies. She continues to work in both fiction and non-fiction in addition to art criticism.

Previously published by Portland State University in support of the PSU Art Collection



Jovencio de la Paz,  
*Redaction 1.0*, 2018. Jacquard  
woven natural and synthetic  
fibers, 42 × 26 in. Courtesy  
Portland State University, as  
part of the State of Oregon  
Percent for Art Collection.  
(Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Jaleesa Johnston:  
Knowledge in the Body

Bean Gilsdorf

# 26

It is the end of August, and I am talking with Jaleesa Johnston about her practice. She has recently returned from a residency at Playa in Summer Lake, Oregon—her first convocation with an all-Black group of artists and creators—and she confesses that she enthusiastically overpacked for the trip: “I brought my entire studio! I didn’t know exactly what I would want to work on because I have a few projects in motion. I brought about twenty books, but I ended up reading Laura Raicovich’s *Culture Strike* and, for fun, the novel *Ghosts* by Dolly Alderton.” During her time at Playa, Johnston completed a new suite of collages that connect to concepts from a previous series, *Between Contact* (2017). In our conversation, she notes the interplay between series and the way that a handful of core concepts reverberate among bodies of her work: “The same ideas resurface in different iterations. Am I ever really done with anything? There’s really no beginning and no end, just a constant, generative cycle.”

The reading of theory is a constant for Johnston, a critical underpinning to a studio practice that roams across collage, painting, drawing, performance, and new media. Many of her prior works have been influenced by the texts of Black theorists such as Katherine McKittrick, whose philosophies of visibility and invisibility informed Johnston’s 2017 performance/installation *Black Geographies*, as well as her 2019 video installation *Overspaced*. In *Overspaced*, multicolored close-up images of the artist’s body are fluidly enveloped by static, coming into focus and then dissolving into noise, never resting in one mode or the other. In the studio, the space between representation and abstraction is a source of energy for the artist. “I find it comforting to think abstractly. Lately I’ve been leaning into the work of Ta-Nehisi Coates—*The Water Dancer* has heavily informed my



curatorial project, as has *Listening to Images* by Tina Campt. I’m revisiting *Embodied Avatars* by Uri McMillan, thinking about the roots of Black performance and performativity. Theory that asks us to consider how we perceive the world inspires my work. The way we experience everyday things appears to be concrete, but sometimes, like in the pandemic, we realize perception is actually glitchy. That’s where theory comes in.”

Johnston received her BA in Comparative Ethnic Studies and Studio Art from Vassar College in 2011, and her MFA in Studio Art from the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) in 2016; she expects to complete an MA in Curatorial Practice at the University of Bergen in Norway in 2023. The years spent in academia continue to feed her practice: “I’m still thinking about some of the texts I read at SFAI. It takes me a long time to digest ideas, and a really long time to realize how they’re surfacing.” Johnston’s series of drawings on paper, *Encounters* (2017–present), reflects this contemplative aspect of her practice; as of this writing, she has completed over fifty drawings, each featuring her own body. She began the series with experiments involving the use of paint to glue hair to paper, which did not work exactly as the artist intended but left intriguing impressions on the surface. Those experiments evolved into a series of techniques used to portray how her body is changing over time: most of the drawings show delicate blind-contour lines mapping the body, with clouds of gouache for hair. Having morphed into a visual diary, *Encounters* remains open-ended. In 2020, thirty-five of the drawings were exhibited in *Time Being* at the Oregon Center for Contemporary Art, a show that *Portland Monthly*

Jaleesa Johnson, *Overspaced*, 2020. Two-channel video installation at Oregon Contemporary. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Jaleesa Johnston, *Crown(ing)*  
2017. Pen, gouache, and human  
hair on watercolor paper,  
8.5 x 5.5 in. Courtesy the artist



Jaleesa Johnston, Selections  
from *Encounters*, Installation  
in "Time Being" at Oregon  
Contemporary, 2020. Pen,  
gouache and human hair on  
watercolor paper. (Photo:  
Mario Gallucci)

noted "questioned how the turning of the planet hurts, helps, and changes our bodies, and how we might best weather the transformation."<sup>1</sup>

In her artist statement, Johnston explains that her practice "explores the ruptured and queer existence of the Black female body," a focus that is made exquisitely visible in her series of small sculptural paper collages entitled *Between Contact* (all 2017). Here, carefully excised portions of naked Black bodies are conjoined in intimate groupings atop Modernist grids of white, light yellow, cream, and blonde papers. The tiny four by four inch *Bone and Flesh* depicts three sets of hands and arms touching, claspings, and creating connection. *Ghost and Flesh* combines fragmented thighs, knees, elbows, and shoulders in an arc, one rounded body part supporting the next. Though the brightly lit limbs in these collages were sourced from porn magazines and still evince some of the genre's intended eroticism, the intimacy in Johnston's works feel structural rather than sexualized: the parts uphold one another gracefully and with purpose, seeming to operate toward a tender common cause. Of the pale colors that Johnston selected for the backgrounds, she says, "Whiteness needs Blackness to exist. But Blackness has more depth than whiteness would insist."

Our conversation moves toward the interpretation of her works, and Johnston discusses the possibilities and limitations of communicating her concepts to an audience: "In particular, I had to come to terms with not being able to force a particular reading when I started doing performance.



Jaleesa Johnston, *Bone and Flesh*, 2017. Collage on wood panel, 4 × 4 in. Courtesy the artist



Jaleesa Johnston, *Ghost and Flesh*, 2017. Collage on wood panel, 14 × 11 in. Courtesy the artist

I understand what’s happening, I know why I did what I did, but people bring their own experience and understanding [to viewership], so the resonance may be different. You never know how it’s going to land, and I’m okay with that.” In creating a performance, Johnston explores her own physical presence while interrogating different forms of being present and absent in her own consciousness, moment by moment. For example, in *Monument to 6%* (2015), Johnston recites the names of Black and Brown people murdered by the police over a ten year span while lying on a platform as another performer builds a shrine on Johnston’s back using rocks dipped in a mixture of charcoal, dirt, and oil—a weight that gradually compresses her body. In describing this act of bearing witness, Johnston observes that she enters a dissociative state: “The performance is important to me, but I also dread it because it’s sitting with death and mourning. It gives me a terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach that I carry with me for days before. Afterward, I go home and wash off the charcoal mixture, but I’m still carrying it with me. It’s hard to be present in a performance like that.” Similarly, *Carried On* (2017, performed with Fernanda D’Agostino and Elisa Nyassom) involves the artist addressing the audience with continuous stream-of-consciousness utterances, a methodology used to bypass her inner censor as she meditates out loud on the trauma and healing of sexual assault. Of this work, she said simply, “I’m trying to not be there.”

By contrast, Johnston describes her internal valence as “ecstatic” during the performances of *In/body* (2018), in which she and fellow artists Fernanda D’Agostino and Sophia Wright Emigh perform in front of and alongside a series of large video projections on cloth. At certain moments, the performers respond to the motions on the screen by touching and

lifting the cloth, and at other times by moving their bodies in front of it. This work is enacted improvisationally, with the artist entering and leaving a trance state repeatedly over the course of two hours, letting her body's actions unfold in a state of abandon: "Each medium allows me a new way of expressing what it's like to be in a particular kind of body. Movement allows access to information that's outside of my brain, access to areas of knowledge in the body. Sometimes I'm super-present in a sensory way, being aware of the cold of the ground or how the air changes when people enter the room. In other performances, I'm not there. I'm not in my brain, thinking about anything—but I'm also not in my body either. Those are weird moments because I wonder, *Where do I go?* The point is to be curious about it."

In all of these works, the body that's depicted—in a collage, or a video, or a performance—is naked, and eventually our conversation turns toward exposure and vulnerability. Johnston finds it very easy to appear unclothed before an audience: "I feel very comfortable letting things that are thought of as flaws be present, be part of the work. Like messing up: stuttering or stumbling, having raw emotion show, I'm okay with that. It's an important part of my practice. I can't speak for anybody else, but I feel like these are very nuanced moments where you can see that the softer parts of someone are actually their strength." This openness can become a political act; to a receptive audience, the personal vulnerability manifested by the artist can allude to vulnerabilities of Black bodies more generally. But an artist can only project such incisive vulnerability from a position of deep power: as a signifier, a woman standing naked on a cold concrete floor might not immediately evince a conception of strength, yet to embody such an archetype of defenselessness is an act of considerable bravery. Johnston continues to question aspects of her practice as they evolve. Recently, she realized that she hates the word *surrender*: "I associate it with giving up, but I've been challenged to think about how surrender can be strong. It's related to control: if you feel the need to control everything, that articulates how afraid you are. Letting go takes a lot of strength."

The concepts of strength and surrender reconnect our conversation to Johnston's artist statement, in which she refers to her practice as an expression of resistance and freedom. Since these words can signify many different things to an artist, I ask Johnston to define what those terms mean for her right now. "Resistance is my reaction to social forces, an unwillingness to let them shift me from my sense of self," she responds. "When I talk about resistance, what I'm thinking about is the lineage of Black people enslaved in the United States, living in a system that claims that you are only worth your labor, and not fully human—and to still insist on your own existence and to live so that you and other generations can see the other side. When I think of resistance, I think of that thing inside that can't be broken. And that's also where the freedom is: no matter what happens to my exterior, I'm still standing in the power of who I am."

1 Conner Reed, "The Best Oregon-Made Movies, Books, Music & Art of 2021," *Portland Monthly*, December 8, 2021.

Bean Gilsdorf is an artist and writer. Her artworks have been exhibited internationally and she is a 2020 Warhol Foundation Arts Writers grantee.



Jaleesa Johnston,  
*Monument to 6%*, 2015.  
Performed with Tasha Ceyan,  
"IN/TENSION" at Diego Rivera  
Gallery, San Francisco, 1 hr.  
(Photo: Christina Marie Walley)

*Following spread:*  
Jaleesa Johnston, *In/Body*,  
2018–2019. In collaboration  
with Fernanda D'Agostino  
and Sophia Wright Emigh.  
Performed at Portland Winter  
Lights Festival at Open Signal,  
2 hrs. (Photo: RaShaunda Brooks)



Some critics have described Portland-based artist sidony o’neal’s work as opaque, which o’neal thinks is funny, if not ironic, because they often worry that their work is overly didactic. Speaking about their 2020 sculpture *closed walk in raised islet*, they told me, “I literally mean, *Let’s think about ourselves as ramps*.” And there’s something to be gained from taking o’neal literally. Doing so allows us to ask questions such as *How do we inhabit the aluminum ramp or the islet it leads us to*, or *What are we ramping up to?* o’neal’s expansive and experimental sculptural, digital, and poetic practice ultimately asks the question: What if? If we, as viewers, buy in, the suspended wondering of that question situates us between the many possible articulations of the future, and a close attention to what we might have missed all along.

o’neal is interested in inheritance, even or especially if that inheritance has been forgotten or erased, and in how attending to that inheritance might bring the future closer, or give us new ways to simulate, invent, or, in their words, “live into” it. This is the driving question behind *AugurRing*, an exhibition of multimedia models that o’neal exhibited at the Seattle art space Veronica in 2021. In this show, o’neal used synthetic materials such as silicone putty to simulate the malleable and networked architecture of thought. One of the many things o’neal thinks about are “child objects”—

a category of objects in computer science and coding. A child object inherits the traits of the parent object without being contained by it, and o’neal sees their sculptures as these kinds of objects. *le nid* (2021), a warped and lumpy grid of marble and grout that spreads across the floor, inherits the model of the Cartesian plane and the colonial violence concordant with its logic of discretization, all without being contained by its rigidity. By warping the graph, o’neal warps this logic, which sees space and the individuated components that occupy that space as something to be separated, divided, and controlled. Think the Berlin Conference. Instead, o’neal allows the 3D printed forms resting on the grid to slide along the uneven surface, to not be fixed in their spatial position. In the topological deformation of the grid, o’neal deforms the instability of the ground itself—what appeared to have always been true—into a playground.

o’neal practices both study and play, problematizing the distinction between the two. The artist loves mathematics and coding, and they love contemporary gaming environments, whether it’s tabletop roleplaying games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, or open world video games in which players move freely through the virtual environment in an unstructured narrative. o’neal describes their fabrication practice as akin to rendering

sidony o’neal, *closed walk in raised islet*, 2020. Aluminum ramp with tape, thinking putty, 6½ × 82.¼ × 59 ⅛ in. Courtesy the artist





sidony o'neal, *Titanium*, Carrara marble, epoxy grout, acrylic, thermoplastic rubber, 2 1/2 x 23 x 12 in. Courtesy the artist



sidony o'neal, *TOUKISHOU VIVAN*, 2022. Asphalt, moss, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist

digital images, and the renders that o’neal creates serve as models, drafts, or prototypes, all of which are forms that both figure and figure something to come. That is, o’neal’s renders, like the ramp, both model a certain form of dwelling or being, and provide a model for further iterations of that form. These renders are materially and figuratively synthetic, and rather than searching for the real within the virtual, the work reveals the virtual within the real. We can see, for example, the virtual logic of Minecraft—in which a player sources materials to build themselves a place to live—manifesting in o’neal’s installation of found fragments of asphalt and moss *TOUKISHOJ VIVAN*. This is also a good example of how o’neal uses physical material as a medium for virtual renders. In fact, o’neal often starts with a given material or medium, whether found or fabricated, and then imagines how to work with (in) it. Even insofar as digital systems have been deployed as both metaphors and instruments for control in contemporary society—think biometrics or surveillance—o’neal’s renders insist that the intersection of materiality and virtuality can motivate creative, experimental spaces or projects. Just as virtual worlds are deeply material in terms of the technology and infrastructure on which they depend, the material world can be virtual and therefore malleable or glitchy.

There are many ways to consider o’neal’s experimental practice. I think of Cezanne, who obsessively worked and reworked iterations of his drawings and paintings, resisting the notion of finality, or Allen Iverson “talking about practice.” The concept of rendering itself is apt in its provisional, unfinished relationship to time and space—especially as a concept which is to some degree opposed to sculpture, which connotes the fineness or supposed timelessness of an artistic masterpiece. In the same way,

o’neal’s modeling can be opposed to molding insofar as a model is just one of many possibilities for how to build or make something. Perhaps the best analogy for how o’neal approaches the studio or the gallery alike is sandbox mode. In many gaming environments, sandbox mode is a creative setting in which all of the given resources are available to you, and within the framework of the game, you can free play. o’neal loves to play with what they’ve got, whether that’s inherited concepts, synthetic media, found objects, or a combination of the three, as in the case of Kouri-Vini, the Louisiana Creole language their ancestors spoke.

This, ironically, returns us to opacity, a hermeneutic that has become a common approach to thinking with Black artists and writers. To call something opaque is sometimes to give up or to become frustrated and defensive in the face of interpretation, but it is also sometimes to approach something with curiosity, to humble yourself before a system or a world you know you don’t understand but can work at learning. This is what Glissant means by opacity, and this is how o’neal thinks about abstraction. They said, “The juicy thing about abstraction isn’t that it’s abstract. You have a field with operations and then you have some intuitions about what things might be possible, and then you go out and you try to see what things are possible given those constraints or given that world.”

We’re getting close to something. In o’neal’s first major solo exhibition at the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), *ENCHIRIDION: aisle, spline, resort*, the title *enchiridion* comes from the Greek term for *manual*, which is a fitting description of the show as well as o’neal’s work more generally because it connotes both the materiality of it and a set of instructions or rules that guide o’neal’s investigations and inquiries.

*Following spread:*

sidony o’neal, *TANP D’ÆR/SPLINE + ELEGY*, 2022.

Tyvek, nickel buttons, aluminum pipe, plastic rods,

24 min audio, 40 × 18 ft. Courtesy the artist

In both senses of the word, there is a manualness to their work, both in the process of making it and in the processes it outlines for the viewer. The process for the exhibition involved research about o’neal’s family’s origins in Louisiana and Mississippi, where the United States engaged in wargaming maneuvers in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as the Natchez Rhythm Club fire in the 1940s and the generation of Black people who died there, for whom the whole exhibition is a kind of elegy. In wargaming environments or on land organized by colonialism and chattel slavery, there are hardly ever sandboxes, even when the state oh-so-beneficently extends hospitality or refuge to asylum seekers. And when there are uncommon spaces of asylum or marronage created by and for Black people, like the social and cultural home that was the Rhythm Night Club, they so often get destroyed. o’neal returns to those spaces by remembering this inheritance, and it is within these constraints that o’neal explores what other spaces they can build or rebuild, for however long they might last. Ruins too can offer asylum or refuge, space to rest and to play, as *TOUKISHOJ VIVAN*, exhibited in the PICA show, reminds us.

Entering *ENCHIRIDION*, you walk through a passageway walled off by materially impermanent Tyvek and surrounded by a sound score produced by Adee Roberson based on o’neal’s text. Passing through the aisle *TANP D’ÆR/SPLINE + ELEGY* into the isle of the exhibition, you return and embark at the same time in the generative, mournful, and celebratory practice of elegiac remembering. The score hums, attuned to the various emotional registers of memory, like a song they can’t quite remember the words to. It might come back to them any minute now. This remembering, which is also remembering how things might have been otherwise, reveals

the ways that personal and political histories get erased or abstracted away, which is why the process of abstraction matters so much in the first place as a kind of history.

This is the crux of it: How do we get close to something without forgetting how we got there? In mathematics, a spline is a functional approximation of a curve or a formula that best fits a given curve. In the 17th and 18th centuries, calculus, imperialism, and the transatlantic slave trade worked in tandem to obscure the approximate, constructed, or projected nature of the violent dissection of the world, including calculus itself, as the globally and politically powerful mapped hegemonic ideas about land, humanity, and progress onto non-white and non-European peoples. For o’neal, so much depends upon how we forget the process of approximation or abstraction and treat the result as fact or truth, whether that’s the area under a curve or how we define the category of the human.

Moving against teleology, o’neal returns to these moments of approximation as abstraction to dwell in the uncertainty and possibility of that approximation—about the past *and* the future—as a resort, if not the last resort. In the publication for the exhibition, *MISSIVE: AISLE, SPLINE, RESORT*, they write, “The refuge I seek in earth/moss world must also be a refuge of approximations, a refuge of *nearness*. A refuge that treats the linear approximations fundamental to calculus as Indigenous and inherited techniques—moving diasporically on the mainlands and beyond—held among techniques in the sacred study of increment and variation, difference and bo(u)nds.” o’neal wants to be less exact. What’s at stake in their work is what happens when we forget how we made what we made, and the stakes are high in the face of ontological violence. Remembering and returning to





the process of abstraction or the formula for approximation is an opportunity to differentiate alternative possibilities from historical contingencies—a practice that is anything but derivative in the pejorative sense of the word. When we remember how we made it here, how can we be remade? What limits can we approach? Or, better yet, given the related violence of the universalizing “we” which centers whiteness and elides difference, what else can o’neal make?

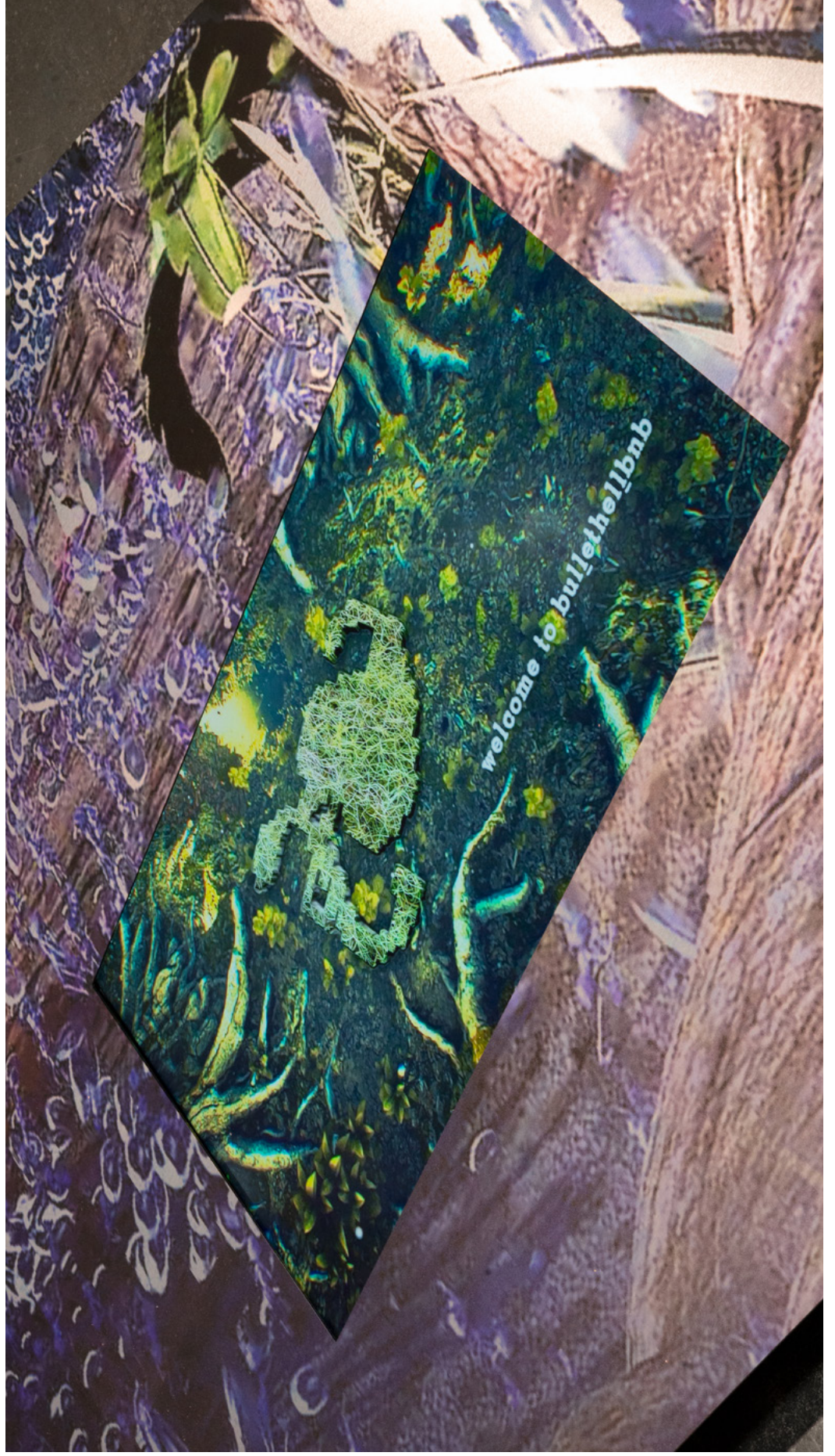
In this way, their practice generates its own permutations. Playing in sandbox mode, o’neal has all the material they need to make something new and old all at once, whether that’s moss or gampi paper or objectivist poetry. In their drawings and their renders, they are interested in the shapes they find in what they make and in what is made for them—or not for them. In a river, they see an image, and in an image, they see a river, as in the image of the fleuron in *BULLET HELL BNB*. One such permutation, the fleuron is a typographic ornamentation that recurs throughout o’neal’s drawings, and in this instance, the ornament becomes the image, and the image becomes a river. A river is an iteration. A river runs between its banks and slowly alters its own course and the ground it moves through. A river traces history, like Bayou Teche in Louisiana, which nourished the land and their ancestors. A bayou is slow; it swirls, it turns. And it is home to many living things.

Ben Read is a poet and writer from Spokane, WA. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature from Reed College in 2021. His poems have appeared in *WA129* and *The Adroit Journal*, and he received the Mary Barnard Academy of American Poets Prize in 2020. His writing lives at the intersection of critical inquiry and creative improvisation, studying forms of sociality, memory, and radical politics in art and literature. He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he works in libraries and bookstores. He loves basketball, pop music, and Argentine tango.



sidony o'neal, *BULLET HELL BNB*, 2022. Printed Dibond, plywood, single channel video, color, 3 min. *FLEURON HEX*, 140 x 60 x 5½ in. *BL HEX*, 185 x 70 x 5½ in. Courtesy the artist

x



sidony o'neal, *BULLET HELL BNB*, 2022. Printed Dibond, plywood, single channel video, color, 3 min. *FLEURON HEX*, 140 x 60 x 5½ in. *BL HEX*, 185 x 70 x 5½ in. Courtesy the artist

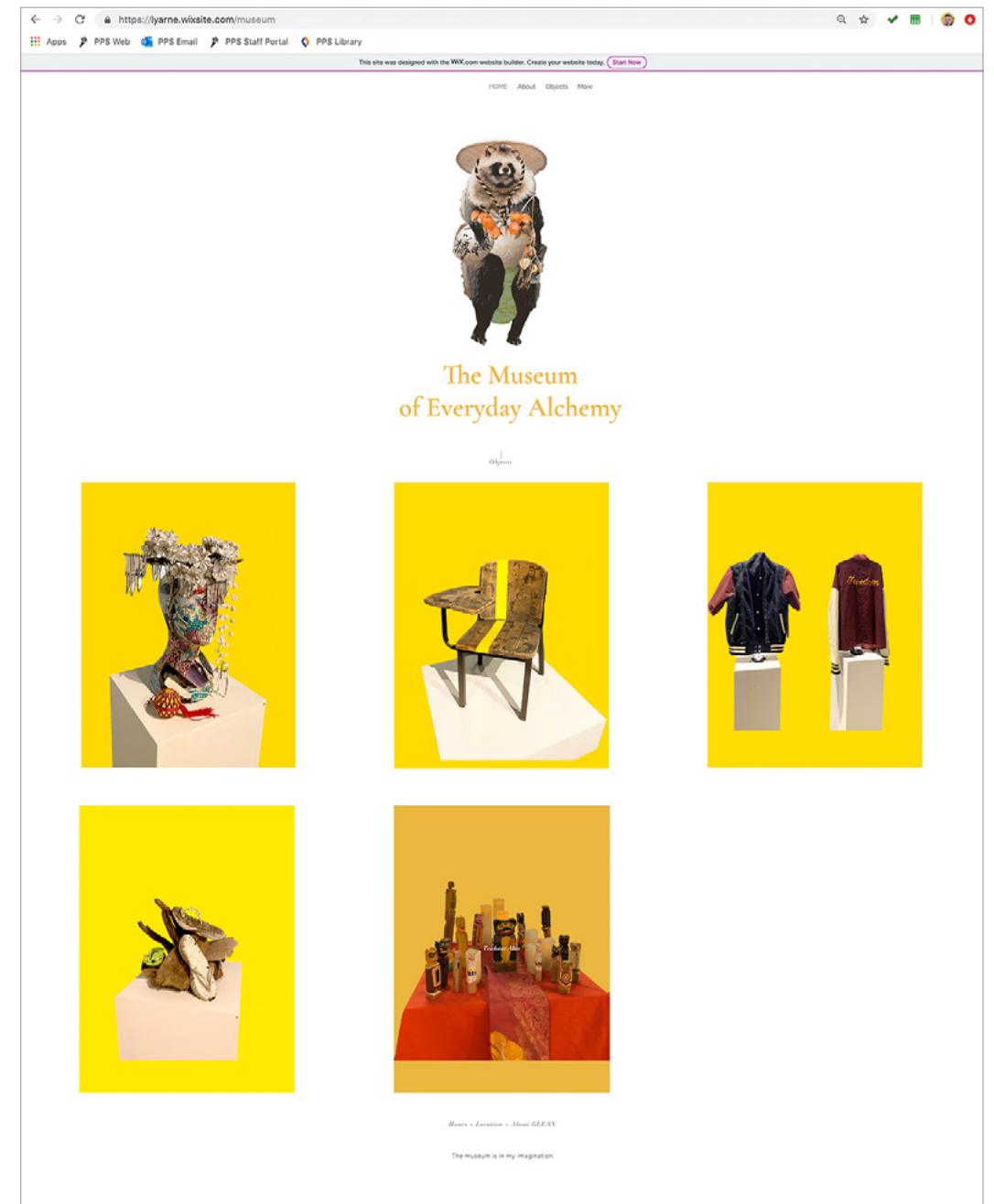
Lynn Yarne and the  
Magic Condition

Ashley Stull Meyers

# 46

Artist Lynn Yarne relishes the intersections where an artist's pursuit meets an educator's values. Her work manages to be arrestingly visual while at its core preoccupied with the non-visual remnants of cultural attunement. Yarne's practice takes the form of digital storytelling, object-making, and the community engaged processes that make any conceptual framework tangible, legible, and memorable to the peoples it addresses. As with any deeply perceptive maker, Yarne operates with a series of internalized questions—What does it mean to be a storyteller? What is its value as practice? How do we facilitate the passing along of stories and cultural histories in a genuine and generous way? These questions manifest as works (both physical and virtual) that carry emotionally compelling strategies for engaging viewers. Yarne, ever thoughtful about language, prefers to reference the community-centered elements of her practice as “projects with people” rather than “social practice.” Social Practice, a term formally popularized within the context of contemporary art in 2005, holds a distinct energy, as well as a series of potential hierarchical stumbling blocks, that Yarne's practice delicately questions. Her works, constantly reflecting visual and relational values of the communities to which she belongs, find their success in their material components as well as their immaterial residue.

*The Museum of Everyday Alchemy* is Lynn Yarne's catalog of the ways that Japanese American community (post-internment) seek to reconnect with a visual language that for generations was condemned. This process of rediscovery is cathartic and quirky, much like the resulting assemblages of the “museum.” East Asian visual culture, practices, and popular iconography have been distorted by generations of commodification, assimilation, and general misunderstanding by a Western audience, creating additional fuel for what the catalog is becoming. The collages, equal-handed in their



Lynn Yarne, (screenshot from the Museum of Everyday Alchemy website), 2020. Website

Following spread:  
Lynn Yarne, *East Portland Farmers Mural*, 2019. Printed vinyl





Lynn Yarne, *Strawberry Social*, 2022. Desserts, conversations, story, screen printing. In collaboration with Ikoi No Kai, Senior Lunch Program, Amisa Chiu, Jaclyn Nakashima, and Jeannine Shinoda. (Photo: Hiroshi Iwaya)

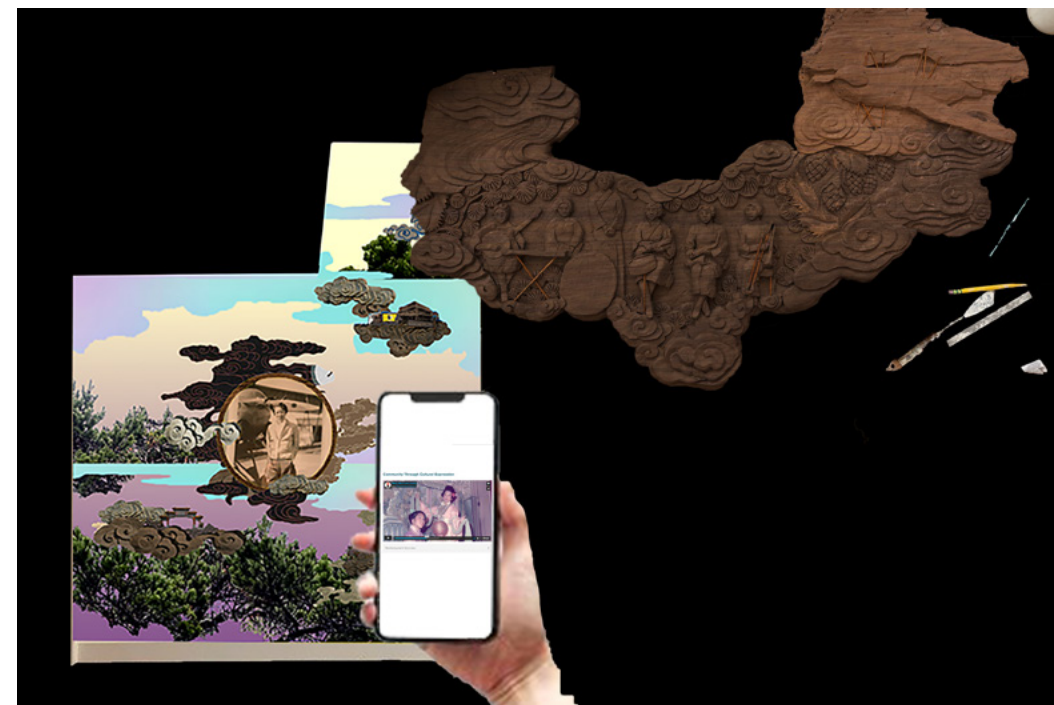
humor and concern, feature many familiar objects and tropes that have been animated to alternative conceptual ends. “I think

about Katy Perry’s performance of her song *Unconditionally* at the 2013 American Music Awards,” laughs Yarne. The performance featured an unthoughtful blending of many East Asian cultures, sexualized choreography inspired by gestures that traditionally convey respect, and references to the play *Madame Butterfly*. Yarne thinks about the (perhaps uniquely Western) consumption of Asian visual culture, and the ways that popular media attempt to make sacred philosophies, practices, and objects digestible for casual audiences. She keeps digital folders of images and video clips—Asian actors being made to perform elaborate exaggerations of accents and gestures, passively agreeing “yes” to any suggestion by a white counterpart, iconographies completely removed from their sacred contexts. This research has, in small part, become the *Museum of Everyday Alchemy*. The web-based collection of collages and animations is at once an artful processing of the artist’s research, and a visually engaging metaphor for the ways East Asian culture has been blended and remixed with Western (American) culture in equally interesting and problematic ways. The projects of reclamation and detangling internal from external references produce images and animations that are at once strange and familiar, ultimately speaking internally to the Japanese American community. Yarne is inspired by the questions of writers like Zora Neale Hurston—what is the beauty in illegibility? In what contexts do the politics of representation serve us or hinder our radical potential?

Independent of subject matter, the through-line in all of Yarne’s work is the recreation of what she calls “the magic conditions” for

nurturing cultural memory. These magic conditions often require untraditional or surprising venues for creative gathering. In her recent work, *Strawberry Social*, Yarne engineered an artist project that was part conversation and part maker’s lab, which centered the distinct energy of the kitchen or lunch counter space. Yarne (and her collaborators Amisa Chiu, Jaclyn Nakashima, and Jeannine Shinoda) made transparent a pointed cultural touchstone—the history of strawberry farming and strawberry picking in the Japanese American community at the turn of the century. Many Japanese immigrant communities undertook the work of cultivating berries along the west coast of the United States, and became responsible for 90 percent of Oregon’s strawberry fields in an era when political discrimination made it difficult for Japanese community to own land. Yarne’s process sought to do some “cultivation” of its own, creating the magic conditions wherein a little-discussed history can be recalled and reanimated for subsequent generations. Through storytelling, baking, drawing, and screenprinting, *Strawberry Social* resulted in the material creation of printed cotton tenugui—small woven towels, often handprinted and used in domestic spaces. The tenugui of *Strawberry Social* were printed in collaboration with the community and offered as intimate takeaways from the gathering. “As children, my parents would board a bus during the summers and pick strawberries for local farms. It is a shared experience for many local Asian Americans of that generation. This experience, and more broadly API agricultural history in the Pacific Northwest, is a much underrepresented history echoed today across many ethnic communities,” says Yarne. Kitchens, the spaces where aunties and other elders have little hesitation to give you a task while imparting a variety of formal and informal wisdom, can be a hotbed for creative practice. Spaces for

Lynn Yarne, *Leah Hing Mural*, 2022. Wood, vinyl, printed aluminum, paint, augmented reality



preparing food facilitate an appreciation for oft-ignored cultural materials and objects, as well as bodily labors and conversations difficult to contextualize in less intimate venues. Temples, churches, and classrooms can catalyze something similar. *Strawberry Social* hybridizes visual/materialist art-making with the art of historical resonance through doing and speaking. Screenprinted tenugui, used in the kitchen while baking strawberry desserts, become beautiful sensory acknowledgements that turn histories of labor, strife, and forgotten contributions on their heads.

The Pacific Northwest's Japanese American community has been torn apart by an everchanging political and economic landscape that makes it challenging for many ethnic communities (particularly immigrant communities) to form and nourish roots. This is evident in Portland's own "Old Town," a surface representation (and in some places "Disney-fication") of a once vibrant Japanese enclave. "Montavilla and east Multnomah County were also once where many Japanese American communities lived and worked, played pool, attended Japanese language schools, picked strawberries, and played a significant and underrepresented role in Oregon's agricultural industry and the develop-

ment of the East Multnomah County area," details Yarne. As an artist and educator, she believes that space and social justice are inextricably linked—a notion which has led to the creation of multiple murals (some with interactive, digital components) highlighting the past dwellings of Chinese and Japanese communities in the state of Oregon.

Lynn Yarne, *Scan to See A Story of This Place: The Jolly Roger*, 2021. Five markers on printed aluminum dibond, augmented reality

Lynn Yarne, *Scan to See A Story of This Place: The Renaming of Hayashi Boulevard*, 2021. Five markers on printed aluminum dibond, augmented reality



Lynn Yarne, *Freedom Jackets in the Museum of Everyday Alchemy*, 2020. Hapi coat, letterman jacket, embroidery. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

"As you look at these walls, look for a 1917 photo of the Suematsu and Masaki Ando family, who raised produce around 92nd and Main, and Irene (Shido) Hayashi, whose family owned the Russellville Market on 103rd and Stark, a hub for the Japanese American community. Find an image of the Shiogi family farm, the Kinoshita family in a strawberry field or picnicking with friends, and children's faces from a Russellville school photo. Look for Jayne (Kinoshita) Ichikawa and Cheryl (Kinoshita) Freeman dressed up for a big winter snowstorm in the 1950s, and Toshi Okino on his vegetable farm in Gresham," writes Yarne about these murals.

In addition to the creation of murals and altars throughout the city (at sites like APANO, the Portland Building, and various locations around Seattle), Yarne has experimented with the placement of QR codes (a computer generated pattern used to store digital information, like a website URL) on the derelict buildings that used to be dynamic centers of East Asian domestic life, labor, worship, and community gathering. When followed, the QR codes reveal images and video of the architecture's past life—for example, the buzzing energy of a bygone Japanese grocery store. An aesthetic consideration for bringing Japanese iconographies and visual culture to the fore also becomes an opportunity for visual art to consider its spatial context better than it often can in a traditional museum or gallery.

Lynn Yarne is a visual artist who thinks two dimensional things can do more to reach people in carefully considered multidimensional space. Through web-based or digital renderings, murals, the playful recreation of objects, and encounters in unlikely venues for "contemporary art," Yarne engineers the "magic conditions" for creative practice to exist in the same environments as people's everyday lives. Her artist practice engages



Lynn Yarne, *IRS Audit Kanzashi*  
*in the Museum of Everyday*  
*Alchemy*, 2020. IRS audits, beer  
 cans, string, hot glue

elders and children on the same level as an explicitly art-curious public. She is equally considerate of the writings of Claudia Rankine as the performances of pop stars who have found success through blatant cultural appropriation. Her visual practice serves as an index or map to broader conversations about the regional histories many are still uncovering.

Lynn Yarne is an artist and educator from Portland, Oregon. She works within animation and collage to address collective memory, generational narratives, histories and space. A fourth generation Chinese and Japanese American, her current work explores themes of displacement and loss, resilience and community, particularly within Old Town Portland. She is curious about participatory works, magic, and rejuvenation.

As a teacher in a public high school, she facilitates a teen digital media think tank and skill building program with an emphasis on equipping young people with media skills to create positive change and participate in visual culture. Yarne and her students began building a screenprinting studio in a classroom closet in 2015, which is now a printmaking studio that trains over 120 youth printers a year. Instagram: @be.nice\_studio <https://lynnyarne.cargo.site>

Ashley Stull Meyers is a writer, editor, and culture worker. In 2017, Stull Meyers was named Director and Curator of The Art Gym and Belluschi Pavilion at Marylhurst University, and the following year was made co-curator of the 2019 Portland Biennial. Currently, she serves as the Thomas Hart and Mary Jones Horning Chief Curator of Art, Science and Technology at Oregon State University.

Lynn Yarne, *Future Chinatown Lab: Collective Envisioning for the New Chinatown/ Japantown Historic District*, 2022. Conversations and collage. (Photo: Jeff Lee)



## Teaming Up: Crow's Shadow & Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Steph Littlebird

# 56



Exterior view of Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts in the historic schoolhouse at Saint Andrew's Mission. Courtesy Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts

This story is about Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts (CSIA) and its unique relationship with Willamette University's Hallie Ford Museum of Art (HFMA). The institutions' collaborative dynamic provides a blueprint for other organi-

zations that are interested in developing relationships with Indigenous institutions like Crow's Shadow. In this article you'll meet Hallie Ford's curator of Native American Art Rebecca Dobkins and learn about the museum's approach to supporting Indigenous artists. You'll also get to know Lehuauakea (they/them), a mähū, mixed-Native Hawaiian and recent Crow's Shadow artist in residence, and learn about their experience as an emerging Indigenous creative.

Crow's Shadow is located about four hours east of Portland, on the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Reservation near Pendleton. Established in 1992 by Native artists James Lavadour and Phillip Cash, the institute is located in the Saint Andrew's Mission historic school house. It is the only center of its kind on a reservation anywhere in the United States. In creating a 501(c)3 non-profit, the artists wanted to offer services to local youth and workshops that explored many art forms. In 2001, Crow's Shadow decided to focus its resources on fine-art printmaking, creating

Steph Littlebird

a space where emerging artists could develop their skill sets and expand their portfolios.

Over the years, Crow's Shadow has established itself as a center for fine-art Indigenous printmaking. The coveted Artists-in-Residence program is by invitation only, and former participants include some of the most influential Indigenous makers in contemporary art (Wendy Red Star, and Kay Walking Stick have both been residents). Crow's Shadow artists spend about two weeks in the studio creating editioned prints, assisted by a Master Printer. Many of Crow's Shadows artists are not printmakers, but this program enables them to work with a highly specialized team to take their imagery into a new realm. By creating a limited-edition set of prints the artist not only learns a new skill set but also gains the opportunity to sell the multiples in the future.

Crow's Shadow began to focus its programming on printmaking in the early 2000s. Around the same time, the newly established Hallie Ford Museum, at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, was beginning to cultivate relationships with regional Indigenous communities. Rebecca Dobkins is the Hallie Ford curator of Native American Arts, and a professor of anthropology at Willamette University. She came to Oregon in 1996 to help launch the Museum.

When Hallie Ford opened, it received initial funding from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to build the Museum's collection, "we were given a quarter million dollar endowment from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund, our gallery that focuses on Native arts is called the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Gallery. Since then, we've used the proceeds from it to buy more Native art, and create programming year after year."

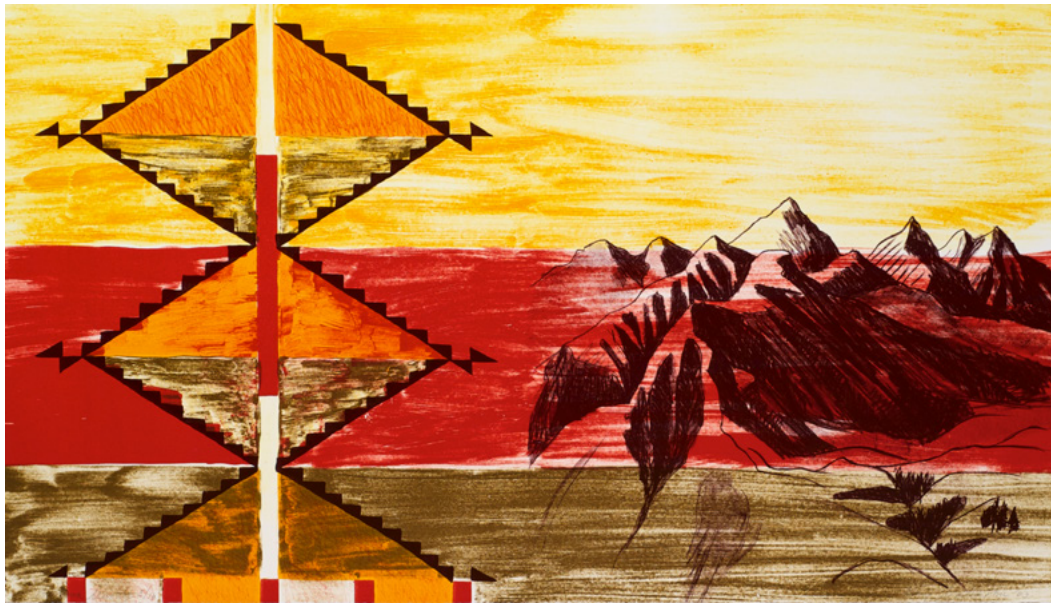
Dobkins has been instrumental in developing a relationship between the Hallie Ford Museum of Art and Crow's Shadow. She saw the opportunity to connect the two institutions in the early 2000s, when Crow's Shadow began to focus its program on printmaking. Dobkins recalls: "I knew about Jim Lavadour's work and wanted to do a show with him. So I just went out to meet folks at Crow's Shadow and we started a relationship and I started learning about what they were doing and thinking about showing their work."

As Dobkins remembers, "around 2007 or 2008 we began acting as the repository for the Crow's Shadow archives. But, we don't own those prints; we are the caretakers. And that is a practice that I feel really strongly about. We were not asking Crow's Shadow to donate their prints to us. We can use them, and put them on display, but we take care of them, take good photos and make the images available on our website. Then we do these exhibits every two years."

In 2017, Crow's Shadow and Hallie Ford celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Crow's Shadow Institute with an exhibition and published the book *Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts at 25*, featuring the works of Indigenous artists from two and a half decades. "The big 25th anniversary show in 2017 traveled a bit, and we were able to get some broader representation. There was an article in *The New York Times* and the show was a *First American Art Magazine* candidate for the 10 most important art events of the year." Just a year later, in 2018, Crow's Shadow was awarded a prestigious grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Crow's Shadows presence in the region has grown and continues to establish itself in the Pacific Northwest as a significant art institution, but it also grows through validation from other institutions, like Hallie Ford





Kay Walking Stick, *Wallowa Dreaming*. Four-color lithograph on Rives BFK White. Edition of 16. Collaborating printer Frank Janzen, TMP. Courtesy Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts

recognizing the importance of the work coming from the institute. These relationships are important for the future viability of CSIA—the recognition and affirmation that the program produces noteworthy and significant works, while supporting the careers of emerging artists.

One such artist who has had the opportunity to further their career at Crow's Shadow is Lehuauakea, a traditional maker who graduated from Portland's Pacific Northwest College of Art and is recently featured in the Portland Art Museum's exhibition *Mesh*, curated by Kathleen Ash-Milby. Much of Lehua's work is based in the production of traditional Hawaiian bark cloth kapa, a laborious, time-consuming method that produces a beautiful and durable textile. Once the cloth is created, Lehua embellishes it with hand-carved stamps, creating a myriad of traditional geometric patterns. And while their work is deeply rooted in ancestral practice, it has contemporary presence.

When Lehua found out they were selected for the Crow's Shadow residency, they hadn't taken a formal printmaking course: as one of the youngest artists ever selected for the residency, they were honored to be amongst notable Indigenous artists such as Ka'ila Ferrell-Smith, and Joe Fedderson. "When I went to PNCA I took a bunch of classes in various media," Lehua says. "But, I had actually never taken a printmaking class. So all of the printmaking experience I've had in the past, it was traditional Hawaiian, old-school bamboo carving that I used for my kapa making. So it was a huge learning curve for me, figuring out how layers interact with each other, how colors print on top of each other."

During their residency, Lehua got a crash course in fine-art printmaking and got to work with master printers to fine-tune the process, "I was there for two weeks, so about nine full working days, and we did three litho prints; one was a series of monoprints and then two were photo litho print."

Getting the opportunity to have your work reproduced by master printers is a chance most artists just don't readily have access to. Most methods of fine-art printing, like lithography, require an extensive list

of supplies and access to a printing press. Printmaking as an art form is arcane, and those who are masters of it are few and far between. So the experience that Crow's Shadow offers to artists is quite unique, because they gain access to tools and facilities that are often difficult to access unless you work in a commercial printing operation or have access to an academic print studio. Not to mention, limited edition fine-art prints command higher prices and place an artist's imagery into what is considered an "elite" medium.

As Lehua explains it, residencies like Crow's Shadow give their work a sense of authority that is not often afforded to emerging artists. "To put it really simply, the biggest thing that makes Crow's Shadow stand out from a lot of other institutions is their unwavering desire to support Native artists without conditions. Artists aren't looked at as a means of production. Like, yes, the prints are sold and to an extent, the money goes back to supporting the organization. But at the same time—the artist has full control over what is made, what they create, and they split the proceeds of their sales. So it's not like all the money is just going back to them, it's continuing to fuel the artist's practice with something that is relevant to the path that they are already on."

As more organizations seek to engage with Indigenous creatives, it's important to recognize that marginalized people may require different resources than other artists or communities. I asked Lehua how they think institutions can engage with Indigenous artists more intentionally. "I know for a lot of artists, especially those artists of color who would want to say yes to an opportunity like this, if it's not paid or, or funded in some way, it can be an access barrier," they replied. "I think that's something that more institutions should consider going forward, to just pay us well for our time and our energy and what we're bringing to the table."

Besides access barriers, there are cultural differences that require reframing how organizations approach these relationships. Lehua thinks it's "something that a lot of non-artists overlook. If you're not doing this work every day, you're more likely to look at it as a task-based profession where the artist has a certain quota to fulfill. Especially for Native art-

As more organizations seek to engage with Indigenous creatives, it's important to recognize that marginalized people may require different resources than other artists or communities.

ists whose work may not revolve around a nine to five. It can be difficult to be invited and succeed in spaces that were just not built for that kind of level of creativity and productivity. A lot of people don't understand that my work is seasonal—I cannot go out and make kapa in winter

weather. I literally have to flow with cycles that are beyond the Gregorian time clocks and look at how my practice fits into that. And of course, we know the world that we live in right now is not accustomed to people who work like that. So, I think it's just really nice that Crow's Shadow allows the artist to kind of flow at their own pace."

Along with the creative freedom that Crow's Shadow offers resident artists, it also provides another unique resource, which is supported by their relationship with the Hallie Ford in Salem. For an artist, having your work in a museum collection and featured in a biennial is a massive achievement and gives the work an authority it might otherwise not have.

Particularly for Indigenous artists, our work has been historically excluded from fine art institutions and relegated to natural history museums. Our work is often dismissed as “primitive” or strictly “utilitarian.” By offering Native artists this opportunity and positioning their work squarely in the fine art realm directly upends a bias that still pervades the broader fine art institution.

For an artist, having your work in a museum collection and featured in a biennial is a massive achievement and gives the work an authority it might otherwise not have. Particularly for Indigenous artists, our work has been historically excluded from fine art institutions and relegated to natural history museums.

This validation is important, because Natives can shout at the top of our lungs about how we’ve been excluded from these institutions, but until the people who are at the helm of these privileged museums get in on that conversation, it’s more difficult to make headway. That’s why the work that Crow’s Shadow and Hallie Ford are doing to promote, document, and archive contemporary Indigenous art is transformative.

More institutions need to identify how their resources can legitimately enrich the lives of communities that have been typically excluded from their spaces, to make intentional progress toward decentering whiteness in the fine arts.

Steph Littlebird is an artist, author, curator and enrolled member of Oregon’s Grand Ronde Confederated Tribes. Steph earned her B.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) in Portland, Oregon. She currently lives and works in Las Vegas.

Littlebird is known for her vibrant graphic imagery that combines traditional styles of her Indigenous ancestors with contemporary illustration aesthetics. Her work often examines issues related to Native identity, cultural resilience, and responsible land stewardship.

Her first children’s book, *My Powerful Hair*, was released in early 2023 in collaboration with author Carole Lindstrom and Abrams Books. Steph has been commissioned by brands like Lucasfilms, Yahoo, Luna Bar, and featured by media outlets like PBS News, NPR, and *ArtNews*. She is currently a Commissioning Editor for Critical Conversations.

This piece was originally published in February 22, 2022 by Oregon Artswatch as a part of a series, “Indigenous Resilience in Oregon,” focused on different aspects of Oregon’s contemporary Tribal culture and explores how traditional ways of life have continued forward throughout colonization and settlement of Oregon. This collection of writings and interviews showcases the history and resiliency of Oregon’s First Peoples.



Lehuauakea, *Manō Kaukani Maka*. A series of 13 mono-prints on Rives BFK white. Collaborative Master Printer Judith Baumann

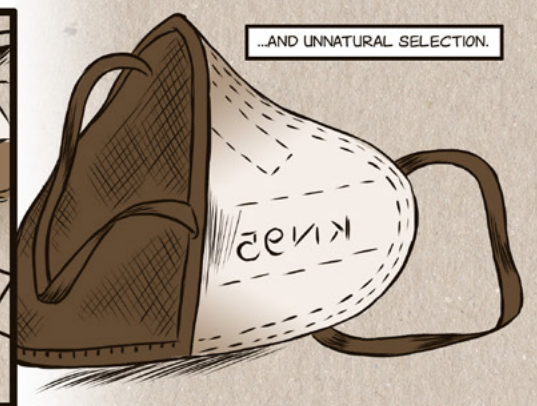
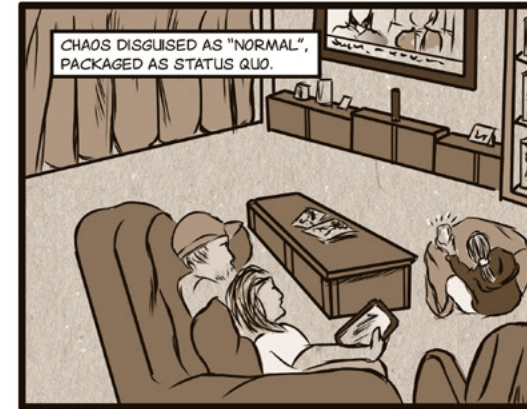
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# THE TRICKLE DOWN

PART ONE



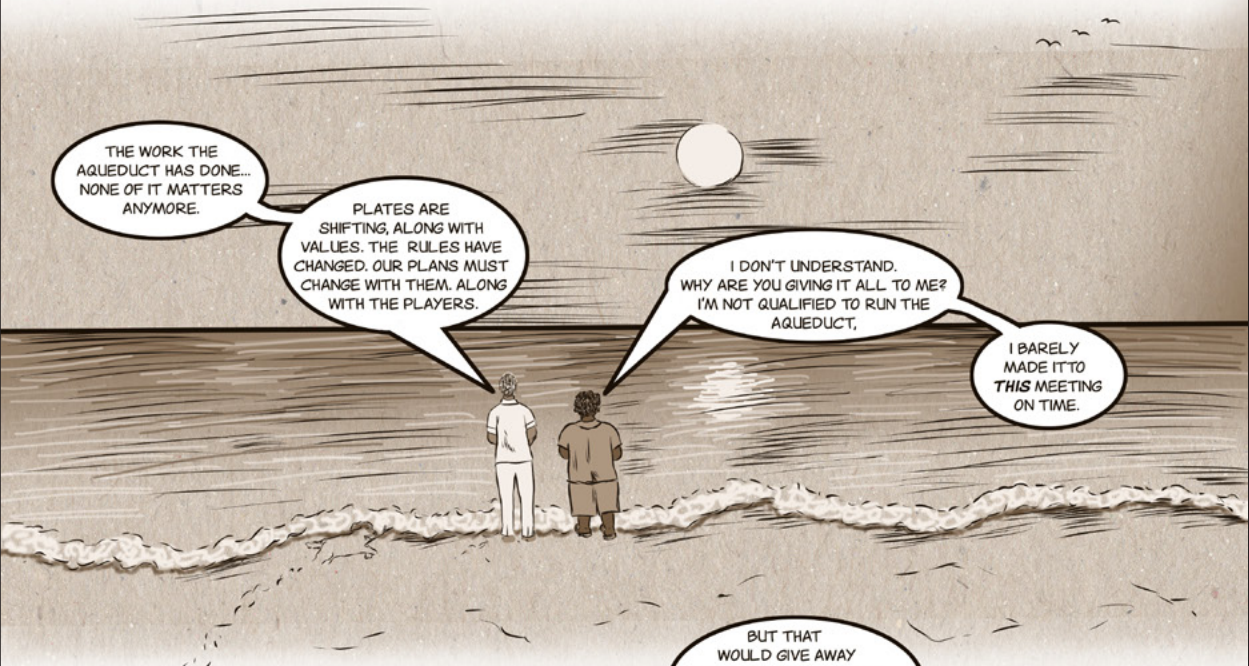
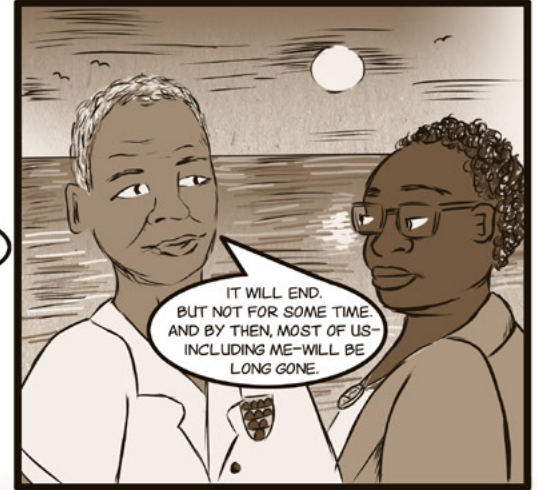
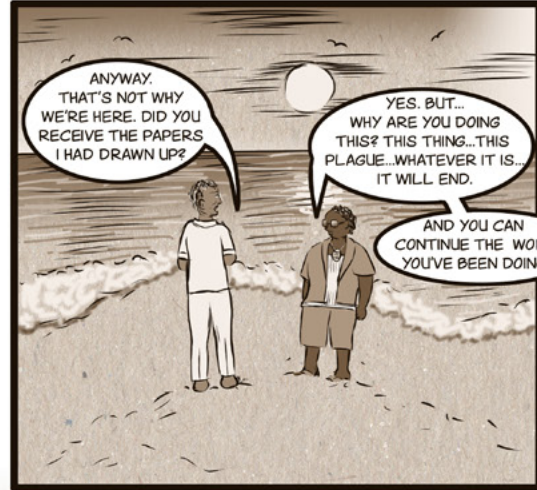
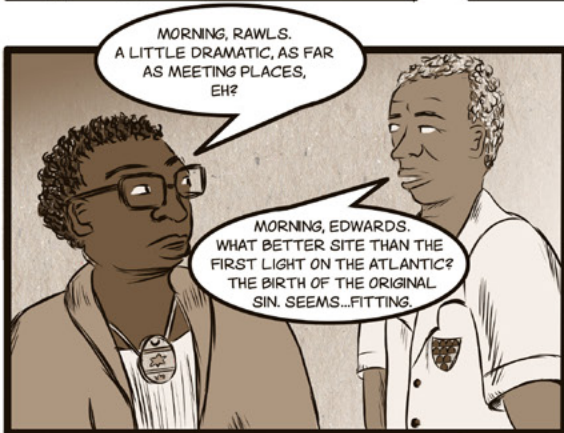
MELANIE STEVENS

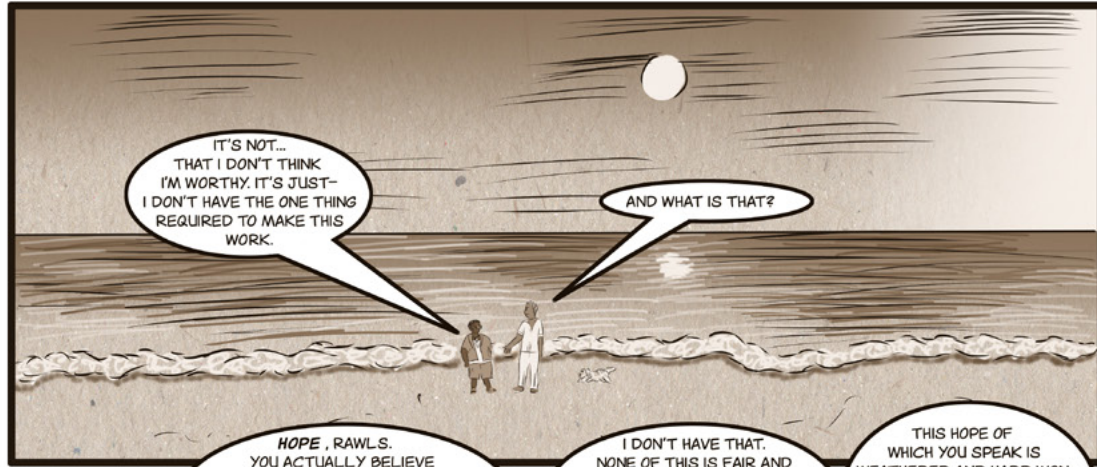


There is never a time in the future in which we will work out our salvation.  
 The challenge is in the moment.  
 The time is always now.

-James Baldwin

LOCATION REDACTED  
ROUGHLY 10 MILES FROM AQUEDUCT SAFE HOUSE #863





IT'S NOT... THAT I DON'T THINK I'M WORTHY. IT'S JUST- I DON'T HAVE THE ONE THING REQUIRED TO MAKE THIS WORK.

AND WHAT IS THAT?



HOPE, RAWLS. YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE THAT THIS ALL MEANS SOMETHING. THAT AT THE END OF THE DAY... AFTER A FAIR FIGHT, IT WILL ALL WORK ITSELF OUT. THAT WE'LL ALL FIND OUR WAY.

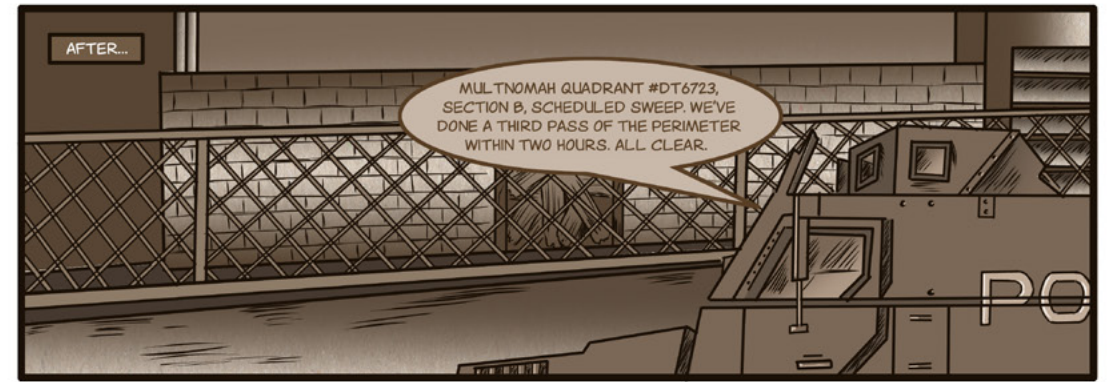
I DON'T HAVE THAT. NONE OF THIS IS FAIR AND IT'S ALL RANDOM CHAOS. I'M NOT SURE WHAT WILL BE WAITING FOR US ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS, IF ANYTHING.

THIS HOPE OF WHICH YOU SPEAK IS WEATHERED AND HARD-WON. BUT YOU'LL LEARN... NOW, WALK WITH ME. WE HAVE MUCH TO DECIDE AND VERY LITTLE TIME TO DO SO.



OH. ABOUT THAT...

WHO'S YOUR NEW FRIEND?

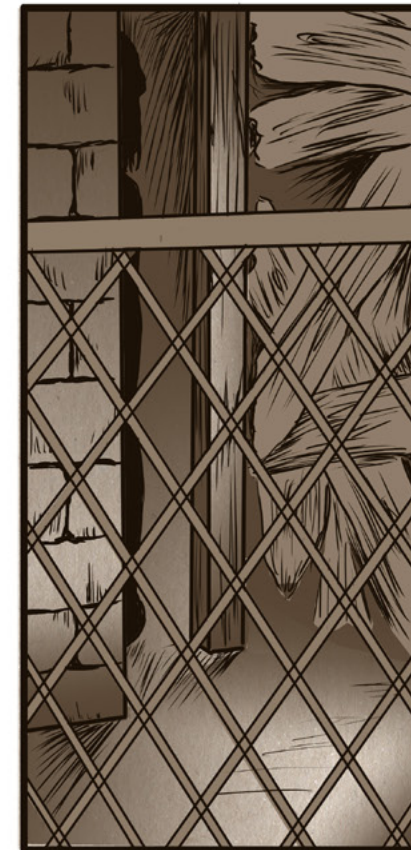


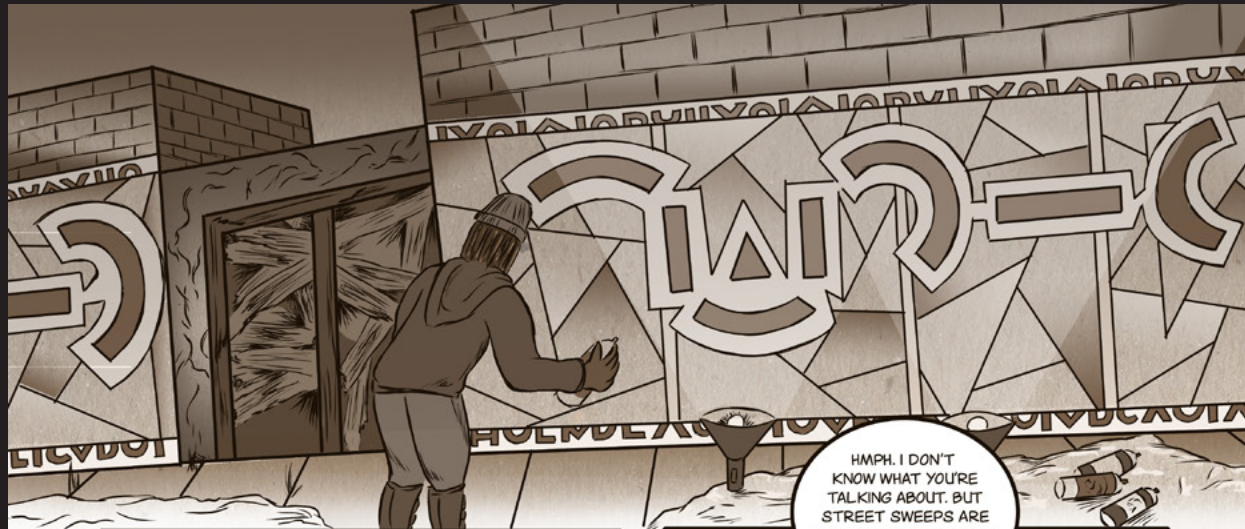
AFTER...

MULTNOMAH QUADRANT #DT6723, SECTION B, SCHEDULED SWEEP. WE'VE DONE A THIRD PASS OF THE PERIMETER WITHIN TWO HOURS. ALL CLEAR.



COPY. MOVE OUT. EVACUATION PROTOCOLS NEEDED IN MULTNOMAH QUADRANT #DT5321. REPORTS OF SQUATTERS. ALL AVAILABLE VEHICLES IN THE AREA REQUESTED.





HMPH. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. BUT STREET SWEEPS ARE IN ABOUT 30 MINUTES SO YOU MIGHT WANT TO GET UP OUTTA HERE.



FOR SUCH A PROLIFIC CREATOR OF PUBLIC ART, YOU'RE KINDA DIFFICULT TO FIND.



HMPH. SURE. WELL, LONG STORY SHORT, ONCE CRAWFORD WAS ELECTED AND THEY STARTED CUTTING EDUCATION, MY DEPARTMENT'S WERE THE FIRST TO GET DEFUNDED. THEN ALL THE COLLEGES WERE GONE.



BEFORE I GO, I SHOULD PROBABLY LET THE GOOD FOLKS AT QUADRANT #NW1820 KNOW A RAID IS BEING PLANNED FOR TUESDAY NIGHT AT 1845 THOUGH. THAT'S WHAT THIS SAYS, RIGHT?



WHO ARE YOU? HOW'D YOU GET HERE? YOU FOLLOWING ME AND HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS SAYS?



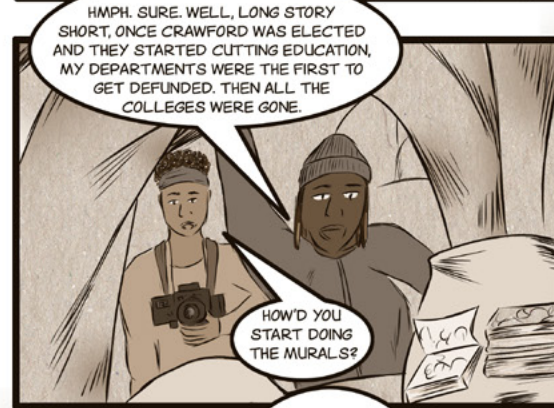
I'M KIRAN FLOWERS. AND YOU ARE SADI HARRISON. I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING YOUR WORK FOR A WHILE NOW. BIG FAN. AND...IF YOU LET ME INTERVIEW YOU FOR THIS SERIES I'M DOING, I'LL TELL YOU ANYTHING ELSE YOU NEED TO KNOW.



FINE. MEET ME TOMORROW AT 1500. I STAY AT-- OH, I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE.



SO, YOU WERE A TEACHER? A LONG, LONG TIME AGO, I WAS A PROFESSOR AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AF-AM STUDIES AND ART. AND THEN..?



HMPH. SURE. WELL, LONG STORY SHORT, ONCE CRAWFORD WAS ELECTED AND THEY STARTED CUTTING EDUCATION, MY DEPARTMENT'S WERE THE FIRST TO GET DEFUNDED. THEN ALL THE COLLEGES WERE GONE.

HOW'D YOU START DOING THE MURALS?



EVERYONE NEEDS A SUPERHERO IN THEIR NARRATIVE, HUH? SIGH NO, FLOWERS, I DID NOT INVENT A WHOLE ASS LANGUAGE. IT WAS A COMMUNITY OF FOLKS, PASSED DOWN OVER TIME.

OH. THAT MAKES SENSE.



IS THAT WHAT YOU DO? COLLECT SAD STORIES ABOUT EVERYONE'S PAST LIFE? WHAT IS THIS FOR?

IT'S HISTORY. OUR HISTORY. SOMEONE HAS TO ARCHIVE ALL THIS. WHY NOT ME?



I LOST MY PARTNER AND MOST OF MY FAMILY IN THE 6TH AND 7TH WAVES. AND WITH NO JOB, I COULDN'T MAKE RENT, ESPECIALLY WITH THE UPCHARGES. SO, LIKE MOST FOLKS, I ENDED UP HERE IN THESE POP-UP ENCAMPMENTS.

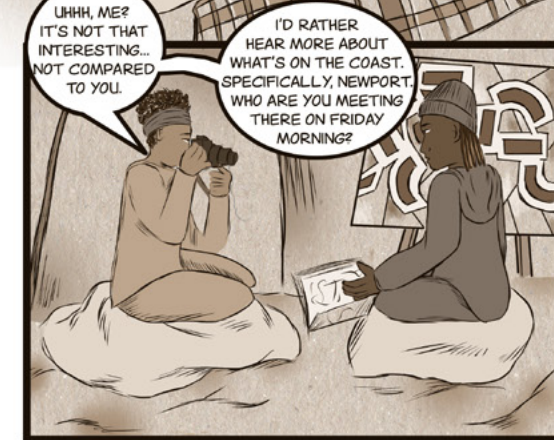
AND YOU CREATED THIS SECRET CODED LANGUAGES AND PLANTED MESSAGES AS AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM IN YOU MURALS?



YEAH. I BET. SO... WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

MY STORY?

YEP. WHAT WAS YOUR LIFE LIKE IN THE BEFORE TIMES? WHAT DID YOU LOSE?



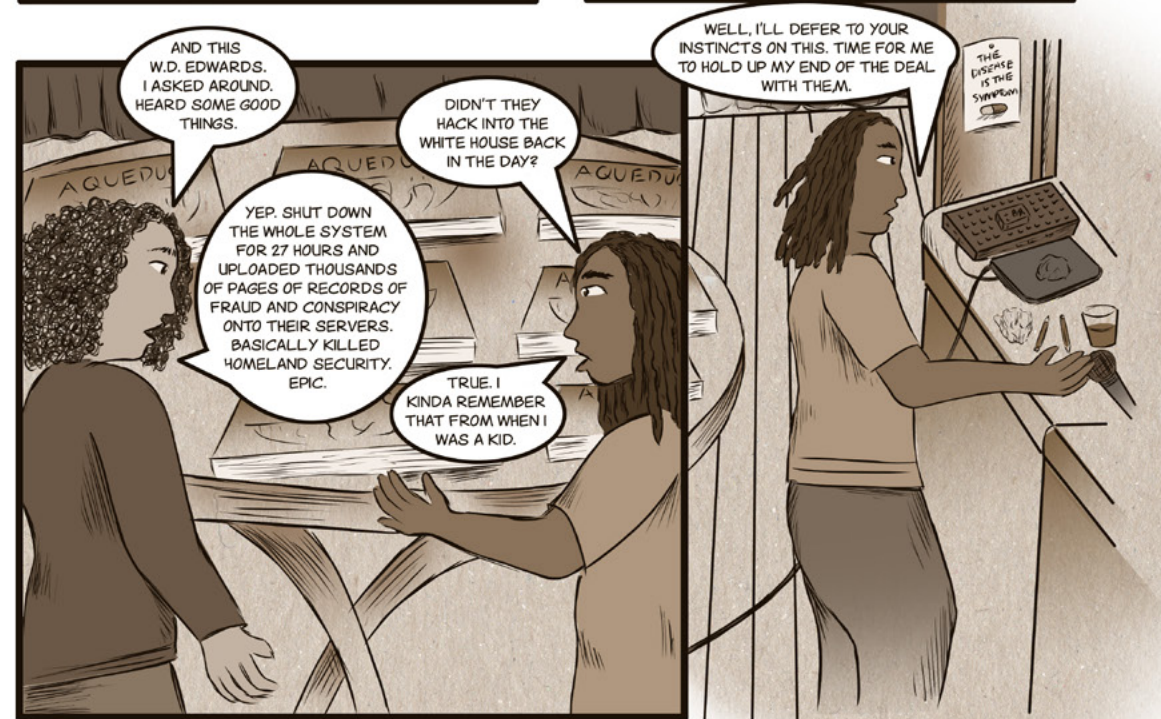
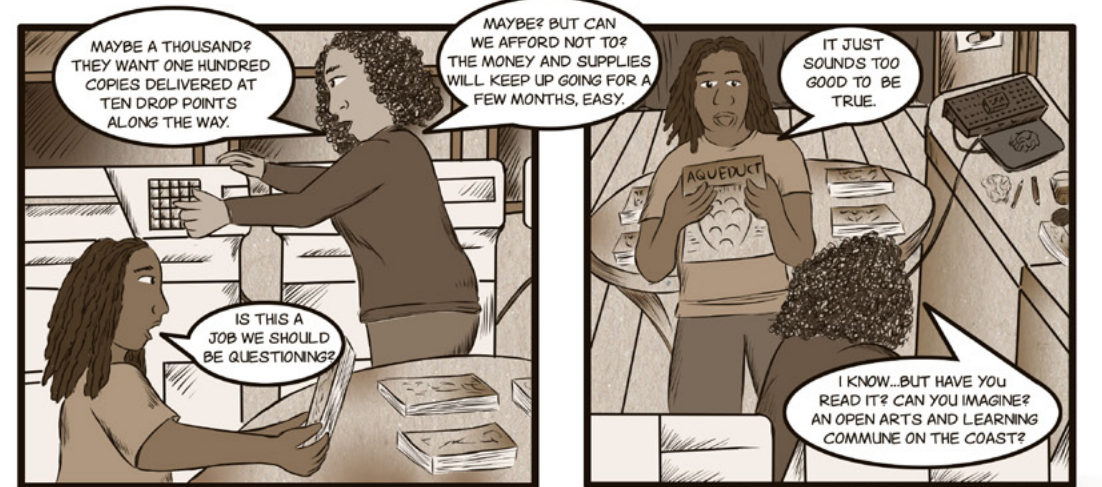
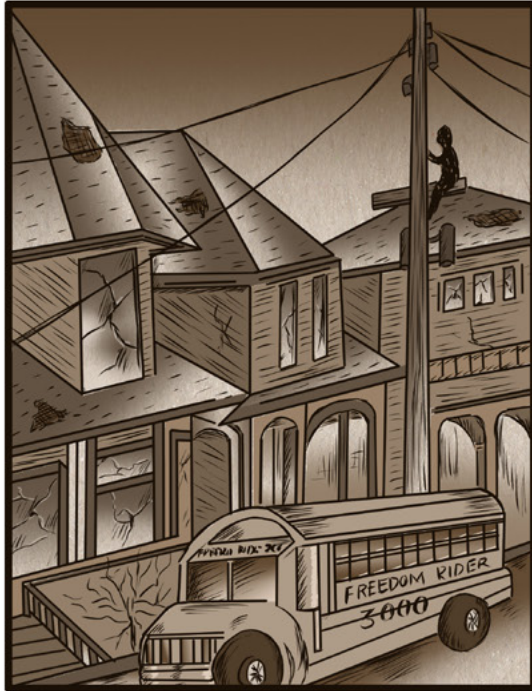
UHHH, ME? IT'S NOT THAT INTERESTING... NOT COMPARED TO YOU.

I'D RATHER HEAR MORE ABOUT WHAT'S ON THE COAST. SPECIFICALLY, NEWPORT. WHO ARE YOU MEETING THERE ON FRIDAY MORNING?



I TOLD YOU. I FOLLOW ALL OF YOUR WORK. EVEN THE DEEP CUTS. JUST GOTTA KNOW WHERE TO LOOK. SO TELL ME...

HOW DO I GET IN ON THIS TRIP TO NEWPORT? I HAVE RESOURCES. I CAN HELP.







WELCOME BACK, FELLOW SURVIVORS AND WANDERERS. LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER GOOD NIGHT TO MAKE A LITTLE NOISE AND START SOME FIRES.



SO LIE BACK, COUNT THE STARS, AND ENJOY TONIGHT'S HOT 15 END OF DAYS PLAYLIST FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS BEFORE I RETURN TO BLESS YOU WITH SOME NEWS.



THANKS FOR MEETING ME ON THE DARK SIDE. TONIGHT, I WANTED TO LET Y'ALL KNOW ABOUT A LITTLE SOMETHING I HEARD ABOUT. THERE'S A COMMUNE UP IN NEWPORT FOR BLACK ARTISTS, SCHOLARS, WRITERS. ACRES OF FARMLAND, CABINS, STUDIOS, SUPPLIES. JUST FOR US. ANYONE ELSE HEARD ABOUT THIS? LET ME KNOW.



ALRIGHT! WHAT YOU GOT FOR ME?

HELLO? I HEARD ABOUT THIS TOO. I USED TO PAINT BEFORE... YOU KNOW. I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIND SUPPLIES TO WORK WITH IN YEARS. I'M TRYING TO FIND A WAY THERE I'VE SEEN

YEAH, SOMEONE TOLD ME THEY HAVE A REAL FARM OUT THERE. ONE OF THE LAST ONES. AND YOU CAN WORK AND TEACH IN EXCHANGE FOR FOOD. I WAS IN WOODWORK AND CONSTRUCTION BEFORE...

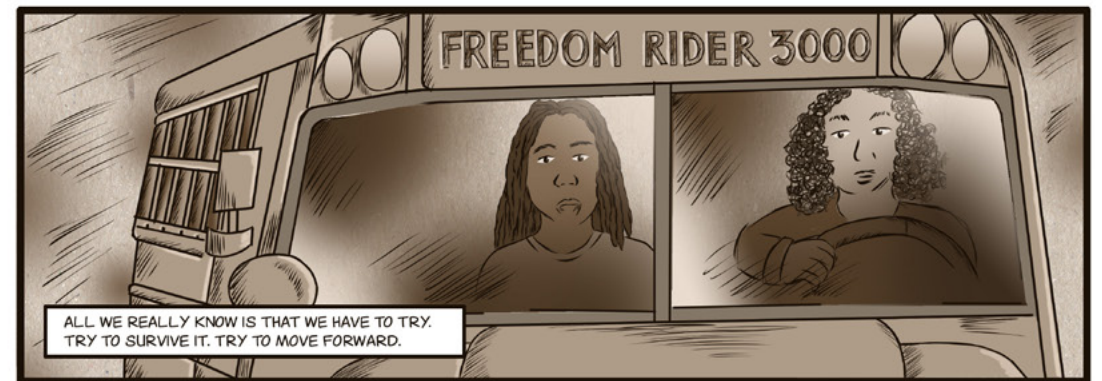


I DON'T KNOW ABOUT ALL THIS. WHAT ARE THEY GETTING OUT OF IT? IT FEELS LIKE A SETUP.

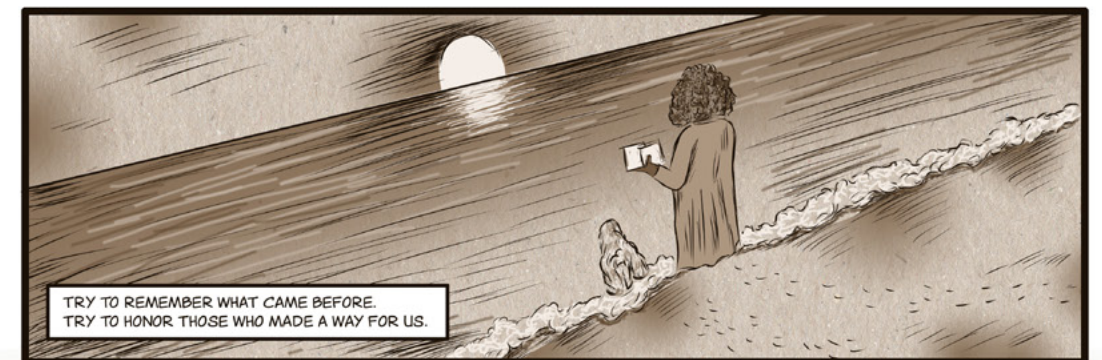
I CAN CONFIRM THAT THE COMMUNE IS REAL. IT IS HAPPENING. AND I HAVE THE MAP AND INFO ON HOW TO GET THERE. SO LET'S BREAK THIS DOWN. IT'S CALLED THE AQUEDUCT AND HERE IS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW...



EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME, THERE REALLY IS NO WAY OF KNOWING WHERE OR HOW ALL OF THIS ENDS. SOME DAYS FEEL JUST AS LAWLESS AND RANDOM AS THAT FIRST FRACTURE SO LONG AGO.



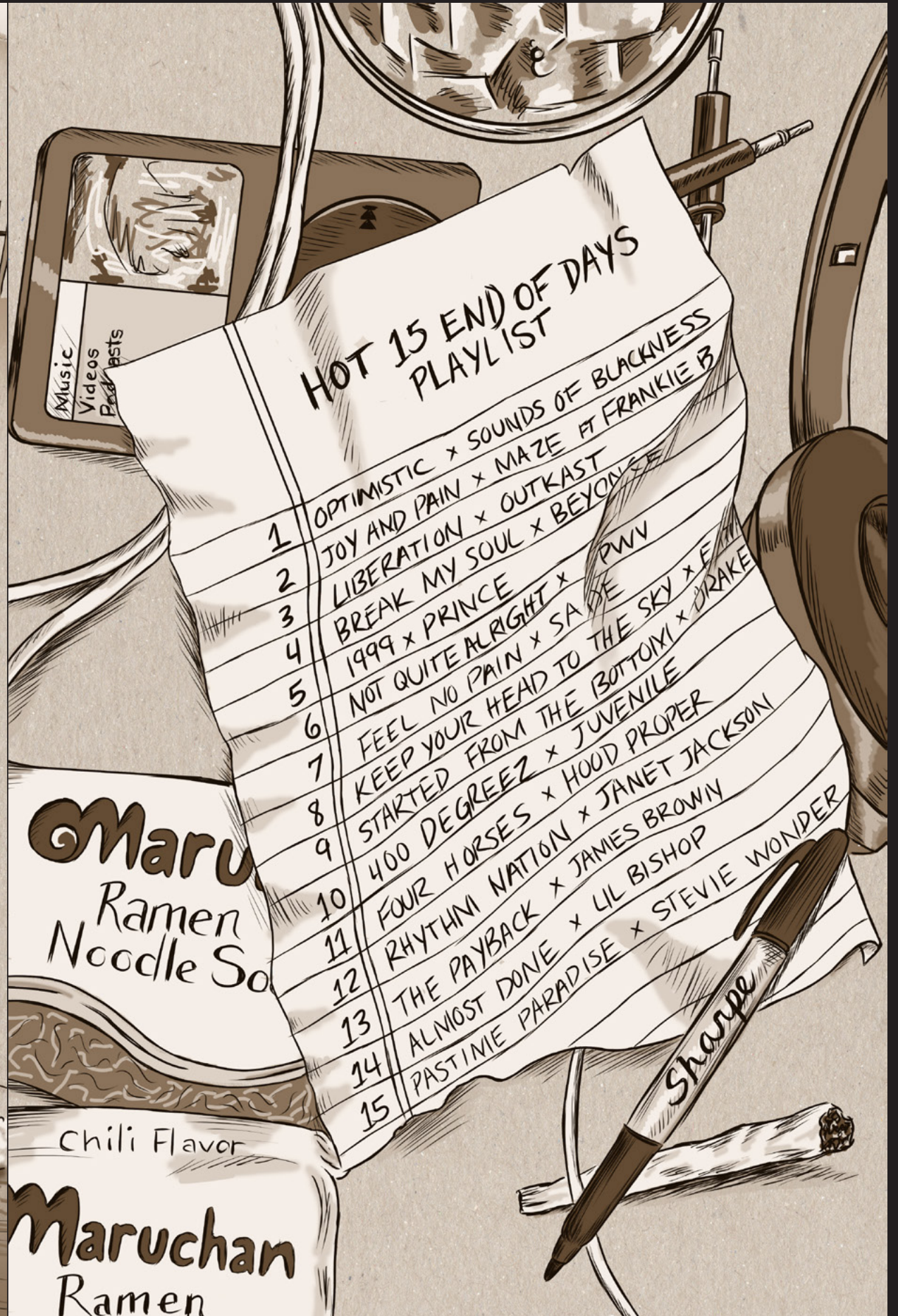
ALL WE REALLY KNOW IS THAT WE HAVE TO TRY. TRY TO SURVIVE IT. TRY TO MOVE FORWARD.



TRY TO REMEMBER WHAT CAME BEFORE. TRY TO HONOR THOSE WHO MADE A WAY FOR US.



AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, TRY TO LEAVE AS MANY BEAUTIFUL MARKS AND FOOTPRINTS AS POSSIBLE. TRY TO LIGHT THE PATH OF FUTURE JOURNEYS WITH A RECORD OF PAST AND PRESENT.



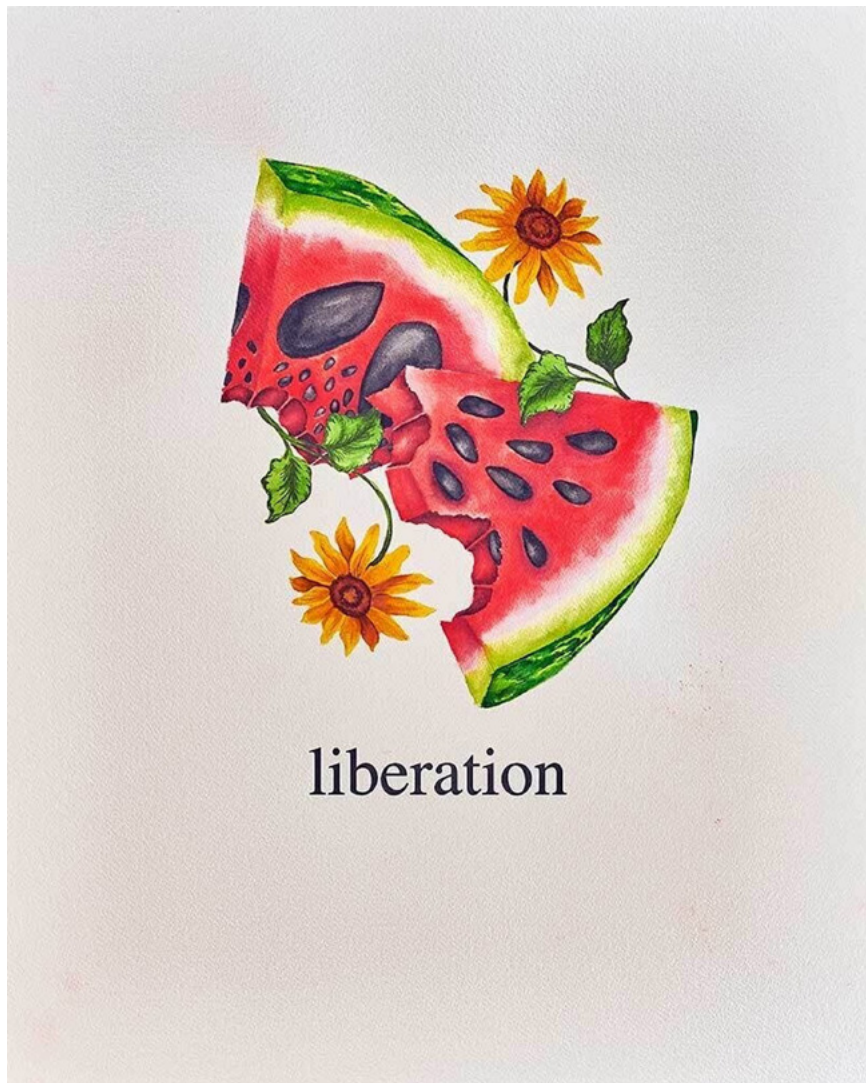


Melanie Stevens is an artist, illustrator, and writer. She is the creator of the graphic novel series, *WaterShed*, and the co-founder and co-curator of Nat Turner Project, a fugitive gallery space that provides funding, resources, and spaces for artists of color to create or express their own language within and without the parameters of racial commodification or designation. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree for Political Science from Yale University and her Masters of Fine Arts degree for Visual Studies at Pacific Northwest College of Art, where she currently teaches. <http://melaniestevensart.com> <https://www.watershedcomics.com>  
lg: @brownivyx

Packaged and Sold:  
Food and Identity in Art:  
Christine Miller's *Syrup  
on Watermelon*,  
at the Portland Art Museum  
and Others.

*May Maylisa Cat*

80



May Maylisa Cat

Years ago at an oceanside art residency, the director picked me up from the airport and asked if I wanted to cook Thai food for our cohort. I panicked. Is this déjà vu?

If I decide on the “authentic” route—like the predictable Pad Thai—should I include edible banana blossoms, fish sauce to bring salinity, white rice noodles instead of brown “healthy” ones, and any hint of spice? Is anyone vegan; do they have allergies? What’s the budget and portions? Besides the “ethnic” aisle, is there an Asian grocery store in town—preferably a Southeast Asian one and not East Asian? If there isn’t, would anyone be offended, especially fellow Asians who can taste the difference, if I substituted the fish sauce with tamari sauce?

Or, a subversion: do I invent a Disneyfied version of Thai food so frightening and career-shattering, with blue food coloring and fermented shrimp paste—something so aromatically “foreign” that kids will point and yell “Ew!” in the lunchroom—so I will forever be free of Thai food duties? Will the cooking go on my CV as an art performance, or is it simply just an expression of hospitality and inclusivity where I cordially perform the labor?

Years earlier, a program manager at a Pacific Northwest residency asked if I wanted to cook Thai food as an artist workshop with teens. I kept presenting her my lesson plan of examining ghost stories to see how we turn what we fear into monsters instead. Finally, she gave in, and at the end, the teens performed poetry about their own experiences of discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. Another year, I was asked to make food for an East Coast exhibition. To present chinoiserie and serve this meal seems so easy, and yet I don’t think they’ve ever asked a white man this. When did I become a serviceable artist?

Unfortunately, being the hybridized event director, planner, producer, cultural ambassador, and kitchen worker was too much labor. I declined the invitation for cultural servitude and model minority cosplay.

In the essay *The Unexpected Guest: Food and Hospitality in Contemporary Asian Art*<sup>1</sup>, Francis Maravillas emphasizes how contemporary Asian artists are often typecast to make work surrounding food for institutional visibility, as “food is also often figured as a trope of *identity and difference*.” Maravillas points out that “food and its trappings” allows the audience to consume Asian diasporic multiculturalism by provoking “an ‘imagined’ home” while catering to the liberal ideals about coexisting in a utopian “imagined community.” From a relational aesthetic point of view, food is easily “the site and medium of *sociality*,” like a restaurant, where interaction and absolute hospitality are dramatized with expected etiquettes and customer service amiability. The displacement of food products—in a gallery, at a residency, on a reality TV show, in a museum with donors, and anywhere outside of one’s private spectator-less kitchen—provides an exotic, expatriate appeal. Who, what, where, *with*

whom one eats, and whom one is responsible for while serving is situated in a larger theater of power relations and racialized dynamics. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discussed in *Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium*<sup>2</sup>, to perform is “to make food, to serve food,” and “to perform is to *behave*.” It is a feel-good attempt to diversify and unify. It’s assumed to work simply because it is uncritical and obsequious to the existing structures of oppression.

Sociologist Summer Kim Lee refers to the Asian American identity as the “After You” embodiment, where we are rendered as “accommodating subjects within liberal multiculturalism<sup>3</sup>.” In public, she noted that the cost of visibility is the expectation of racial performativity. As an Asian woman, I am either hypersexualized, infantilized, or invisibilized within society. In public, I am dismissed, or assumed to be a temptress or a sex worker. Yet, in a professional and artistic setting, I am the domestic worker or a “foreign” labor they can outsource for the aesthetic of diversity.

Maravillas’ research and many others informed my practice so much that I began to discern and record these “trappings.” That summer after my Pacific Northwest residency, I toyed with the idea of broadcasting and celebrity chefs. With a live audience in the garage of Open Signal, I recreated the 1975 performance *Semiotics of the Kitchen* by video artist Martha Rosler. I wore sculptures by Thai artist Nina Vichayapai from her *Jumpsuit* series, which touch on foreign labor and immigrant workers, while standing in front of a green screen that flashed footage of Thai food in pop culture. Where Rosler mouthed the alphabet of kitchen appliances to critique “the commodification of the traditional women’s role,” I substituted words “fish sauce” and “wok.” What will happen now that the kitchen is racialized and orientalized, just by having me in it? Or is it this very set up that orientalizes me?

On the green screen wall that enveloped my body, I flashed two out of the many-to-choose-from clips in the background. One was of GOOP’s episode “The NOODLE: Two Classic Thai Dishes Face Off<sup>4</sup>,” featuring celebrity host Gwyneth Paltrow and chef Kris Yenbamroong. Paltrow makes a subpar attempt at a “clean” version of Thai food by substituting fish sauce with tamari sauce, sugar with honey, and white rice noodles with “healthier” brown rice noodles after Yenbamroong demonstrated cooking the original cultural recipe. Paltrow’s version of this cultural dish demonizes traditional food, which is “dirty” by comparison. The second clip was “Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown: Season 3, Episode 7” where, in a quest to find the best ambassador of Thailand, Bourdain meets up with *white* expat, Andy Ricker, head chef and owner of the Portland restaurant Pok Pok. The guest could’ve been a scholar—or even a contemporary artist famously known for cooking pad thai in art galleries, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija—anyone Thai! The devil works hard, but the PR team works harder!



Nina Vichayapai,  
*Jumpsuit Series*, 2018.  
Courtesy the artist

The rise of celebrity chefs is no coincidence, especially in scripted faux-reality TV shows. Media consumption, image-making, and culinary arts go hand-in-hand like aged cheese and fine wine. Cooking isn't about the meal itself, but the drama and theater involved with an appetizing backstory. One can "sanitize" a foreign dish into modernity, or replicate traditional recipes so well that they're one of "the locals." In "Parts Unknown," Bourdain's "adventure narrative" into "different" foodscapes fits a predictable lineage of consuming and commodifying the Other—think British colonial cookbooks of India to the history of tourism.

One can "sanitize" a foreign dish into modernity, or replicate traditional recipes so well that they're one of "the locals."

The foreign Other becomes a prop: inviting, smiling, and behaving like the Magical Minority trope, where a person of color only exists to aid a more privileged white person on screen. This fantasy of the "serviceable" Other

makes money in food trendy publishing and show business. Hospitality is a form of entertainment, stemming from the colonial gaze disguised as sociality and multiculturalism.

Christine Miller's exhibition *Syrup on Watermelon* (2022) at the Portland Art Museum demonstrates the insidious history of food and hospitality, examining Black identity in connection with consumerism, then recontextualizes it through "the lens of power and visibility." A product developer by trade, Miller knows what it takes to bring a creation successfully to the market, pointing out how society relies on Black culture and Black bodies to make money.

In 1889, Chris L. Rutt attended a minstrel show that inspired him to create the American brand Aunt Jemima (rebranded as Pearl Milling Company in 2021) to sell self-mixing pancakes. For the longest time, I couldn't wrap my head around justifying Rutt's misogynoir brand, let alone the eerie figurine-shaped cookie jars selling for hundreds if not thousands on eBay. As Lee puts it, "To be accommodating is to be available, accessible, and amicable, yet unassuming and unobtrusive." When paired with something like the kitchen, which seems homey and unassuming, it is rendered as "serviceable, private, and privately disposed to others' needs and inclinations." Enforcing racial hierarchy and white dominance, Aunt Jemima was an invention of racism, conceived as a hospitable subject. For poor white consumers, this also was a way to imagine owning a slave.

*Syrup on Watermelon* is enveloped in parts by checkered red and white walls, reminiscent of picnic baskets. Hung along with plates and advertisements are a number of watermelon drawings paired with the word "liberation." Some of "the forbidden fruit" are half-bitten



Nina Vichayapai,  
*Jumpsuit Series*, 2018.  
Courtesy the artist



Installation view of  
Christine Miller, *Syrup on  
Watermelon*, 2018. Portland  
Art Museum. Courtesy  
Portland Art Museum

and eaten, some with blossoms of sunflowers springing from the seeds. What Miller tries to convey is sweet, but in a way unexpected. To me, on a micro level, *Syrup on Watermelon* is about a person confronting the world's lies and mythologies of why "who they are" is to be "unloved." On a macro level, it confronts the historical racist association and turns it on its head. By making molds of Aunt Jemima cookie jars, Miller attempts to transfer ownership away from the White lens and imagination, and it's about time.

*Syrup on Watermelon* evokes the multiplying images, characters, and byproducts of the white supremacist imagination in our day-to-day life. In commerce, who gets objectified, and why? From *TikTok* discourse of Black creators having their dance moves stolen, to music where Black A.I. rapper FN Meka<sup>5</sup> is created by white dudes, food is being exploited with things like *Thug Kitchen: The Official Cookbook: Eat Like You Give a F\*ck*, a vegan cookbook in blackface. The world seems so entitled to capitalize on Black culture—precisely by being anti-Black. Who makes money, from whom, and why?

The artist group Disorientation explores identity and advertising through the icons of industrialized food. As buyers, how do these smiling mascots—like Aunt Jemima on syrup bottles and the Land O'Lakes Indian Maiden on butter—become so depersonalized yet acceptable to us?

Founded by Katherine Behar and Marianne M. Kim, the duo Disorientation created characters called "The Disorientals" who explore various fictitious narratives that make us question the effects of corporatized food,

Disorientation, *Two Sides to Every Coin*, 2015.  
Five two-sided photographic fabric banners, motors, wood, bicycle handle grips. 52 x 36 in each. Installation view. Courtesy the artists.



the Industrial Revolution, and, well, the intimate hell we know as late stage capitalism. In their five part *Food Group* series, which consisted of "installations and performances focused on race and labor in American food production and promotion," the mascots suddenly came alive, taking on the task of racialized bodies, specifically agricultural and working class laborers. In some cases, these mascots are filling out alien entrepreneur EB-5 Visa applications, or on strike with historical labor activist Cesar Chavez, or reading *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. The happy packaging presents the smiling mascots as being generous with their labor. In fact, the long hours, lack of benefits, dangerous work conditions, and other challenges are covered up in genteel faces, their reality ultimately forgotten. Disorientation makes visible what's "behind the scenes" by reminding us of a heavy corporate curtain, while Vichayapa's jumpsuits honor the very laborers as sentient and of value from a personal point of view.

Cultural theorist and video essayist F.D Signifier highlighted that creations conceived for the white gaze often require cognitive dissonance to enjoy.<sup>6</sup> In order to "be seen" and thus validated, Signifier noted a time when marginalized communities *needed* to invite mainstream gaze into its space. This achievement of visibility and "coexistence" mentality came at the cost of burdensome racial performativity. The new millennium was a time where "cultural mixing" was significant in media: Abercrombie & Fitch t-shirts had offensive Asian jokes written in Bamboo fonts and Miss Swan<sup>7</sup> ("He look-a-like-a man") on MADtv made the nation laugh at the Asian immigrant stereotype. Those partaking in cultural appropriation were seen as

Disorientation, *Incorporated*, 2011.  
Bobblehead dolls, auto-bobble stands, sound. Variable dimensions. Courtesy the artists. (Photo: Jeff Barnett-Winsby)





Disorientation, *Incorporated* (*Hunger Strike*), 2018. Five-channel animation, cardboard, sound. Dimensions variable, 15:05 min looped. Installation view. Courtesy of the artists. (Photo: Nick Mansell)



well-informed and liberal, varying extractive techniques from “sampling” to “Columbusing” (claiming to discover) or *ornamentalizing*<sup>8</sup> the Other. The Obama-era arrived to declare that “racism was over.” And so, the “post-racial” culinary scene produced a long list<sup>9</sup> of appropriative, white-owned “ethnic fusion” restaurants in the name of “cultural appreciation.” Portland participated, too, keeping itself “weird” by outright boasting about stealing burrito recipes<sup>10</sup> to having a colonial-inspired restaurant in a Black neighborhood with plantation themed drinks.<sup>11</sup> It’s no wonder that this warped sense of “multiculturalism” lays the groundwork for people’s cognitive dissonance to “honor,” while extracting and capitalizing from the cultural Other, with entitlement.

I’ve always wondered, if Ricker’s Thai food is a “proud copycat” to the “original,” why does the public give him so much fame for “picking the brains” of street vendors and other cooks in Thailand?<sup>12</sup> To his credit, sure, Ricker wanted to present “real” Thai food, as opposed to GOOP’s version (even though the menu’s ingredients changed over time—*allegedly*). He even credited the originator of those recipes (though previous Pok Pok workers claim the Thai man works in the back-of-house, walking around microwaving sticky rice, and has no actual authority in the restaurant—*allegedly*). But why can’t I repeat Ricker’s Thai recipes that he and many non-Thais sourced from the “original,” and amass authority and capital from my own culture? Why do I get the respective burdens of assimilation, codeswitching, and being a perpetual foreigner while continuously having to explain these terms in a friendly, palatable way on my grant applications and life story?

Pok Pok’s marketing stance for “real” food punched down on immigrants who had to rely on assimilation and appease the white palate to sell their own cultural food. Over the years, we began to see this shift in “representation,” and food creators of color owning their own narrative—though again, it meets the pipeline of self-exoticizing and racial performativity.

Signifier’s view is that even with the good intentions of creators of color, White consumers can only understand the pain

and lived experiences of racialized people to an *extent*. I would add that, though we *can* learn perspectives, placing culture as a thing to be bought or consumed sets it up to be objectified and extracted, not understood. Maybe some of us reliving our trauma, or cooking for institutions in good faith, hits a certain glass ceiling.

While institutions want the live action remake and sequel to Rirkrit Tiravanija's *untitled (pad thai)* (1990), asking artists to perform cultural servitude does not solve structural inequity, eradicate racism, or work as an effective diversity statement.

Both Miller and Distorientalism show us the association of imagery related to racialized bodies, hospitality, labor, and food. From slavery to immigration, the US has a history of assigning performative hospitality to people of color, from whom it continues to capitalize and exploit as entertainment. Sometimes I wonder: What if, instead of food, my practice was associated with any other type of domestic labor, like cleaning? Would I be asked to mop the floors?

Food is labor. Hospitality is labor. Community care is labor. Ruminating about ingredients while being an event director, planner, producer, cultural ambassador, and kitchen worker for one is labor. The maintenance of art institutions as a culturally relevant and intersectional place is shifted off the backs of marginalized artists and their invisible labor.

I'm reminded of Mierle Laderman Ukeles's "Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside" (1973), scrubbing the steps of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, and her "I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day" (September 16–October 20, 1976), where she collected 720 photographs of 300 maintenance workers doing behind the scenes labor in the exhibition *Art <> World* at the Whitney. This unveiling—of how art institutions assign value and to whom—is like the "behind the scenes" of television, revealing the sets, scripts, multitude of players, and hierarchies that keep the story running. It's similar to upper class socialites getting compliments for throwing dinner parties when they have a staff of footmen, planners, maids, cooks, etc. for their vision. Unfortunately, the same framework is applied when "Other" cultures are assumed to be readily commodifiable, recklessly consumed, and eagerly served by a person from said culture.

How do we escape these "trappings" set forth by history and media?

From slavery to immigration, the US has a history of assigning performative hospitality to people of color, from whom it continues to capitalize and exploit as entertainment.

I hope we can put a new story in place, a new script, and a new reckoning that artists are changemakers to be esteemed and paid—not innate cooks, generous servants, uncritical entertainers, nor those who behave.

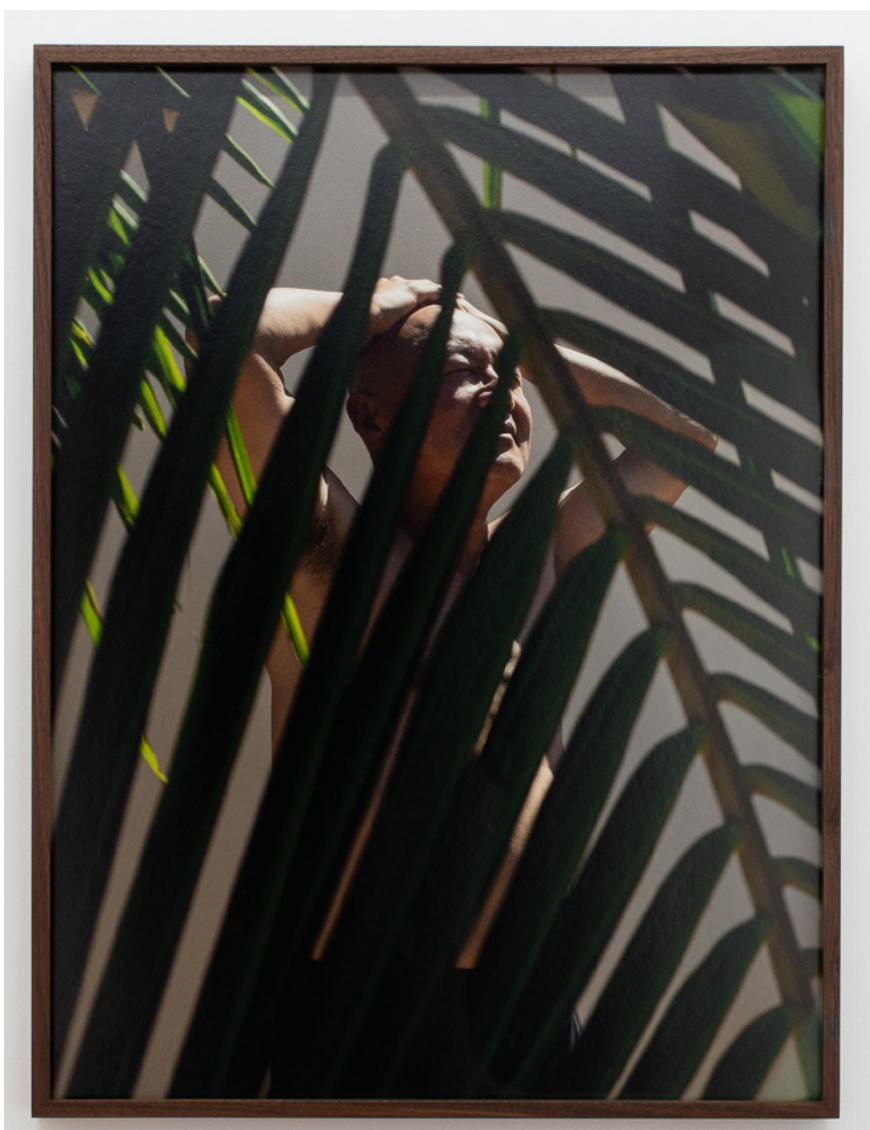
- 1 Francis Maravillas, et al. "The Unexpected Guest: Food and Hospitality in Contemporary Asian Art." *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, ANU Press, 2014, pp. 159–78. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13www81.12>. Accessed 12 Sep. 2022.
- 2 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) "Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium," *Performance Research*, 4:1, 1-30, DOI: 10.1080/13528165.1999.10871639
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- 6 F.D Signifier, "Black Movie Breakdown:Hamilton." YouTube, 2020, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGQLryUHPog](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGQLryUHPog).
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- 8 "While Orientalism is about turning persons into things that can be possessed and dominated, ornamentalism is about a fantasy of turning things into persons through the conduit of racial meaning in order, paradoxically, to allow us to abandon our humanness." — *Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman* by Anne Anlin Cheng
- 9 In 2017, an anonymous group released an Excel document of appropriative restaurants in the city. B. Bennett, (2017, June 1). List Of Culturally Appropriative Restaurants In Portland. TastingTable.com. Retrieved October 1, 2022, from <https://www.tastingtable.com/693954/portland-kooks-burritos-cultural-appropriation-restaurant-list/>
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- 11 M. J. Bamman, (2016, March 29). "Controversial colonial-themed restaurant sparks multiple protests." Eater Portland. Retrieved October 1, 2022, from <https://pdx.eater.com/2016/3/29/11325650/saffron-colonial-controversy-update-tracking-north-williams-portland>
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A multidisciplinary artist whose work spans new media, performance art, sculpture, and installation, May Maylisa Cat's projects have earned support from organizations such as the Franklin Furnace Fund, Oregon Arts Commission, and Regional Arts and Culture Council of Portland, Oregon. In 2022, Cat earned the Lilla Jewel Award for advancing a social change message through her work. Cat's practice blends parody and queer archive activism, which works to unravel hidden social dynamics and critique power through fiction.

at last, I see you:  
a conversation between:  
Ricardo Nagaoka  
and Yaelle S. Amir

Yaelle S. Amir

# 94



Ricardo Nagaoka, *Sunday (Papá)*, 2022. Archival inkjet print in walnut frame, 20 x 26 1/3 in

Yaelle S. Amir

The following text is an edited version of a public dialogue that was held in conjunction with Ricardo Nagaoka's exhibition *at last, I see you*, curated by Yaelle S. Amir for Melanie Flood Projects in Portland, Oregon (June 25 – July 23, 2022).



**YAELE S. AMIR (YSA):**  
In our conversations about this body of work, you've talked about how making this work was a cathartic experience. Do you mind talking more about that?

Ricardo Nagaoka (RN): I've been making the work on and off for about four years. The moment that I realized I really wanted to pursue this body of work came at a time when I was questioning how exactly I came to be who I am. In that time of introspection and self-questioning, I started to really probe what it would take to make work that would reflect that internal state of mind. This self-exploration led me to conversations with people close to me and strangers alike about masculinity and the complexities of identity

that American identity politics don't really account for. These dialogues and the work that continues to come from them have been truly cathartic as I've begun to see new ways of being.

**YSA:** It's clear that this series also functions as a counter and/or a re-imagining of the racist imagery of the "Yellow Peril"—a caricature of (primarily) Asian males that first appeared and spread globally in the 19th century as a response to the threat white men felt Asians posed to their livelihood. The Asian male was depicted in popular media as either belligerent or effeminate. Can you talk a little bit about how these images function to counter this historical image?

Ricardo Nagaoka, *Breaking (John & Timme)*, 2021. Archival inkjet print in walnut frame, 20 x 26 1/3 in. Courtesy the artist

*Following spread:*  
Ricardo Nagaoka, *at last, I see you* installation view, 2022. Courtesy Melanie Flood Projects



Ricardo Nagaoka, *Joe*, 2020.  
Archival inkjet print in  
walnut frame, 20 × 26½ in.  
Courtesy the artist

RN: I try to display a wide spectrum of masculinity through my work. Although I personally cherish my own relationship with femininity, I can also appreciate

a muscular, aggressive depiction of masculinity—the work is really about understanding complexity and bringing dimensionality to this conversation around masculinity. I'm using photography—which I always find to be an ironic medium as it physically flattens what it's depicting—to deal with these racialized tropes, since it's the photographic and filmed image of Asian males that has often been used to emasculate us. It came down to using each frame as an opportunity to further understand what masculinity means through its photographic depictions.

**YSA: How does the domestic space play into that?**

RN: There's this idea that's repeated throughout history that domesticity equates to femininity. But there have been a lot of really wonderful artists in the last few decades who have inserted queerness into the domestic space, which has been reaffirming to witness. I was raised in a thoroughly hegemonic, masculine environment—I grew up surrounded by the macho Latino culture of Paraguay as well as within a Japanese household, which really just doubled down on my own dose of patriarchal values. What really saved me from going deeper down these generational and cultural pits was the fact that I was raised by my mom and my grandmother.

The choice to photograph people in their domestic space comes from my realization that the only time we feel we're allowed to be vulnerable is in our home, in our own solitude. It breaks me that this is the reality for a lot of men in this world.

**YSA: One of the questions you've said you're wanting to address with this work is "How might men become whole again?" Though simply phrased, that's a pretty loaded question.**

RN: It *is* loaded. In the last decade, there's been a concerted mainstream effort to break down the



Yaelle S. Amir

toxic aspects of masculinity, yet I don't think we as a collective have found healthy, generative models to replace what's been torn down. In making these pictures, I'm asking how we can build something new out of the fractured masculinity that surrounds us, because I truly believe there is. We just haven't allowed the conversations or created the image landscape to

Ricardo Nagaoka, *Gabriel*, 2022.  
Archival inkjet print in  
walnut frame, 20 × 26½ in.  
Courtesy the artist

understand that fully. I also have to point out that it's hard to talk about these issues as broken men continue to take center stage through bouts of systemic and pointed violence against others. These fractured forms are literally killing the very people who reproduce these hegemonic masculinities through deaths of despair or suicide. It's hard to see people suffer as products of a broken culture and as a result of their inability to connect to society in a way that seems healthy and sustainable.

bell hooks talks about this in her book *A Will to Change*, that it's an unfortunate fact that we, as a society, want to break down masculinity for its problems, but often fail to create new ways of being;

that the idea of patriarchy is reified not just by men, but also by women. And so, how do we come together as a whole and understand that this healing process is a joint effort that we all have to participate in? And how can creating images act as a bridge, how can they bring the missing dimensionality to masculinity?

**YSA: We installed the show the day that Roe v. Wade was overturned. I found it difficult to not look at this work through the lens of that moment. Even verbalizing the word 'masculinity' made me somewhat uncomfortable.**

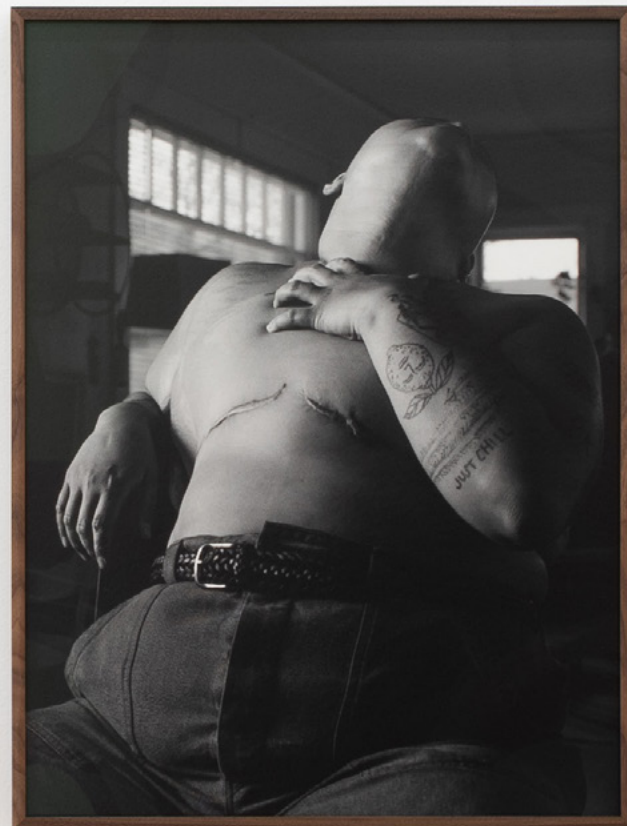
RN: It's real, and questioning masculinity's place in society has always been tough because of these constant reminders of patriarchally-led violence.



**YSA: It's been interesting spending time in the exhibition, because as a viewer you position yourself in front of the images and find yourself observing these people's lives—having a window into their experiences and their crafted identity. In contrast, some viewers see themselves in these images, and that is such a gift—for you, the artist, to be able to communicate as a stranger to a stranger through other strangers... I'm curious how, for you, this work is actualized. Is it enough for it to be made and exist in the world, or are we, the audience, a crucial part of its manifestation?**

RN: That's the eternal question, isn't it? As artists, do we make work for an audience, or do we make it for ourselves? For me, the answer lies somewhere in the middle, as to make this work and never show it would be a disservice to my sitters. Part of what we speak about when we're making these pictures is for them to have the opportunity to be seen. I would make the work even if it didn't have an audience, but it's exciting to me to have the photographs be more than "just" an image, and rather a reflection of someone's subjective understanding of the world.

**YSA: Once the work was on the walls, it became clear to me that one of the successes of this exhibition is that it feels like we're witnessing the formation of a community. We're surrounded by a community that you represent in a way that pushes beyond generalized identity tropes and can be seen in a multilayered, complex perspective. My personal interest in curatorial work has always been to bring together work that can create a sense of community and adherence for the audience, for the subjects, for the artist...a place for connection. Thank you for making this work and for bringing this community together for us to witness.**



Ricardo Nagaoka is an artist born and raised in Paraguay, and a grandson of Japanese immigrants. He emigrated to Canada with his family during his teenage years, and eventually landed in the U.S. to study at the Rhode Island School of Design (BFA in Photography). He currently lives and works in Portland, Oregon.

Ricardo's work seeks to explore our constructs and ideas of home, selfhood, and masculinity. He finds an urgency in questioning the tendency to frame identities through their immediate surfaces, where the complexity of our conditions is often pushed aside for the status quo.

Ricardo has had work published by *The New York Times*, *M Le Monde*, *The British Journal of Photography*, and has been commissioned by *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *TIME*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, and *VICE*, among others.

Yaelle S. Amir is a curator and educator based in Portland, Oregon. Her writing and curatorial projects focus primarily on artists whose practices supplement the initiatives of existing social movements—rendering themes within those struggles in ways that both interrogate and promote these issues to a wider audience. She has curated exhibitions at Artists Space (NY), CUE Art Foundation (NY), The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (NY), Franklin Street Works (CT), HOLDING Contemporary

(OR), ISE Cultural Foundation (NY), Marginal Utility (PA), Melanie Flood Projects (OR), and Oregon Contemporary, among other institutions. She has held curatorial and research appointments at the International Center of Photography (NY), the Museum of Modern Art (NY), Newspace Center for Photography (OR), NYU's Institute of Fine Arts, and the University of Oregon's Center for Art Research. She presently teaches curatorial studies and professional practices at Lewis & Clark College.

Ricardo Nagaoka, *Corazón mio (Brit)*, 2022. Archival inkjet print in walnut frame, 20 x 26 1/3 in each. Courtesy the artist



Ricardo Nagaoka, *Justin*, 2021.  
Archival inkjet print in walnut  
frame print in walnut frame,  
20 x 26 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist

The text below includes excerpts from a conversation between Teresa Raiford, Founder, *Don't Shoot Portland* and Tiffany (Tiff) Harker, Director, *HOLDING Contemporary*, and focuses on some of the history, content and curatorial decisions for exhibitions that have been presented by Don't Shoot Portland in the gallery space from 2017–present:

*Stolen Angels: A Black Lives Matter Exhibit*, 2017

*Stop Killing Us: A Black Lives Still Matter Installation*, 2020

*Archives for Black Lives: A Liberated Archives Experience*, 2021

*Feeling Documents: A Liberated Archives Experience*, 2022

*Artists for Black Lives: A Black Lives Matter Installation & Art Auction*, 2022

**Tiff (TH):** I like hearing about your curatorial process. The way you work and think through themes with research-based visuals seems incredibly intuitive, as if you have the layout sorted out entirely in your head. When you begin thinking about an installation, are you able to visualize all the various elements that will be included in the space?

Teresa (TR): With the curation, I do have the installations visualized in my head: the concept, colors and everything. Even as a child—I would write in this little journal—I wanted to do a series of art installations. I wanted to put information on walls because nobody was paying attention to what we were saying in our marches. We were saying “Stop Killing Us” and I thought that maybe by sharing information in this way, people wouldn't want to hurt us. I realized art makes you feel something, it makes people feel a certain way, and when you're physically standing in front of it, you may actually connect your feelings to what you're seeing. I wanted visitors to *feel* the documents we were presenting so that they could have some kind of understanding or empathy, particularly for people that are vulnerable to state-sanctioned violence.

**TH:** Yes, you've always described your work as a “call to action,” and it is connected to the experience that Don't Shoot creates inside the gallery that cannot be completely articulated. It becomes a multi-media education center, a place for discourse, and a space for something much bigger. I want to say...a physical container for an entire range of human emotions...

Stolen Angels: A Black Lives Matter Exhibit, 2017. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)







Stolen Angels: A Black Lives Matter Exhibit, 2017. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

TR: As a community organizer, my perspective in building these art installations was to create an easier way for me to process and communicate. There are so many different components to this information, including videos or sound, because I tried to bring the process into the space without the kind of police intervention and violence that happens during protests. When we had the *Stop Killing Us* protest back in 2020, it had already been years of showing up here in Portland. I wanted to be able to show the faces of the people, children and families who were participating because in the media we are called anti-fascists and other dehumanizing terms. They don't conclude that we're out there for human rights and dignity. In the space of the gallery, I get to make room for that kind of access, and create the human intersect for people.

**TH: Do you consider your installations as social justice art?**

TR: There has been a lot of talk about things like social justice and art, but I really believe that the way that we make social justice is through arts education programming. There's always an artistic as well as educational platform that can reveal more than people might know.

For *Stolen Angels* (2017), we made the space for families whose children and loved ones had been killed by law enforcement and gun violence. I wanted it to be more than a remembrance. I wanted to create a space inside the gallery with news documents, photographs, and intimate pieces from the families that were given to us. As someone who really cares about these people, I didn't want to dehumanize them at all, and we were able to create something in a space that remembered they were loved and that communicated to people how much we care for and value the lives that have



Teresa Raiford, *Stop Killing Us: A Black Lives Still Matter Exhibit*, 2020. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Stop Killing Us: A Black Lives Still Matter Exhibit, 2020. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

been lost. For me, it's important to provide evidence of who we are as people and not just what's told through the media. By truly addressing the violence and intention to circumvent my access to life—and our children's lives—we needed to make it plain to others. It was Malcolm X that said "make it plain," and I believe in using that kind of process to illuminate these ideas through art.

**TH: The installations are emotionally and physically overwhelming—and there's another level of tension because they combine aesthetic beauty with devastatingly brutal content. You're making so many decisions around the theme, the design and multimedia components, the programming...**

TR: It's about human understanding and the call to action. It's thinking about why we are doing this work. It's not just for us, but about how people can do the work themselves. How can others participate and create—and support other kinds of education models and uphold long-term interest in these issues. I am always asking: "How do we get more people to have access and promote social change?"

The full conversation can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THVmhFrdRY&t=15066>.

For more information about the gallery installations, visit the archives on the websites of Don't Shoot Portland and HOLDING Contemporary.

Afterword by Tiff Harker, Director, *HOLDING Contemporary*

I joined the gallery as co-director with Iris in 2019, and together we established HOLDING Contemporary. We presented Don't Shoot Portland (DSPDX) projects for four more years and when HOLDING was deciding to transition to a project-based model, DSPDX was simultaneously considering the possibility of programming exhibitions for their own gallery. In 2023, THE BLACK GALLERY opened its doors in our former space at 916 NW Flanders Street. DSPDX continues to promote new voices that advance social change through exhibitions and projects. We hope you'll support their work in person and online at [www.theblackgallerypdx.com](http://www.theblackgallerypdx.com).



Archives for Black Lives: A Liberated Archives Experience, 2021. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

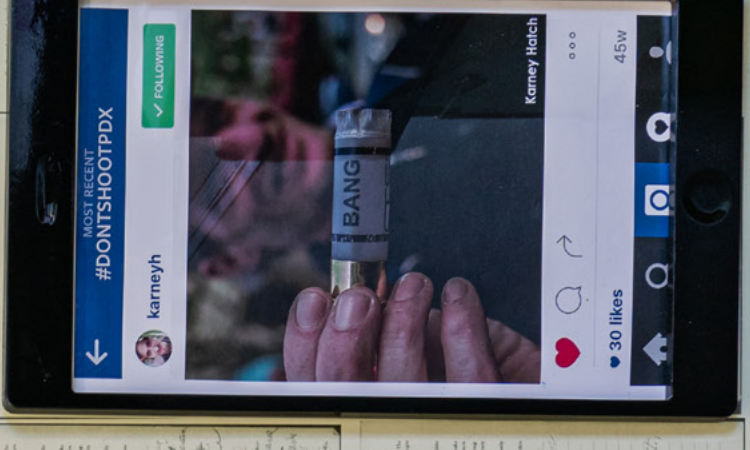
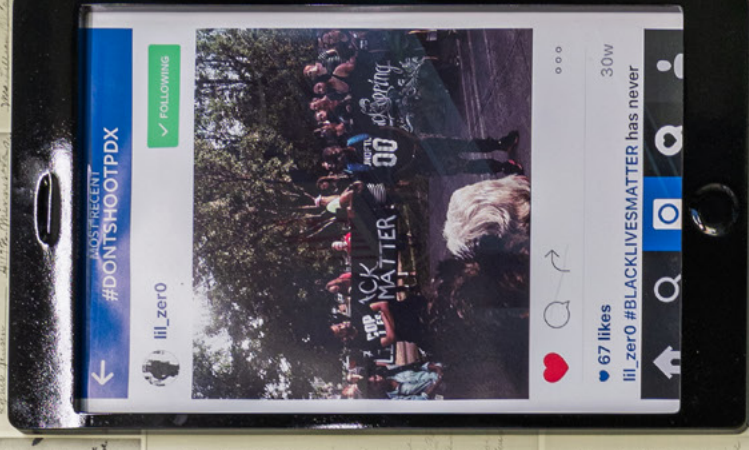
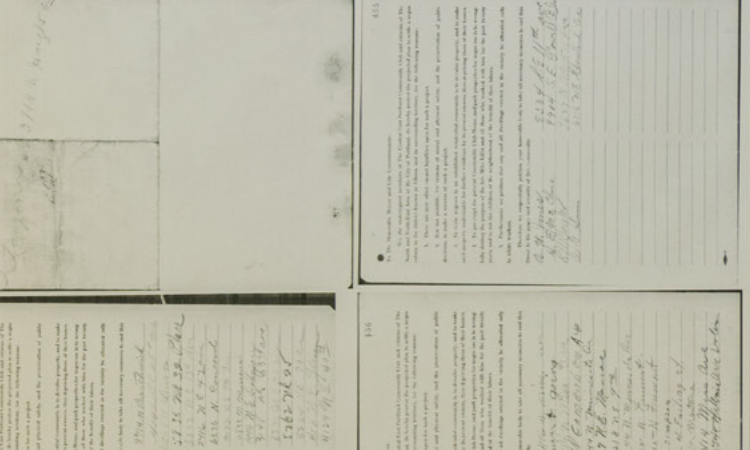
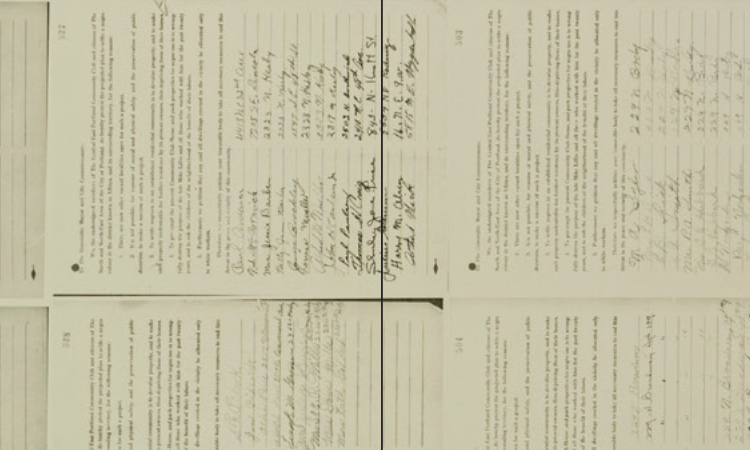
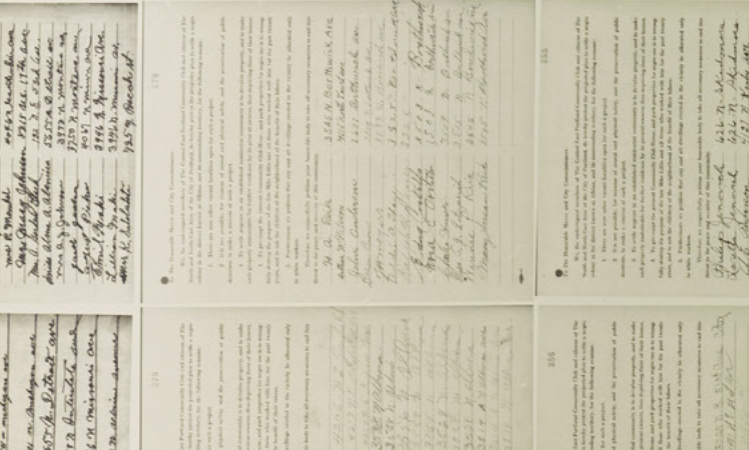
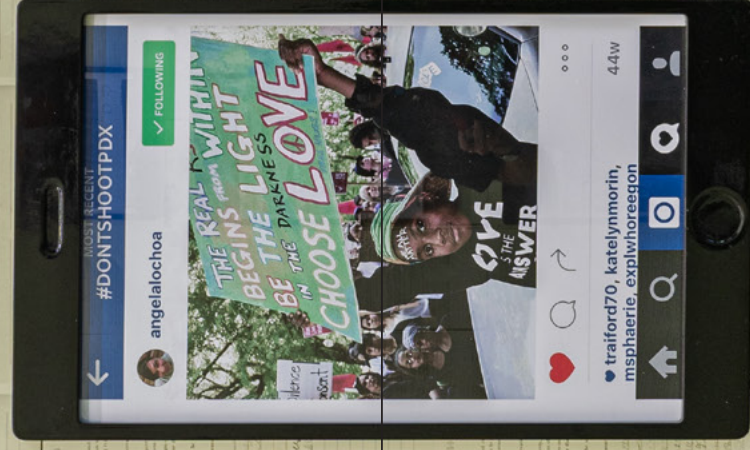
Teresa Raiford is the founder and Executive Director of Don't Shoot Portland, “a Black-led and community driven nonprofit in Portland, Oregon, that advocates for accountability to create social change in the spaces of human rights and racial justice. Teresa was a keynote speaker at the Society of American Archivists Conference in 2017 where she co-presented a panel and workshop, “Archives for Black Lives”, about the importance of access. She has also built a framework by using art and social justice to develop community-based archives, ongoing workshops and educational programming.

Tiffany Harker is Director of HOLDING Contemporary (2019–2023), Project Coordinator for the Percent for Art in Public Places Program with the Oregon Arts Commission, Curator-in-Residence for the Center for Art Research at University of Oregon, Eugene (2021–2022), Special Projects at Elizabeth Leach Gallery (2018–present), Advisor to Gather:Make:Shelter (2018–present), recent board president of the Contemporary Arts Council at the Portland Art Museum (2020–2022). Harker has worked in contemporary art museums, galleries, and nonprofit organizations in San Francisco, California, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Crown Point Press, and Fraenkel Gallery where she was Artist Liaison to the Estate of Diane Arbus, Sophie Calle, Christian Marclay, Alec Soth, and Hiroshi Sugimoto among others. After relocating to Portland, Oregon in 2016, she was Project Manager for Converge 45’s Ann Hamilton’s *habitus* installation, and has volunteered for the Mentor Program at KSMoCA and the SMART Reading Program at the Blazers Boys and Girls Club.



Printed booklet for exhibition by Omnivore, Archives for Black Lives: A Liberated Archives Experience, 2021. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

Following spread: Archives for Black Lives: A Liberated Archives Experience, 2021. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)





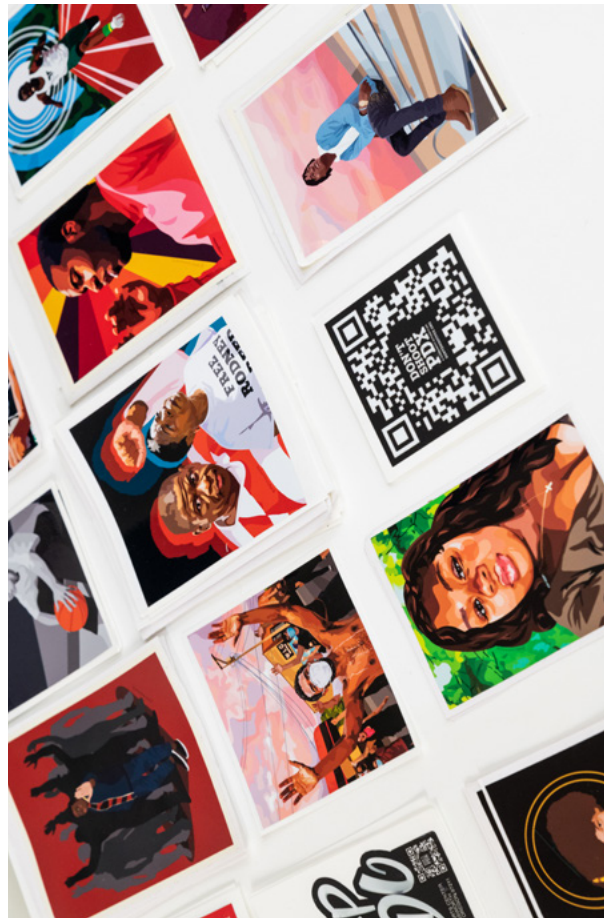
"Racist Faces" wall, Feeling Documents: A Liberated Archives Experience, 2022. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)

Feeling Documents: A Liberated Archives Experience, 2022. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)





Artists for Black Lives: A Black Lives Matter Installation & Art Auction, 2022. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Installation detail, Artists for Black Lives: A Black Lives Matter Installation & Art Auction, 2022. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Opening Reception, Artists for Black Lives: A Black Lives Matter Installation & Art Auction, 2022. (Photo: Mika Martinez)

Ssy1

Roya  
Amirsoleymani

# 118

Interview:  
Felisha Ledesma

Archive:  
Alex Ian Smith

Tiny Creatures is not a gallery. It is Tiny Creatures.  
Tiny Creatures is not a venue. It is Tiny Creatures.  
—Janet Kim, *Tiny Creatures Manifesto*, 2007

As excerpted in Chris Kraus's essay, "You Are Invited To Be The Last Tiny Creature" (2010), from *Where Art Belongs*<sup>1</sup>

There was never a real manifesto. We were running downhill full speed, hoping to make it work. Sometimes we succeeded and sometimes we completely failed ourselves and other artists. We always reminded ourselves we were making it work with what we had.

—Felisha Ledesma, email interview, February 27, 2022<sup>2</sup>

I parked on the roof of the Rite-Aid and walked down the ramp to the sidewalk. It was a little cold outside. Maybe early spring.

**(I learned later that it was February 21, 2015, seven years to the day that I took that guess).**

A couple of kids way cooler than us collected a cover charge at the door. A long, eerie hallway with flickering fluorescent lights descended to the basement, opening out into a large, mostly empty space, dark save for the abrasive glare of track lighting through the windows of the surrounding rooms, old offices converted into galleries, with bright white walls and muddy-green floors. The spacious center felt ready for anything: music, performance, dancing, drinking, probably drugs. There might have been a fog machine. A side corridor led to the bathroom, and another to a staff

Roya Amirsoleymani

area or green room, some no-go zone. It had already escaped me that this weirdo art gathering, in a labyrinthine vacant warehouse, was happening beneath a chain drug store. It was S1's underground phase, in more ways than one.

**Felisha Ledesma (FL): S1 appeared endless and cavernous; an immense resonant object that was shifted and multiplied. S1 had its own dimension; something about entering from the street, you had no clue what awaited you. Our vivid green gallery floor was not neutral; it held everything that came before it. I always appreciated the weird quirks of the building and little stains left behind from artists.**

I was on time, but early for a performance by keyon gaskin, a Portland dance artist. So I stood in line for cheap whiskey in a plastic cup and made my way to the galleries.

**(I forget what was on view that night, but S1's archive reminds me that Portland artist Julie Perini was showing work, and suddenly a memory flashes, of standing by the far wall, watching a barely-moving image of a yellow leaf on wet ground (I think), from a series of short, daily, diaristic videos Julie was making at the time.)**

**(There could have been more. I can't be sure).**

At some point, gaskin performed, and like anything I've seen of theirs before or since—whether at S1, or the art museum, or a major festival in Europe or New York—it left me speechless.



Performance by keyon gaskin.  
Part of Physical Education  
collective. S1. 2015. Courtesy  
Physical Education

But so did S1. How did they *do it, afford it*? The “it” of renting a space, making a show, paying artists, working for free, sustaining something meaningful and real?

**(I’m savvy and critical and caring, but even in 2015, I lacked today’s sharpened concepts and precise language for the art world’s labor inequities and other unforgivable injustices.)**

I found my way back to the art (something I can’t always do now).

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Risking nostalgia, I remember much of Portland’s art landscape in the 2010’s as optimistic and aspirational, spotted with broke but flourishing artist-run spaces that embraced an independent spirit of informal exhibition-making. The art scene was growing up rather than growing weary. Life cost less. The world hadn’t broken us yet.

**(And I acknowledge its lack-of foresight, of racial analysis, of cutting social critique, of NOW).**

**FL: I felt tension in my shoulder and chest before an opening, performance, party. Sometimes it lingered for days.**

For all the scrappiness of a DIY collective and the hedonism of an illicit rave, S1 put on proper *exhibitions*. They were rigorous and sophisticated yet welcoming and warm, under-polished, with the punk ethos of *art shows*. But my memories of them are like abstractions or impressions, entangled and hazy. Embodied states, fuzzy visuals, low vibrations. Like their noise shows.

Spaciousness. A flickering. Soft sculpture in stark rooms. Line drawings maybe. Shapeless sheets. Pops of bright color against cold, white walls. Outlets and cords. A bright orange tarp.

I remember fondly the signs of curatorial care, evidenced by how the artists were treated, and by the thoughtful consideration with which newly made objects were spaced out, placed on floors, hung from the ceilings or on the walls.



Carly Mandel and Rebecca Peel. From *Apple of My Iris*, S1. 2014. Courtesy S1

noon

Roya Amirsoleymani



Nicola Gentile. From *Goodsport*. 2015. Courtesy S1

Nicola Gentile. From *Goodsport*. 2015. Courtesy S1

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With a spirit of generosity and commitment to community, S1 always punched above its weight. It supported a range of emerging artists, a mix of local, national, and international, and regularly made exhibitions with artists from New York and Europe. They had an eye for the up and coming and overlooked. Many of those who had early solo or small group shows at S1 graduated to more established practices and careers.

**FL: I loved working with Emily Jones on Orange House Action Clinic (OHAC), because it pushed us beyond what we thought we could accomplish. Emily made a mix for 'OHAC' though it wasn't played in the gallery. I think having a sound element creates a world around her exhibition.**



And in the early-mid 2010s, when the contemporary art world became seemingly fixated on the aesthetic (and not always the substance) of underground schools and experimental pedagogy, S1 was one of few non-academic art spaces in town to host nerdy but cool artist lectures and critical theory reading groups that were actually anti- and resolutely alternative. For one of them, organized by the Physical Education collective, we convened on a winter evening in the cold, bare basement, encircling a single space heater, drinks in hand, to debate and build knowledge.



S1's story epitomized a time and place, but its soul exceeded it. Its chronology traced a new surge of development and displacement in a city already gentrified. But for the moment, I choose to celebrate. For a moment, I am going to chase a feeling.

\*\*\*

**FL: At first, we wanted something you couldn't find online, somewhat obscured. When you typed S1 into the search bar, all you would find was Ford Trucks. We didn't know the scale we wanted to be and didn't want to make any declarations about the space in our name. We wanted it to be whatever it was that night or in that moment.**

Artists Felisha Ledesma, Alex Ian Smith, and Erik Carlson founded S1 in Portland in 2014 as an unincorporated contemporary art space. Having outgrown Multiplex, an earlier incarnation in a live/work studio of Old Town's Everett Station Lofts, they

February 13, 2015.  
Reading Group organized by Physical Education (Allie Hankins, keyon gaskin, Takahiro Yamamoto, Lu Yim), featuring reading/discussions on the works and writings of Jimmy Robert, Penny Arcade, Ann Liv Young, and bell hooks. Part of a series of reading groups, artist shares and performances organized by Physical Education for S1. Courtesy Physical Education

*Opposite:*  
From exhibition by Emily Jones. Orange House Action Clinic. Courtesy S1

From exhibition by Emily Jones. Orange House Action Clinic. Courtesy S1

ambitiously relocated to what was lovingly referred to as “that place in the basement of the Hollywood Rite-Aid.”

**FL: [T]o go from a couple hundred square feet to thousands was a mixture of delusion, impulse, and courage. S1 was always some sort of fantasy. It started in 2009 when I would go down with my good friend to Tuesday Morning, a bargain home goods store that actually stayed open a few months into our program. There was nothing else down there, just a vast empty space. Sometimes people would squat or hang out in the unclaimed spaces. I thought about it for years—what it could be, how we could use it, what other people would think when they saw it.**

Eventually and surprisingly, S1 incorporated as a nonprofit. While some might balk at such formalization, a 501(c)(3) status allowed access to funding, visibility, and expansion. At their peak, they presented visual art, sound art, performances, and parties; programmed artist talks, panels, residencies, and reading groups; partnered with larger organizations to present bigger, more expensive shows; and offered workshops in electronic music and experimental sound for women and femmes in an effort to narrow the gender gap. Most notably, they established a robust and still active synthesizer library, internationally recognized and respected as a foundational model for education and equipment exchange.

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In 2017, S1 moved again, to a much smaller but still sizable space in Roseway, a relatively central and now more “desirable” neighborhood that felt, at the time, out of the way. While lacking the basement’s more youthful energy, this above-ground, two room storefront still had grit, tucked into a run-down commercial strip on seedy Sandy Blvd & NE 73rd Ave, with guardrails on the windows and a dive bar next door.

Twinned with the harsh realities of nonprofit operations, the transition to a new venue marked a conflicted coming of age, a period of possibility and potential weighed down by the traps of early adulthood (a shitty landlord, an expensive lease, a board of directors, building repairs). Maturing meant battling Portland’s own growth spurt, in the form of a new wave of affluent development, astronomical rent hikes, and a full-blown housing crisis, ultimately insurmountable challenges that were largely responsible for S1’s denouement. Despite the rockiness of their last chapter and final home, I am not alone in remembering it fondly.

**Felisha: When we moved to our second location, there were so many things floating around. Nothing seemed grounded, and we were unsure how to really utilize the new space. Working with sidony o’neal on their exhibition ‘Néanmoins UNE Catachrèse’ really shifted whatever fears we were holding onto. It was great to have an artist utilize our synth library and resources to incorporate sound into their sculptural and performance pieces.**

sidony o’neal. Still from a performance as part of their exhibition *Néanmoins UNE Catachrèse*. S1. 2017. Courtesy S1

sidony o’neal. From their exhibition *Néanmoins UNE Catachrèse*. S1. 2017. Courtesy S1

Paired with an exhibition of objects, o’neal’s one-off performance for *Néanmoins UNE Catachrèse* (“nevertheless a catachresis”) was visually and viscerally arresting. Outside S1’s streetside entrance, an audience congregated expectantly, a neighborhood spectacle in itself. We turned

suddenly, en masse, to meet the striking image of o’neal—in a beige sweater, denim shorts, and bright red thigh-high boots—steadily making their way down the center of the busy, two way boulevard. Wending their way through the crowd and into the gallery, o’neal concluded their piece inside, the rest of us remaining huddled on the sidewalk, gazing through the barred windows, witnessing and witnessed, distanced.



Later, inside, we meandered around sculptures of soft textile, shiny metal, and hard concrete.



I saw a lot of S1 shows in those later years.

On a muggy midsummer night in 2017, I sat with a half dozen friends on the floor of Yale Union’s upper hall, a treasured architectural gem of Portland, assembled for a performance by SADAF (July 2017), an Iranian-American artist based in New York. Dramatic lighting and

projection illuminated the center of the darkened room, with SADAF's haunting instrumentals reverberating across the vastness, while S1's tiny team tended to the artist, the audience, and all the technical details of a visually and sonically nuanced experience.



**FL: Sound was a big part of our artistic practices. Many musicians and sound artists were involved in making [S1] happen over the years, so there was a natural pull in that direction. [W]e gave artists the opportunity to explore sound in different ways...[as] part of their exhibition, a big party, a one-off performance, a cassette, or new collaborations.**

I sat on the floor again in 2018, maybe '19, this time in S1's own front room, for an engagement with Portland artist maximiliano, whose video poem employed baroquely textured digital collages, dissonant sounds, and still and moving images of performance for camera, overlaid with live readings of original text.

maximiliano was also one half of *cvllejex*, an artistic and curatorial collaborative with angelica maria millan lozano. Their *ropa vieja* show in May 2018 curated artists, objects, garments, performances, and a publication (a copy still sits on my bedside table). The S1 archive claims the show was at night, but I vividly recall buying the book in the low glow of post-golden hour, thinking it was the only time I'd ever seen S1 before dark. The late-day sun was streaming through the windows, making long shadows of the guardrail bars on the hardwood floor.

SADAF. From the performance *Decent, Bitten, Glad*. Co-presented by Yale Union and S1. 2017. Courtesy S

CVLLEJEX. *ropa vieja*. S1. 2018. Courtesy S1



As I grow older, I am impressed with the number of art events I attended in my early Portland years, but S1 was prolific, so I still missed a lot. But I didn't have to be there to understand their value to artists and communities in and beyond Portland, an impact that continues to resonate.

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(A lot of Black and Brown artists presented work and spent time at S1, in part because there were some shortcuts to trust, a sense of agency and autonomy, and an anti-institutional affinity. At the time, it was rare to see other people of color at art events in Portland, but when I looked around the room at S1, I could often breathe a sigh of relief.)

\*\*\*

Even after incorporating, S1's budget was tight. Paying artists was always a priority, but also always a stretch. Rent, already a struggle, was skyrocketing. Organizers often covered costs out-of-pocket, but were being priced out themselves. Erik had left in 2014, but Felisha and Alex stayed until 2019. Staff were mostly unpaid, fueled by a passion eventually extinguished by an exploitative and extractive art world reliant on burnout, and contributory to the broken systems that reinforce wealth gaps, economic divides, and outdated notions of art and altruism.

**FL: The hardest [part was] the money. We had none. Rent was extremely high, and the landlord hated us...It was never quite enough, not clean enough, [or] something would break and it would feel like the end of the world. To make rent we would have parties, fundraisers, and [eventually] memberships. It always got figured out, but it never felt sustainable... We did it though. I have to remind myself of that.**

Many of us can relate, being accessories to the various industrial complexes to which we thought we were building alternatives. And perhaps

we were. Or are. Temporary utopias do exist. But their idealism doesn't fold to an overbearing, oppressive force; instead, it succumbs to the slow, insidious, parasitic pressure of practicality, the kind that kills our spaces for creating, communing, and dreaming.

**FL: Looking back, I was not a whole person yet. If I was, I would have known there would have to be some balance between taking care of myself and the space.**

S1 balanced its perpetual precarity with vitality and integrity. It fell into that liminal (and sometimes limitless) space between the established art centers and the house shows. And fall it did, defeated like others by a city's race to flatten aesthetics and homogenize culture.

The band always breaks up, and they usually should, but others form and fill the gap over time. S1 was unique, but something like it, its next generation, could have emerged (and perhaps even sustained) if not for current conditions so hostile to art and so indifferent to life itself.

**(For the record, S1 persisted beyond its founding's finale, with a different shape and smaller scale, buoyed for a couple of years by devoted volunteer artists without whom there would be no Synth Library Portland now. But that stage has other storytellers.)<sup>3</sup>**

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On the floor again.

My final visit to S1 was alone, for a series of sets by sound artists that ran until 4am. I arrived around 8 and left around 2. I nursed a tequila and soda on a bean bag, dozing in and out in the dark. I made out some familiar faces but never said hello. I finished my drink but stayed put, sinking back, listening deeply, finding comfort in solitude among strangers.

**(In retrospect, the dark, melancholic overtones seemed to signal S1's end.)**

When I arrived home around 3am, a birthday party was winding down. I crossed the living room without a hello, drifting in a despondent gaze.

My best friend Ernie was in that living room. And he was with me at S1 in 2015, the night of gaskin's performance (he loved it). We were often in the same room together.

**FL: The greatest joy was the moment you were able to witness a piece or performance with the rest of the people in the space. That energy is unmatched.**

noon

Ernie died of cancer on September 30, 2020. I was in the room.

I said I was going to celebrate, and I am. And we will. S1's artist projects deserve to be archived, and their successes and hardships should be shared. So, this essay is the start of something more. But part of memorializing life is acknowledging death, and we can agree not all deaths have to be.

- 1 Chris Kraus, "You Are Invited To Be The Last Tiny Creature," *Where Art Belongs* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 9.
- 2 Felisha Ledesma, email interview with author, February 27, 2022.
- 3 Synth Library Portland volunteers include Thomas Fang, Matthew Rempes, Alessandra Genovese, and Kevin Holden.

S1 balanced its perpetual precarity with vitality and integrity. It fell into that liminal (and sometimes limitless) space between the established art centers and the house shows. And fall it did, defeated like others by a city's race to flatten aesthetics and homogenize culture.

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# 130

“...it’s really the white man’s worst nightmare to have a fully rested negro who is fully self-possessed.”  
—Navild Acosta

As a chronically-ill Black femme, I can’t understate how much my bed means to me. Beyond medication that keeps pain boiling just under the surface, my bed is often the only thing that brings me a semblance of

relief. As my face touches the cold satin pillowcase and my limbs relax between the weight of my comforter and the mattress, I (very temporarily) distance myself from an external world that punishes me for how much I need to lay down. Illness aside, I’ve always loved being in bed despite the push toward “getting up.”

Antiblack-imperialist-patriarchal-ableist-capitalist logic marks the bed as a site of laziness. Our lives are very literally structured to deprive us from practicing rest, pleasure, and dreaming, driving a wedge between us and the spaces where we can physically and psychologically restore ourselves. Knowing this, what does it mean to embrace the bed? When

we explore beds as a unique place in our interior lives and as objects that can destabilize our ideas about who is worthy of rest, do beds and bedrooms become more urgent and meaningful? While initially considering these questions, I turned to Josie Roland Hodson’s ideas about “Black Sleep Aesthetics.” In “Rest Notes: On Black Sleep Aesthetics\*,” Hodson ascertains that Black Sleep is “a quiet gesture cast against tropes of Black idleness and the rationalization of the Black (non)human as a laboring, nonsomniac machine.”<sup>1</sup> By extending Hodson’s line of thinking to the vessels in which/on which “Black Sleep”—as well as Black birth, sex, illness, and leisure—occur, I began looking at Black contemporary artists documenting and exhibiting their beds. In tracing a visual history of “being Black in bed,” I was struck by works that use beds to reconfigure the social meaning of the object so that the bed acted as a vehicle for exploring our interior selves.



Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa, *Siestas Negras / Black Power Naps*, 2019. Installation view, Performance Space New York. (Photo: Da Ping Luo)

My fixation on bed art began in August 2021 when Twitter user @ftrplnss tweeted an image set comparing the austere stage dressing from Kanye West’s DONDA tour—comprised of his mattress on the cement floor, a small side table, dumbbells, and few pairs of shoes—with Tracey Emin’s seminal installation work *My Bed* from 1998. Rapper and artist Kari Faux added to the thread with images of her bedroom installation from the “CRY 4 HELP” album release party in 2019. The triangulation of West, Emin, and Faux started an art historical “who did it first” conversation that dove into nearly 100 years of examples of beds in modern and contemporary art. The presence of Faux’s performance work in this conversation is critical as it 1) represents Black femme authored Black femme interior space and 2) refuses the pervasive and idealized “empty bed” trope that marks beds as uniform objects void of the “materiality of the human body.”<sup>2</sup> At the party/performance held at Space15Twenty in Los Angeles, Faux performed new music from a replica of her bedroom. The pajama-clad Faux engaged her audience while laying down and jumping on the bed—performing at the very barrier between listeners and her personal space. Adorned with plushies, strewn clothing, an open Macbook, bottles of tequila, and paper ephemera from her writing process, the bed-as-stage interrupts what we expect from a performance by making public

Faux’s “depression bedroom”—an uncensored site that reflects one’s mental state and their (potential) inability to care for their body and personal space due to mental illness.

Additionally, this bed provided physical grounds for the artist to rest mid-performance. The moments where Faux snuggled on top of her bed while people roamed the party around her challenged the terms of performance and work that necessitate continuous production. The bed then becomes a shelter from expectation and a place to process. From her bed “full of stuff,” Kari Faux complicates the boundaries between public and private space; she is both intimately on display and in complete control.<sup>3</sup>



kari faux, 2019



Screenshot from Kari Faux's Twitter

While the participant vs. performer, bedroom vs. gallery, real vs. “fake” matrix was clearer with Kari Faux’s “CRY 4 HELP” performance, Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa’s 2019 iteration of the *Siestas Negras / Black Power Naps* project dissolved these boundaries to create “a zone of pleasurable refusal” where beds were sites of consenting co-rest.<sup>4</sup> Research on sleep disparities between Black folks and people of other races overwhelmingly shows that Black people are getting less quality sleep, and less sleep in general, compared to non-Black people. Sleep and sleep quality further diminishes for fat, poor, queer, disabled, and undocumented Black people.<sup>5</sup> In response to the state-sanctioned “sleep gap,” *Siestas Negras / Black Power Naps* used beds, as well as other platforms of rejuvenation such as trampolines and sensory baths, to encourage Black people to reclaim mundane, “unproductive” rest amongst community. Within the dark, void-like space, pink canopies warmed by washes of rainbow lighting enveloped the squishy, orb-like beds, transporting participants out of the gallery and into a dreamspace. The materiality of the installation is critical—the size and amount of rest spaces available suggested that there was enough room for simultaneous and differing expressions of Black rest in bed, not just sleep. While we often are taught that beds are where we prepare for the next workday—an in-between that exists to provide *brief* respite from antiblack grind culture—can we reimagine when or what hours we use the bed, who we use it with, and what we are doing on/in it? As Hodson writes, sleeping together, or simply being in bed together as a kind of parallel play, is a collaborative act that exists at “the threshold of the interior, subjective space of the self and the sense of belonging to be found in the collective.”<sup>6</sup> *Siestas Negras / Black Power Naps* strikes a balance, in concept and in practice, by conceiving of rest spaces as both communal and solitary. By inviting Black people en masse to be in bed on an ongoing basis, Acosta and Sosa refuse the idea that individual rest is a radical act, instead galvanizing the power of cooperative, well-rested interruption.

Kari Faux, *CRY 4 HELP*, 2019. Performance view, album release party.



Clifford Prince King,  
*Safe Space*, 2020.  
Courtesy the artist



Outside of performance and installation, photography is ripe with Black artists making images of, on, and from their bed/rooms. Clifford Prince King photographs queer Black men in their everyday lives in a manner that supplely reorients quotidian space and warmly embraces shared ritual. The beds, bedrooms, and bed linens in Prince King's images transform into "tableaus for scenes of desire and vulnerability," giving new meaning to images of these spaces and objects.<sup>7</sup> *Safe Space* (2020), a work that regularly goes viral on Twitter without accreditation for Prince King, captures Black care, intimacy, and friendship in motion. The photo depicts the artist between a friend's legs while getting his hair cornrowed. The bare chested Prince King, reading a James Baldwin book, is seated with his back against the edge of the bed and the figure braiding his hair, also shirtless, is sitting on the billowing white bed. A third figure, lying on his back with the top of his head pointed toward the viewer, reaches up to give the braider a puff of a joint. At the foot of the bed there is an open container of EcoStyler gel, various combs and brushes, and an ashtray. Sticking out against the rich, earthly palette, the ordinary, inanimate bed serves as the scaffolding for small, but affirming acts of affection, holding each figure as they casually care for each other. This glimpse into the artist's interior world is punctuated by the familiarity of the scene. *Communion* (2019) similarly captures the warm shadows of quotidian intimacy. Beneath a sheet lit from within, two figures sit face to face on top of a bed forming a fort. While the bed is barely in view in *Communion*—there's a sliver of a pillow and bed frame in the background—it operates as what scholars Caitlin Blanchfield and Farzin Lotfi-Jam call "an apparatus of the self."<sup>8</sup> The quiet and sexy moment unraveling beneath the linen reveals how the architecture of the bed serves as a platform for retooling images of domesticity. Materially, the beds within Clifford Prince King's photographs turn away from their prescribed use to sustain their Black queer inhabitants.

There is no shortage of bed art in art history. There are beds as centerpieces and stages, as afterthoughts within the larger image, as sculptures, as multidimensional textiles, as devices through which artists consider where the private and public meet, and so on. My desire to chart Black artists documenting and exhibiting their beds feels indescribably significant to me as I navigate our "anti-bed" world. Despite how much I enjoy seeing depictions of Black people at rest, this isn't really about representation. The use of the bed by Black artists serves as an opportunity to expand our understanding of our relationships to reparative rest (outside of white supremacist definition). Despite the mundaneness of beds, to be Black in bed without the expectation or denial of sleep is a crucial event. Images, performances, and installations that document autonomous and expansive uses of the bed live at the convergence of fantasy and reality, giving way to new possible structures for our interior lives.

*A few end things:*

The artists I consider within this particular text are the tip of the iceberg, brilliant and challenging uses of beds exist within the works and worlds of Carrie Mae Weems, Mónica Hernández, Mickalene Thomas, manuel arturo abreu, Faith Ringgold, Njideka Akunyili Crosby—to name just a miniscule few. Also, I purposely chose not to speak at length about the set dressing from Kanye West's DONDA tour because of the space that would take.

Clifford Prince King,  
*Communion*, 2019.  
Courtesy the artist



noon

## Ella Ray

- 1 Josie Roland Hodson, "Rest Notes: On Black Sleep Aesthetics." *MIT Press*, no. 176 (2021): 8.
- 2 Gülsüm Baydar, "Bedrooms in Excess: Feminist Strategies Used by Tracey Emin and Semiha Berksoy," *Woman's Art Journal* 33, no. 2 (2012): 29.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa, "Siestas Negras / Black Power Naps," in *Black Futures*, ed. Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham (New York: Penguin Random House), 156–159.
- 5 Brian Resnick, "The Racial Inequality of Sleep," *The Atlantic*, October 27, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/10/the-sleep-gap-and-racial-inequality/412405/>.
- 6 Josie Roland Hodson, "Rest Notes: On Black Sleep Aesthetics." *MIT Press*, no. 176 (2021): 9.
- 7 Caitlin Blanchfield and Farzin Lotfi-Jam, "The Bedroom Of Things." *Log*, no. 41 (2017): 131.
- 8 Ibid.

Ella Ray is a writer, curator, and library worker concerned with the manner in which refusal and worldbuilding can be embodied in visual and performance art. These lines of study are augmented by Ray's investment in Black feminist thought, formal and conceptual experimentation, and cross-diasporic community. Currently an Associate Editor at Variable West, Ray's essays, reviews, and research have appeared in/on Variable West, *Cult Classic Magazine*, the Studio Museum in Harlem's website, in exhibition catalogs for King School Museum of Contemporary Art, and others.

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*Between Waves and Sea Change* is a rubric that enables me to present ongoing work from past years on the body of water that has come to be known as the Indian Ocean, or let us say the Swahili Seas, among other names, that move in parallel with this vast liquid geography. The practices and exhibitions I will address have taken place in close exchange with allies in the field, so I acknowledge this as a joint exercise and not a solo journey. Some of these co-voyagers are named in this piece, but not all. I've been immersed in addressing cultural resonances from and through Afrasian memory cultures in different velocities over recent years. As part of my make-up, as a Zoroastrian Gujarati, transcultural exchange in salt waters and migratory passage form the core of my way to make sense of the world and its crosscurrents. Gujarat in Western India, where I'm from, has been one of the oldest points of crossings into the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and Southeast Asia. Rather than major historic mercantile events and conquests, it is the smaller stories as a mode of archipelagic living archives that we remain attuned toward.

Renisa Mawani<sup>1</sup>, Dilip Menon<sup>2</sup> and other thinkers have referred to such a praxis in terms of 'Ocean as Method,' a life study that cites from hydraulic memory what is transmitted through the body, lived experience, and oral histories, and which reckons with the foamy seas just as much with the undercurrents of human and more-than-human cultures. The projects I deliberate on encounter legacies of captivity, indenture, and immobility, but also accounts of free agents who navigated the ocean well before colonial maritime law segmented waters and formations of cosmopolitan membership in ancient and present-day port towns.

There are, on the one hand, convenient categorizations that serve global capital and trade flows which have bred distinctions between the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. And, on the other hand, North American academia has played a role in building a bulky terrain of scholarship around the Atlantic Ocean. However, when we broaden this lens, we find the movements of the Indian Ocean world to have birthed peoples and cultures that foreground complex and vibrant African and Asian diasporic worlds that remain buoyed in Indigenous, creolized, and Muslim seafaring technologies and cultural infrastructures. Our inquiry is into how to sense and grapple with these multivalent cultural realities that have accrued, as well as the strategic geopolitical role of the Indian Ocean world.

There are, on the one hand, convenient categorizations that serve global capital and trade flows which have bred distinctions between the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. And, on the other hand, North American academia has played a role in building a bulky terrain of scholarship around the Atlantic Ocean. However, when we broaden this lens, we find the movements of the Indian Ocean world to have birthed peoples and cultures that foreground complex and vibrant African and Asian diasporic worlds that remain buoyed in Indigenous, creolized, and Muslim seafaring technologies and cultural infrastructures.

There appears to be an overdetermined use of the term *diversity* within the domain of Euro-American institutional politics that doesn't always

lend itself to the interweaving of reparation, unlearning, and communality in the disseminating of cultural knowledge. It is worth visiting the term as Édouard Glissant expressed it:

Diversity, which is neither chaos nor sterility, means the human spirit's striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence. Diversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relationship. Sameness requires fixed Being, diversity establishes Becoming<sup>3</sup>.

● The installation *Earth Flags* (2018–19) made by Sri Lankan artist Muhanned Cader reminds me of Glissant's understanding of diversity as a way of recognizing and building complex terrestrial and oceanic relationships. In this case, with the horizon itself as chronicled from four directions of Sri Lanka as an island nation that has witnessed long-drawn colonial legacies, ethnic violence, and civil war. When one shifts vantage points to observe the water horizon from here, which is one of the locations I work from, the artist's response is a reminder of how seascapes are the entities that are terraforming earth. While negotiating cultural and religious differences, we are also prone to developmental economics



Muhanned Cader, *Earth  
Flags of A Square Island*, 2019.  
Digital print on canvas.  
Courtesy the artist and  
Colomboscope. (Photo: Ruvin  
de Silva)

of new port infrastructures and extraction. The artist has engaged with constructions of statehood and territoriality by questioning the ways in which landscape becomes an active agent in sociopolitical frameworks. Rendering these works to the scale of international dimensions of national flags, the artist nods to colonial border-making and sea-land resources made into a unit of sovereign power.

This is one among several projects that was presented in *Sea Change*, the 2019 edition of Colomboscope, an interdisciplinary arts festival and platform in Sri Lanka. *Sea Change* addresses the urgencies of a rapidly altering coastline and the complex negotiations to be carried forward between islander communities, unfulfilled agendas of planetary coexistence, and capitalist ambition.

Bringing together artists from across South Asia and the world, *Sea Change* evokes stories of maritime history, delving into oceanic ecology and shipping infrastructure. Ancient Sri Lanka's strategic place amidst the Indian Ocean trade network gave shape to a cosmopolitan lineage of social pluralism and cultures of connectedness, linking distant ports of call from Rome in the West to China in the East, waters from the Bay of Bengal to the Mozambique Channel. How might we re-imagine the Indian Ocean world today, not simply in extractive terms of financialization and material surplus, but instead as a realm of cultural affinities, confluence of languages, and a vital artistic meeting point?

Derek Walcott's poem *The Sea Is History* (1978) notes, "...but the ocean kept turning blank pages // looking for History," and through this fragment of poetry we commenced addressing maritime legacy and infrastructural histories of the sea. Realizing the edition through times of

political upheaval and a coup brought in a kind of eerie "stand still," as well as stormy clashes that still ensue, in a struggle to disseminate cultural ideas—valency and mobility—to inaugurate the year through a festival which conceives open futures of the island, the interconnections brought in through the coastline, and post-war developmental agendas and state violence from the oceanic frontier.

● We know that the lighthouse as a technological architecture has been fundamental to projects of imperial expansion—as the prismatic throw of light guiding passage by sea, charting the wayfinding of maritime legacies and enlightenment philosophy.

The film installation *Sunstone*, by Filipa César and Louis Henderson, traces lighthouse infrastructures through Fresnel lenses at their site of production to their exhibition in a museum of lighthouses and navigational devices. Moving from photosensitive celluloid to desktop imaging and 3D CGI, the filmmakers introduce a lighthouse keeper as a narrative protagonist while also engaging with how his destiny is connected with the invention of global navigation satellite systems (GNSS)—the tool that announces the obsolescence of the lighthouse. Registering these technological advances progressively through the film's materials and means of production, *Sunstone* creates a cinema of affect and refraction as a mode of rupture, breaking away from the darkness of captive dread and imperial logic that spread as contagion in nautical histories.

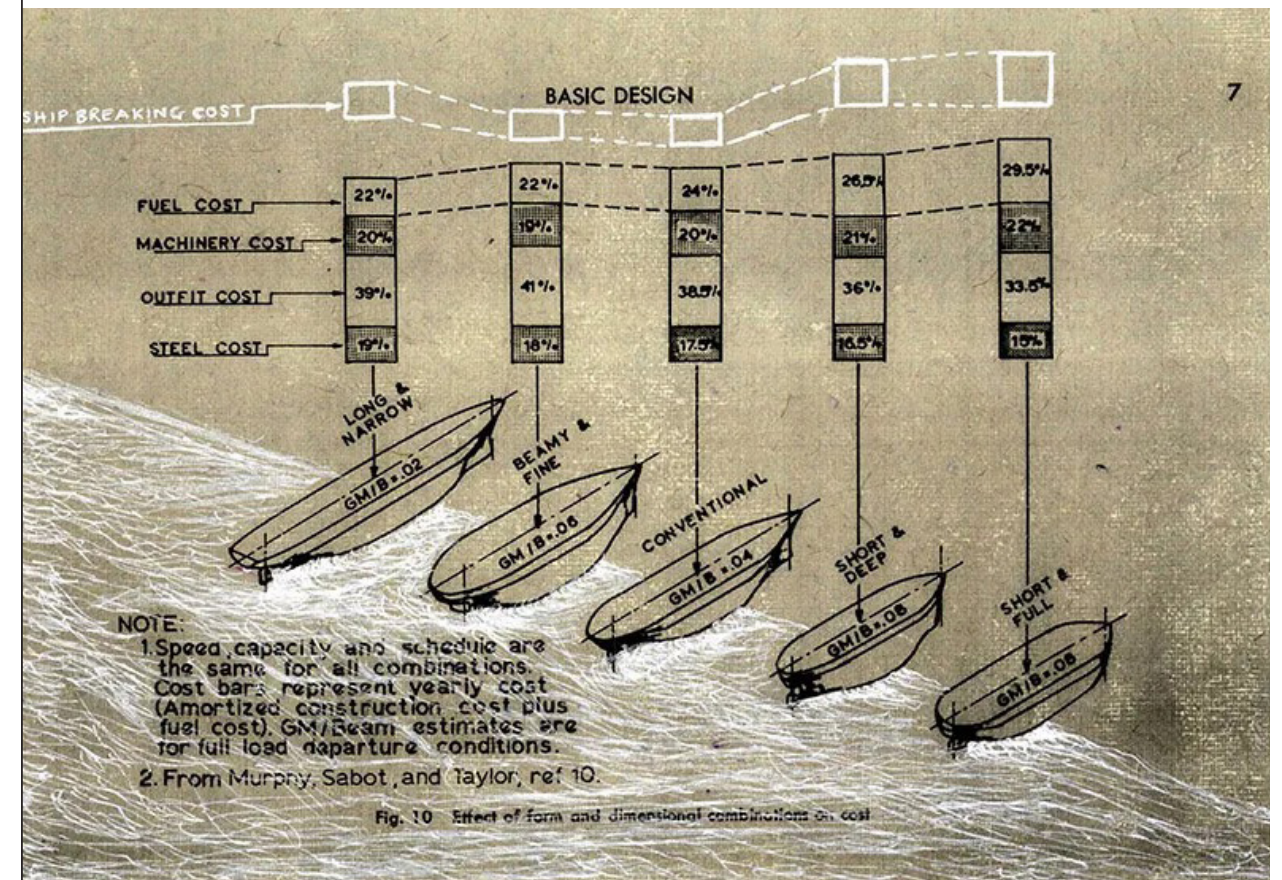
The artist-filmmakers equally address the shadow zones of what lies beyond the glow of this mercantile-military apparatus standing at

shorelines across the world. That is, the optics of colonial modernity and media archaeology as an ultimate terror of transparency, which overexposes the lives of the oppressed and colonized. Inevitably, the lone lighthouse at the edge of Europe where their film is partly shot holds its keeper as a gentle yet dissident storyteller of creolized truths and ways of worlding between wars, seafaring, and hybrid life-making.

Ranjit Kandalgaonkar's long-term project *Modeled Recycled Systems* records shipbreaking, its material waste ecologies, and associated labor practices as relating to global shipping accountability. The durational ramifications of shipworkers' labor conditions are a blind spot that has until recently been conveniently sidelined.

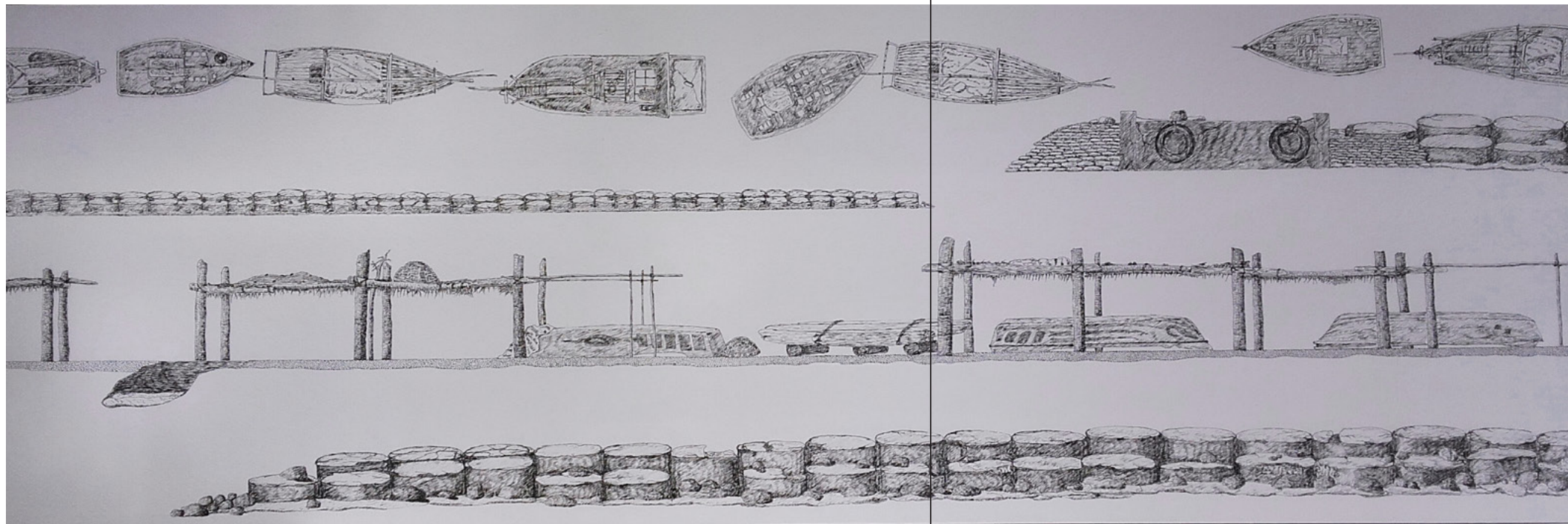
Kandalgaonkar's approach entails mapping through drawing, diagrams, sound recordings and sculptural models each and every part of a ship from the point that it is decommissioned, broken down, and recycled by tracing the often unconventional trajectories followed during this process, and modeling their often odd path back into primary (raw material), secondary (back into other ships) or tertiary (on land) markets.

The series *In the Wake of Shipping Infrastructure*, commissioned by Freethought Collective for Bergen Assembly in 2015, uses instances of personal history to engage with shipping infrastructural setups and trade circulation from the last five decades as it affected the size of ships being broken. Kandalgaonkar exhibited a suite of works titled *Shipbreak Dossier* (2018–ongoing) at Colomboscope, which is based on research conducted over the past decade, charting an early attempt to understand different



operational scales of ship disassembly and subsequent reconfiguration of recycled goods at the shipbreaking yards of Mumbai and Alang-Sosiya. From the start of the life cycle, the shipbuilding process, the maritime industry has had a convenient tendency to dissociate itself from the act of shipbreaking, and relegate it to another industry, namely the waste recycling industry. Hence, the cycle bears a flawed logic that enables broken systems to persist. This refusal to acknowledge end-of-life ships as part of the shipping cycle has led to demolitions migrating to urban peripheral spaces across sites in South Asia, overlooking safe labor laws and sometimes flouting even basic environmental regulation.

Jasmine Nilani Joseph's drawings commence with field research and documentation from communal memory. Joseph's series dwell on geographic details, displaced homes, and how security structures come to denote militarization of the domestic sphere and the natural world. The artist's biography plays out in several of her works as an account during childhood of fleeing violence and forced displacement from her hometown in Jaffna toward Vavuniya through the years of civil war. In motifs of barriers and fences, the artist reveals embedded complexities of exodus and resettlement, language barriers, and cultural difference. *Unveiled Barriers* (2018–ongoing) reflects on the oceans' role as a mediator of pathways in and out of Sri Lanka. Maritime history sees the island as a site of colonial enterprise, facilitated through the ocean, and its role as a strategic mercantile seaport for trade and defense, while its contemporary manifestations have been that of migrant and survivalist travel during times of conflict.



Jasmine Nilani Joseph,  
*Unveiled Barriers*, 2019. Ink  
on paper. Courtesy the  
artist and Colomboscope

Joseph's drawings reflect on how these natural boundaries, the Jaffna peninsula's larger civilizational ties, and the coastal frontier become at times unseen barricades, and at other times pathways, to freedom in today's reality. This is made significant in Joseph's works especially when considering their relationship to the violent histories of habitation and devolution of power within a bounded island geography. Today, with exacerbated political and economic crises, this very area of the ocean remains a space of distress migration, especially for Tamil and Muslim communities in the Northeast, with often fatal consequences.

Mangrove ecologies act as amphibious support structures that recultivate our relationship to the ocean in tropical climes and urban contexts. Their crooked frames and aerial roots are a network of excess, found between sweet and brackish water, hosting multispecies in both micro and macro ecologies. Mangrove forests had the fortitude to withstand the roar of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, reducing wreckage in areas where they performed as a natural barrier. The wetland became the backdrop for dance-artist Amaara Raheem to reflect on her dual belonging between Sri Lanka and Australia in a two-channel video created in a wetland in Werribee. She crouches, bends her legs at odd angles, and spreads her arms exploring the flight pathways of migratory birds. The artist's gestures and movements are inspired by the mangroves that form a weave of sensory antennae between land and water, and by the seabirds' instinctual navigational capabilities. Its sequences resound with the chronologies of waiting, identification, and anticipation. The video-choreography *What*

*the Water Gave Me* (2018–19) produces an internal/external relation to wetlands, working with thresholds where a human/bird body, with its own migratory tugs, can flutter, nest, and hover.

Fahad Bishara calls forth sensorial registers, such as the scent of teak from dhows (boats) meeting seawater, while remarking how the Indian Ocean invites littoral societies to look out across the water to one another<sup>4</sup>. The second initiative I want to address is the ongoing project *Indigo Waves and Other Stories: Re-navigating the Afrasian Sea and Notions of Diaspora*, initiated with curator and author Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Michelangelo Corsaro, in partnership with SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin; Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town; Vasl Artists' Association, Karachi, and BLAK C.O.R.E. (Care of Radical Energy), University of Melbourne. As we transmit the knowledge that is harbored within many of us as water beings, *Indigo Waves and Other Stories* seeks to set up reciprocal motions that unsettle established power relations and disciplinary enclaves of area studies and sociopolitical polarities. Instead, the cultural expressions conjoining in this endeavor reconsider notions of diaspora and cultural belonging with the Indian Ocean—that is, the Swahili Seas, Ratnakara, or Bahari Hindi—as a communal horizon from which to read the tidal shifts of historiography and storylines of itinerant communities—of their forced and unforced movements—and of those set adrift through the voracity of empire.

We reference scholar and archeologist Neville H. Chittick addressing the Indian Ocean as “[a]rguably the largest cultural continuum in

Amaara Raheem, *What The Water Gave Me*, 2019. Video still. Courtesy the artist and Colomboscope

Opposite:  
Malala Andrialavidrazana, *Figures 1853, Kolonien in Afrika und in der Süd-See*, 2016. Pigment print on Hahnemühle cotton rag. Courtesy the artist



the world” together with artists and writers who have engagements that decenter the heroic chronicles of mercantile exploration and colonial erasure, and instead plot encounters of sociality, dense exchange between living cultures, and transit that came long before the “claustrophobic affinities of nationalism.”<sup>5</sup> It is apparent, as T. N. Harper posits, that while “the globalization of European imperialism was an extension of the nation state, the globalism [of diasporas] was not.”<sup>6</sup>

Lee Maracle aptly puts it in her poem “Mapping Our Way Through History: Reflections on Knud Rasmussen’s Journals”: “Maps are pretentious / arrogantly purporting to know where everything is. / Pretending power where none is. / Maps are finite. / Maps are always old.” Malala Andrialavidrazana’s series of photomontages titled *Figures* (2015–ongoing) is a deep reflection on the problematics of cartography—the violence and finiteness of maps. *Figures* reads like an exhumation and recomposition of pictorial, symbolic, and representational legacies. It brings together historical personalities alongside the faces of ordinary men and women whose roles, conditions, and destinies have been overlooked across times and geographies. Fascinating both for their historical heft and their absurdities, they inform about political deviation, intellectual manipulation, systems of privilege, and domination between genders, colors, classes, or nations. It overlays the graphic reliefs of telegraphic cables, river systems, and journeys of sacred philosophy with civilizational imagery of paradoxes and proximity. Denying the supremacy of universal geography, the artist chooses to rescale and collage human



protagonists, botanical life and sea infrastructures into sequences that vividly address the role of mapping in times of augmented intelligence. In Andrialavidrazana’s endeavor, one finds a path toward navigating collective truth and sovereign forms of placemaking.

Shiraz Bayjoo creates talismans that carry the weight of mourning and survival, recollecting foremothers and their struggles in the Indian Ocean world—particularly from the shorelines of Mauritius, Madagascar, and most recently from research in South Africa. Bayjoo listens for buried archives that often lie far beyond the museum, traversing graveyards, ruins, literary texts, court records and botanical gardens. To borrow a term from poet and thinker Kamau Brathwaite, his pursuit carries on the “tidalectics” of remembrance, bearing witness to creole formations and notations of marronage—recalling those in the Indian Ocean’s islands and the Americas who escaped slave societies and formed their own independent communities and settlements. His sculptures include photographs as well as textile flags using Shweshwe and Kanga fabric. The images include archive portraits of Malagasy queens, coastlines of early Dutch arrival in Mauritius, and indigenous as well as transplanted fauna. Composed as wooden display systems that investigate museological approaches but also gesture toward shrines and altar pieces, Bayjoo notes, “[t]hese works draw lines of inquiry between ‘Land erasure’ and matriarchy and a way of survival within the plantation landscape.” The installation *Lamer Vide, Later Ruz* (2022) also links ancestral traumas and defiant wayfinding in dialogue with storyteller Traci Kwaai, who has been exploring her familial

Sancintya Mohini Simpson with Isha Ram Das, *Vessel*, 2020. Sound installation with clay lotas, soil, speakers. Courtesy the artists and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Commissioned by Zeitz MOCAA. (Photo: Dillon Marsh)

(*in the background*): Oscar Murillo, *surge (social cataracts)*, 2021. Oil, oil stick and spray paint on canvas and linen. Courtesy the artist and Zeitz MOCAA. (Photo: Dillon Marsh)

narratives in Kalk Bay, a historic fishing village in greater Cape Town, as well as charting traditions of generations of fishing communities in the Cape.

Françoise Vergès notes, “We want to suggest an Indianoceaness which comprises both anchorages and moorings. We highlight the metaphor of anchorage because it helps us think about exile and displacement, movement and flux, without forgetting about the territory we have left. We want to work with an identity which is anchored yet traveling (concretely or through the imagination), marking or recognizing routes and itineraries where exchanges and meetings happen.”<sup>7</sup>

For *Indigo Waves and Other Stories*, we have attempted to imagine the exhibition as a moving terrain for the composing and reception of “ocean-ness” in its anchorages and centuries-long itineraries of sea traffic. The challenge is how conventional white cubes may be adapted as such containers of memory and encounter. The significance of sensorial approaches and perspectives around corporeal experience in art exhibitions has been gaining momentum in recent years within Euro-American art worlds, but

The significance of sensorial approaches and perspectives around corporeal experience in art exhibitions has been gaining momentum in recent years within Euro-American art worlds, but in Afrasian contexts, the showing and reception of art has continuously been linked with bodies marking place, ritual, sonority, and nourishment.



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Predating the colonial history of Réunion and Seychelles, the sea for the artist Hasawa is a portal. Like gateways conjoining islands and archipelagos across the ocean, his installations and poetry are means to channel sacred access to spirit beings and ancestral vaults. *Silent Poets* (2022), made in Zeitz MOCAA, recalls the spatial past of that building as a grain silo and the artist’s relation to foraging as a practice of recuperating histories. Hasawa’s shamanic sculptures are guardians that reveal and protect metaphorical passages as witness to the thousand year-old encounters between the people who inhabit these seas. Working meticulously over days and nights with driftwood and cordage used by fishing boats around the Cape, the artist chisels, listens, and gives shape to lingering oceanic memories attending to kinship ties, creole worlds, and Indigenous relationality.

Audre Lorde, in her poem “A Woman Speaks,” reminds us: “[B]ut when the sea turns back, it will leave my shape behind.”<sup>8</sup> Sancintya Mohini Simpson and Isha Ram Das’s installation is a percussive remembrance resounding in clay vessels (*lotas*) as carriers of coolie mnemonics. Theirs are familial narratives of indentured labor in sugarcane fields, movement and rhythms carried from India to Natal (now KwaZulu–Natal, South Africa), and then Australia. Sugarcane as remainder in soil, ash, and salt water interplays with broader circuits of shipping and shipped beings amidst sensorial rumbles of the plantationocene. Ash and salt also mark the life cycle in potent ways, knowing that for many souls in transit commemorative respect is denied. They exist numerically in colonial maritime ledgers. Personal storytelling intersects with lists of items on imperial



Hasawa, *Silent Poets*, 2022. Sculptural installation and ritual performance remnants. Commissioned by Zeitz MOCAA. Courtesy of the artist. (Photo: Dillon Marsh)

Cinga Samson, *Izilo Zomlambo 2*, 2019. Oil on canvas. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist. (Photo: Dillon Marsh)

vessels in a performance that Simpson and Das have developed for this piece. Simpson speaks as clay lotas reverberate:

The wave hits  
as the hand a mridangam

That timbres and vibrates  
with each slap

The vessel of bodies  
is not a womb

Yet carries cargo  
of coolies conceived

By an empire  
built from bonded blood

Like the ghatam,  
fired with ash<sup>9</sup>

Adjacent, the singular oil painting *Izilo Zomlambo 2* (2019) by Cinga Samson appears to rise from a spiritual blossoming, bringing together characters embracing forms of majesty, shared pain, and mutual recognition—inhabiting coastal fauna, rocky terrain, and the sky beyond while disputing a hegemonic gaze. They boldly consider mortality and transience in synchronicity with the Cape’s horizon line as the knotting of the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Samson quietly reflects on what a language of fluidity might say to us and upon Xhosa beliefs, which suggest long departed ancestors sometimes appear by riverbanks.

The American critic, activist, and writer on photography Susan Sontag describes photographs as “miniatures of reality,” and in this vein the photographer-artist Akinbode Akinbiyi’s pursuit involves collecting fragments of the world that are often refused, marginalized, and stubbornly active in the effort of communal survival. He charts his gait between the hemispheres, from Berlin to the African world, from Chicago neighborhoods to Salvador da Bahia. The exhibition *Six Songs, Swirling Gracefully in the Taut Air* at Gropius Bau highlighted his unique relation to medium format photography and particular use of the twin lens reflex camera in communicating the soul of inhabited landscapes. The sacred and profane become









Akinbode Akinbiyi,  
From the series *Sea Never Dry*,  
1980s (ongoing). Photograph.  
Courtesy the artist and  
Gropius Bau. (Photo: Laura  
Firio, Bar Beach, Victoria Island,  
Lagos)

*Previous Spread:*  
Akinbode Akinbiyi, From  
the series *Sea Never Dry*,  
1980s (ongoing). Photograph.  
Courtesy the artist.  
(Photo: Laura Firio, Bar Beach,  
Victoria Island, Lagos)

Natasha Ginwala

interwoven in *Sea Never Dry* (since the 1980s, ongoing), a series that brings together coastal zones of West African cities and Europe, portraying public life around beaches while also capturing makeshift sacred zones, nonhuman cohabitation, the banality of tourism, and velocity of environmental degradation. The sea is visited not only as a realm of commuting but as a meeting place and temporary dwelling where the cosmopolitan spirit of cities is rejuvenated.

As monochromatic watermarks, these photographs conspire in drawing us toward water as a domain that acts both as a centrifugal and centripetal force, allowing for a moving center, but also bringing about a circulation that accrues, swallows, spits out, and remembers. The images are vivid renditions of shorelines as space for conviviality, ceremonial gathering, and informal economy amidst everyday duress.

In his text *Praise Singer*, poet and author Ishion Hutchinson responds to this series by Akinbiyi, reflecting, "...[M]ore significantly, the sea is repeated in the bodies' intentness on elsewhere. Even when a figure stands still, he or she appears wavelike. There is always a slight tilt, a fugitive gesture breaking straight lines. We see a hand raised or another motioning; here a head turns aslant, there another bows, acknowledging something outside our view."<sup>10</sup>

I listened to Hiba Ali's *Indian Ocean Mixes* before I met them, in the internet of things. These sonic offerings appeared as generous gifts, their fluid tonalities crossing genres, from ghazal to Taarab and drone, forecasting musical traditions of the ocean hemisphere in Swahili, Arabic and Urdu—rhythms scoring a connectedness through bodies in transit, in ritual, gathering, warring, and in solitude.

Ali's *Black Indian Ocean* reading list and film series alongside these mixes (2020–21) reflects on elements of caste, class, and anti-Blackness in the Indian Ocean region from a personal perspective and as a growing archive. It was serendipitous to be invited to the University of Oregon, which offered a chance for us to meet at the Pacific coast. I instantly wished to connect with them through sonic materiality in physical space. This is how the latest live mix got generated, assembling sounds of water and birds, layered with voices of women icons, such as Zanzibari Taarab singer Bi Kidude and Iranian musician and actress Googoosh.

Less than six months later, I traveled to Stone Town in Zanzibar, a journey I had wished to make for many years that had remained suspended for one reason or another. Finally, the taarab music track "Pakistan," sung by Bi Kidude in Hiba's mix and originally composed by legend Siti binti Saad, reverberated in the voice of binti Saad's great granddaughter, Siti Muharram, amid live accordion, violin, drum, and qanun at the Dhow Countries Music Academy. Taarab music operates as a time portal, engulfing Afrasian codes of being, and marking pulse as navigational poetry in

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the many gradations of love and devotion through oneness with the waters that proliferate. The alleyways of Stone Town are a revelation in the echo and reverb that they create; the capacity for recall broadens here as ancestral memory seamlessly flows from the coastal edges of Gujarat into the warm depths of the Swahili Seas.

What does oceanic re-memory look like, and how to correspond with and commemorate this terrain that is equally one of connection as it is of alienation, ruination, and trauma? There are multidirectional historiographies to draw from, to recover—embodied, desiring, and sensorially anchored. Artistic modes activate oceanic processes of self- and collective recovery, histories of return of knowledge—water as the first and last source of healing.

When Christina Sharpe writes about the wake in relation to family, she asks to “attune not only to our individual circumstances but also to those circumstances as they were an indication of, and related to, the larger antiblack world that structured all of our lives.”<sup>11</sup> *Wake*, as in a state of wakefulness; consciousness, as in the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation.

We need to build shared perspectives around these “continuous oceans”<sup>12</sup> because they are a way to revive a critical form of globalism—of diasporas and deep-seated belonging that is located beyond the timescale of imperialism—while also refusing the ascent of nationalisms on a planetary scale. In this effort, we might dwell in acculturations absorbed via monsoon cycles, economies of interdependence, communitarian kinship, sacred practices, and early cosmopolitanism that was premised on difference while still bearing the intimacy of recognition and co-creation.

- 1 <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/the-ocean/oceans-as-method-law-violence-and-climate-catastrophe>
- 2 <https://www.routledge.com/Ocean-as-Method-Thinking-with-the-Maritime/Menon-Zaidi-Malhotra-Jappie/p/book/9781032246772>
- 3 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse, Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, CARAF Books (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 98
- 4 Neville Chittick, 1980. “East Africa and the Orient: Ports and Trade before the Arrival of the Portuguese.” In *Historical Relations across the Indian Ocean*, report, 13–22. Paris: UNESCO
- 5 John Karugia, (2018). *Connective Afrasian Sea memories: Transregional imaginaries, memory politics, and complexities of national “belonging.”* *Memory Studies*. 11
- 6 Isabel Hofmeyr, *Universalizing the Indian Ocean*, Vol. 125, No. 3 (May 2010), pp 721–729, Cambridge University Press
- 7 *Moorings: Indian Ocean Creolisations* (Amarres/Créolisations indiaocéanes. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005; translated by Stephen Muecke and Françoise Vergès, 2010)
- 8 Audre Lorde, “A Woman Speaks” from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, 1997
- 9 [https://sancintya.com/projects/vessel\\_vessel/](https://sancintya.com/projects/vessel_vessel/)
- 10 <https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/gropiusbau/programm/journal/2020/ishion-hutchinson-praise-singer.html>
- 11 Christina Sharpe, *On Blackness and Being*, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 10–15
- 12 Dilip Menon, *Continuous Oceans*, Conference; Twin Seas: the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea workshop at Cornell University Campus, Doha, 6–7 January 2019, Doha, Qatar

Natasha Ginwala is Associate Curator at Large at Gropius Bau, Berlin; Artistic Director of Colomboscope in Sri Lanka and the 13th Gwangju Biennale with Defne Ayas (2021). Ginwala has curated *Contour Biennale 8*, *Polyphonic Worlds: Justice as Medium*, and was part of the curatorial team of *documenta 14*, 2017. Other projects include *Indigo Waves and Other Stories: Re-navigating the Afrasian Sea and Notions of Diaspora* (with Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Michelangelo Corsaro) at Zeitz MOCAA; survey exhibitions of Bani Abidi, Akinbode Akinbiyi and Zanele Muholi at Gropius Bau. Ginwala was a member of the artistic team for the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2014, and has co-curated *The Museum of Rhythm* at Taipei Biennial 2012 and at *Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz*, 2016–17. Ginwala writes regularly on contemporary art and visual culture. Recent co-edited volumes include *Stronger Than Bone* (Archive Books and Gwangju Biennale Foundation) and *Nights of the Dispossessed: Riots Unbound* (Columbia University Press).

This text was first delivered as a lecture at the University of Oregon on October 11, 2022, which concluded with a DJ session by Hiba Ali, building off of their *Indian Ocean Mixes* series, and a brief discussion with the artist before taking questions from the audience.

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Covers:  
Jaleesa Johnston, *Bone and Flesh*, 2017. Collage on wood panel, 4 × 4 in. Courtesy the artist



Lynn Yarne, *Freedom Jackets in the Museum of Everyday Alchemy*, 2020. Hapi coat, letterman jacket, embroidery. (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Ricardo Nagaoka, *Joe*, 2020. Archival inkjet print in walnut frame, 20 × 26 1/3 in. Courtesy the artist



In 1957, Kenneth Ford and Hallie Ford established a then-modest foundation to give back to the timber communities of southwest Oregon. It grew in size, scope, and geography to become The Ford Family Foundation in 1996. With its headquarters office in Roseburg, Oregon, and its scholarship office in Eugene, Oregon, The Ford Family Foundation now manages large, internal initiatives and makes grants to public charities predominantly benefiting communities in rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, Calif.

The Visual Arts Program honors Hallie Ford's lifelong interest in the arts by helping Oregon's most promising, established visual artists actively pursue their work. It also seeks to enrich Oregon's visual arts ecology by growing centers of excellence. The program, at times in collaboration with state and national partners, supports creative-work time and space, provides resources to artists at crossroads in their practice, engages arts writers and curators in critical conversations, and makes investments in Oregon visual arts institutions.

Critical Conversations is a collaborative program developed by the University of Oregon and The Ford Family Foundation, with partners Pacific Northwest College of Art at Willamette University, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University and The Cooley Gallery, Reed College. These partners create a year-round calendar of visiting critics and curators for studio visits, public lectures and other forms of engagement, as well as overseeing commissioned arts writing for this publication and the Oregon Visual Arts Ecology project, an online partnership with the Oregon Arts Commission.