

[A YEAR IN]

BLACK ART

[2017-2018]

Vol. 1
NOVEMBER 2018

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THE BLACK EMBODIMENTS STUDIO

blackembodiments.org

The Black Embodiments Studio (BES) is a critical arts writing incubator and a public lecture series that came together as a way to enrich the conversation surrounding contemporary black art in Seattle and beyond. This city has a rich intellectual and artistic tradition of engaging questions of race and aesthetics, and there are institutions across the city that are approaching blackness, in particular, from multiple material, aesthetic, and theoretical vantage points. There remains, however, a very real need to enhance the critical writing with and about black art in Seattle if this city wants to understand itself as actually engaging with regional, national, and global conversations about contemporary art.

I subsequently launched BES as a platform for cultivating discourse around the incredible black art that is regularly staged in Seattle. Organized as a residency, graduate students are immersed in models of writing that bridge academic and non-academic audiences, and that also chart a theory and ethics of arts criticism surrounding questions of racial blackness, aesthetics, and embodiments. BES uses embodiments, plural, as a *verb* that invokes activity and movement, as well as the temporary and fleeting; as a dynamic category of analysis that is accessible across disciplines, the language embodiments clears space to

the repeated, performative constitution of blackness while remaining attuned to the material consequences of being black.

BES also invites curators, artists, and writers to give public lectures, as their work model innovative critical and creative engagements with black embodiments. The 2017-2018 guests included the artist Liz Mputu, whose installation *LVLZ Healing Center: IRL Application of Digi-Manifestation* was on view at the now-shuttered Interstitial gallery; Dr. Sampada Aranke visited from the School of the Art Institute Chicago to give a talk on black abstraction in the exhibition *Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the American Justice System*; and Taylor Aldridge, co-founder of *arts.black*, came from Detroit to present on the dance works of Jennifer Harge. Each conducted an intimate workshop with residents, exploring the work of writing on contemporary black practices and the importance of forming ethical and reciprocal relationships between artists and writers, while sharing conversation about the mechanics of one another's critical and creative processes.

2017-2018's residents come from all walks of life. They are scholars, curators, and artists themselves, gathering together with a shared investment in expanding their critical thinking and writing skills and with a shared dedication to directly impacting the discourse surrounding contemporary black makers. They visited commercial and independent galleries alike, picking through group exhibitions in search of single works by black artists and attending wholly black exhibitions—seeing nearly all of the black art on view in Seattle in the process. They continually took the risky step of thinking together and of sharing their writing with one another.

This inaugural issue of *A Year in Black Art* collects just some of the writing the residents produced.

The writing is urgent and timely. It reflects the expansion of the residents’s language beyond traditional, formal (and stuffy) academic writing—and documents the hard work it takes to do so. Their writing shows how utilizing the critical tools of academic training to reflect upon aesthetic practices can lead to rigorous and beautiful examinations of “black” and “blackness” as forms, materialities, bodies and expressions. The journal, the residents’s writing, and The Black Embodiments Studio as a whole would not be possible without support from the Simpson Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington, and from Emily Zimmerman and the Jacob Lawrence Gallery. Keep supporting black art.

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November 2018

MIA HARRISON

Circular Efforts Made to Trek Through Memory/Spaces Prescribed to Mourning

Don't get dirt on your dress.

At the time, I was five, maybe six years old and knee-deep in emerald daydreams within my backyard. My white cap-sleeve dress was pristine and adorned by pink blossoms; the grass practically swallowed me. She might have taken the picture. My head was tilted up while cheer lived in my eyes and the sun hugged me from behind. It was Easter and she wanted me to keep my dress clean. At five years old, mourning colored the moment right after a final bite of a waffle cone. Mourning was when my mother made me pancakes and we watched *Little House on the Prairie* as she got ready for work. Mourning was not morning until I learned how to spell out the difference when my mother passed of cancer six days before my tenth birthday. With age I learned one thing: trauma blurs time.

Physical loss made the second lap into my life in 2018 when I lost the mother of my mother. Her death, although inevitable, drowned me in shock. Needing to find a way to ground myself and heal, I looked to how others are in conversation with grief. Serendipity showed me to Khadija Tarver's exhibition, *A Circle Made by Walking*, which traversed the realities of personal loss.

Beneath street level, Method Gallery became the staging area for Tarver's exhibition. Within the white rectangle rested a

viridescent area rug of faux grass. The wall reads, “Khadija” in thick block letters—an identity marker for a fabricated memorial.

Stark white walls illuminated by a mix of natural sunlight and a track of fluorescent lights flood one’s eyes. The unusual amount of brightness itself reminds you why you are there: Tarver lost her father in 2015 and used the space to reflect and share her process. Buried underneath this conscious intention was a place to activate—a space to decimate internal emotional walls.

Bold black text on the white wall adjacent Tarver’s name read: Khadeeja, Khadyja, Khadijah, Khatija, Khatijah, Katiyah, Khadeejah. Read aloud, each (mis)spelling rang in connotations of black femininity. Read aloud, mixed truths of blackness and misrepresentations of herself stood side-by-side; a strategic choice made to create authentic comfort in an artificial situation. Khadija, a black name. Khadija, a black woman’s name in a white space where the woman, as much as the name, could feel a sense of not naturally belonging.

Tarver was preparing for a 24.1-mile walk from one end of the island of Bermuda, her paternal land, to the other. Meanwhile, I was preparing to slow my life down enough to restructure my emotional grounding and belonging. Walking would become the vehicle of catharsis for us both. The initial version of *A Circe Made by Walking* was to create an experimental sculpture by walking on living grass installed in the gallery. The sculpture would speak to the affective nature of walking, the physical manifestation of your labor. Real grass allows the processing of grief, specifically because of the ability to leave a mark. Yet, the grass died a week before the opening. Grief and the act of grieving is submerged in stagnancy. How does one prepare to grieve when artificial grass erases each step?

Tarver's investigation of that question resulted in multiple performances, each dealing with movement and its relationship to emotional work. Each performance challenged societal constructions of grief and rituals around it. Tarver began by inviting Dani Tirrell, a movement artist and choreographer, to activate the site for his own healing for two hours. She then invited others to walk with her as a way to encourage communal healing and release. Tarver's piece concluded with a meditative walk as performance in Discovery Park to shift the spaces where we commune to grieve.

During one of her solo performances, I walked for two hours with Tarver attempting to retrace steps, reclaim lost ancestral narratives, and contextualize my own rumination. I could walk for hours honoring my mother, my grandmother, my great-great-grandmother but regardless the labor wouldn't show. How do you quantify work that isn't tangible? Society bases work on what you see, especially when discussing black bodies— objects whose existence is directly planted in productivity. Yet, I continued to walk anyway. While mourning, you can't see the end goal you just stand in the doorway between the past, present, and future. This wasn't a space to work through trauma. It was a space to walk with it.

Are those marks mine? Did I ever truly stand there or pass there?

The memory in that grass flashed into my mind as I walked alongside Tarver on the artificial grass. I tried to anchor myself into a time when I hadn't tasted loss twice. I tried to grasp a time long gone with my toes that was just as artificial as the ground beneath me.

Will this be a place to process, a place to release?

A Circle Made by Walking created an interruption of time. Hours, minutes and seconds converged as time simultaneously

stretched and compressed. Even though I walked with Tarver, I was also pacing through my own memories of past, present, and future versions of me—each holding the one who became too tired to carry on. By choosing to actively face trauma together, our individual motives melted as we walked within the liminal space. Our grief was not limited to the scope of ourselves (the death of a part of self), our loved ones (families, friends, lovers) but also the lives that were lost in order for us ponder our own existence. For once, grief wasn't an allotted bereavement from work or school; it was a communal ritual.

Can you ever find your footing after a loss?

Towards the end of the performance, I decided to still stand for several minutes. As I stood, I could feel the artificial grass giving in to the weight of my body—the weight of my thoughts. The minute I moved, time began to count up, my mark rose to the surface. Nothing in this space had permanence. If the wound lifts, does it ever heal?

CHRISTINA YUEN ZI CHUNG

**Meditations on *An Eclogue for [in]HABIT-
ABILITY***

1. Projected onto white walls, two oblong, fleshy orbs spin erratically, facing each other, flanking a wide rectangular wall where waves are shown undulating in dim pastel shades. The throbbing movement of the room echoes in its soundscape, taking cues from the driving hum of an electric current. At the center of the room, three screens are suspended over a stripped-down backhoe, lacquered in black. Its seat is burnt; a hole bores through the surface of the chairback, disinviting us. The black pleather covering of the seat is charred and tattered at the edges of its raw, broken surface, revealing a dirty, spongy layer underneath. A hole. A mouth agape.

A digitally rendered face without eyelids or discernible lips appears in the center of one of the three suspended screens, shifting its open, undirected gaze to and fro, upwards and sideways, with its mouth agape and without audible sound. Behind the face, and mirrored in the two other screens are aerial views of green landscapes mapped digitally, slowly shifting. A finger appears on one of the screens, black skin tracing over and moving the map view: the only sign of a human body in a flattened, alien scene. The sound of a loud beep interrupts, signalling a categorical change. Martian landscapes are replaced

by a sea of milky light. Fine black crosshairs emerge atop the spinning orbs, now lacquered in white and gleaming. Parasitic white nipples cling to its surface, gesturing to a body, but without our crinkled textures.

“Moving and digging and dropping,” a digitally mediated voice repeats, heard through headphones that dangle from the black backhoe. The voice tells a story, referencing a reverend and the misinterpretation of a biblical translation, wherein a weapon was mistaken for a tool. The voice tells the story of Sondra Perry, an artist who began to research terraforming and how an African-American village, named Seneca, was leveled. Central Park now sits atop its former site.

2. What if transmutation was displacement, was destruction, was deconstruction, was colonisation, was creation, was terraforming? Save for a glimpse of her finger, Sondra Perry’s black body is nowhere. Her black body is everywhere, taken apart and transmuted, moving between dimensions. The fleshy orbs are constituted from an abstraction, extracted from the terrain of her body to become a flat image, tricking the eye into believing in its three-dimensionality—her presence echoes the disembodiment of physical terrain, leveled in the Google’s-eye view of our device screens. What is lost in terraforming for abstraction?

Sondra Perry’s Sondra Perry inhabits the uninhabitable, in rhythms of maddening change. She refuses fixity. She was created in the waves of the Middle Passage and she has stayed in the motion of the ocean. The undulations, pulsing through visual and audio mediums, move in relentless repetition,

cycling through creation and destruction without end, a way out. The tool is a weapon is a tool. She is a backhoe that can't be used. She was made to be used. Her refusal is enmeshed in a history of refusals that were transmuted, destroyed for creation.

3. A loud beep. In an uncomfortable, piercing outburst, she inserts blackness into the loud beep. Blackness is the interruption, the misperformance of the object, in that it speaks, it speaks back. A loud beep truncates the performance of repetition, the assumption that the scene and scenery is known, that you have seen its colours and known its rhythm. It jars you into fear and wakedness. The undulations return, rocking you into its dissimilar but familiar rhythms. You know that the beep is going to come back. You know that this is a repetition. It just wasn't what you thought it was. You become alert. You are its subject. You make it about you. It was always about you.

4. You find a way to salvage the experience. Perhaps acceptance will bring relief. You find yourself making peace with the rocking waves, knowing by heart when the loud beep will sound and the scene will change. You find yourself observing smoothness in the projected shapes, the fine grooves that lay hidden in the landscape, the charred edges in the burnt chair of the backhoe, the cold black frame of the dormant machine... You let it reckon with you. You let it shift your reality. You stop equating stillness with comfort. You give in.

MESHELL STURGIS

Waiting to Exhale: Comic & Iconic Figures By MoNoise

Portions of this essay were first published on *Art Practical* on March 13, 2018

It is the opening night for an exhibition of Maurice's artwork at Essentia, a memory foam mattress store by day, gallery by night. The Seattle-based artist who goes by the name of MoNoise mingles with guests while live music mixes in the background. MoNoise's sketches and paintings display an aesthetic fusion of technicolor and bold ink, and depict music artists like Snoop Dogg, Notorious B.I.G., A\$AP Rocky, Erykah Badu, SZA, Janet Jackson, 2Pac, and Ice Cube. The paintings and sketches bring color and cartoon to the still-life hip-hop heads. It seems silly to look at the images upside down—as one can on a bed—but when in a mattress store, it feels appropriate to accept such a playfully intimate invitation. As I lay back, MoNoise's work entitled *Release* (2016) hangs at the crown of my head.

Release, a comic-like acrylic painting, calls me to relax and to let go of the day. Stretching my eyes back, the inverted profile of a salmon-toned black woman comes into view. Her wavy dark hair rests behind her ear, revealing a pearl earring and like my own, her head is thrown back, her neck exposed and eyes closed. Several lavender words like "cruelty," "revenge," "neglect," and "failure" blow from her red lips in a white plume as if it were a speech-bubble. The artist draws a comparison between sensual release and speaking one's truth.

The woman's vivid deliverance is like a coming to terms, literally, with the things we folks of color internalize and hold within despite being imposed upon us from without. To be true to yourself you must let go of what was never yours. She departs from negativity and, because she does, I am able to bask in her glow of purples, blues, and greens.

But this image confesses more than this sole woman's truth, and MoNoise sets her to speak more than once at this exhibit. I snap a photo of two black women laid on another mattress nearby. They too have accepted the intimate invitation from the bed and look up at *Release (2)* hanging above them. As a sequel, this comic-like image broadens the frame of the first piece to include the whole woman's body. Like the two laying on the bed, this woman is on her back, one foot planted on the floor, the other leg bent in a figure four forming a hip-opening stretch. She clutches a lighter in her right hand, her left hand rests on her stomach. Still exhaling, hollow smoke curls upwards and mirrors the shape of her curly black afro. The geometric background of yellows, reds, purples, and greens give texture and color to the full-figured woman and her cloud of smoke. Her head filled by a lavender pentagon and the figure four of her hips neatly filled with a red triangle. This woman, without indication of clothing, is laid bare for us. She is our witness and we are her spectators. Without actual words present in the image it is easy to miss the way that *Release (2)* carries an undercurrent of comic design. The various triangles and polygons that pattern the canvas are framed and separated by a disorderly, white trelis. Her internal and external states are fragmented by the background color panels signifying an irreconcilable fissure between who she is and what the world paints her to be.

But this is not my bed, not even one I can afford. The other women in the space joke about the \$500 “boyfriend pillow” that we all take turns laying with. One woman jokes how she would prefer the body-length u-shaped pillow over a real boy since the pillow comes with no strings attached. I refrain from saying *Except for the new line of credit* as we move on since none of us are in a place to make such a purchase.

Like the gold necklace of the iconic hip-hop dreamer who hangs in the clouds by a balloon-like turntable, another nearby painting *Elev808* (2017) reminds me that the high-priced mattress setting of the gallery, and my reaction to it, symbolizes the capitalist chain we wear as black dreamers. The exhibition pays tribute to the hip-hop legends who managed to escape this place through their dreams. In turn, the exhibit’s timing and placements simultaneously give imagery and sound to the weight and noise of our reality. The plush setting bids an opulent lounging about and viewing of Mo-Noise’s creative works without worry. There are even plastic protective slips on the beds so you can keep your wet Pacific Northwest shoes on while resting. *Release* and its sequel tempt me into laying on my back in an attempt to release the pressures of living as a queer black woman in this time.

Yet, no matter how deeply I exhale, I cannot come to terms with how this has all been set up. You mean, in order for me to find peace I must lay on my back and bare the deepest parts of me for all to see? You mean, in order to see an upcoming local black artist chase their dream I must endure capitalist solicitations of my positionality? As I leave the gallery, I recall the lighter the salmon-toned woman held in her right hand. Oh, she was only blowing smoke? Now that is something I can afford.

MIA LAWRIE

Existing Outside Our Time But Inside Our Bodies & Minds

One Mississippi, two Mississippi. One step forward. One Mississippi, two Mississippi. One more step through the darkness. One Mississippi, two Mississippi. Guided through an unknown path only by my left hand feeling the textured wall, punctuated by thumbtacks, some smooth stone, rough wood, taut rope, someone's back and hair in front of me. I ask myself, "Where am I?"

Black Imagination: States of Matter is an immersive experimental exhibit co-curated by Natasha Marin, of *reparations.me* notoriety, Rachel Ferguson, Amber Flame, and Imani Sims that is described as an exploration to accessibly engage discourse concerning Black joy, wellness, and creativity. It was featured at the CORE gallery in Pioneer Square Seattle, as part of the venue's effort to support the works of underrepresented groups in Seattle. Conceived after the curators heard police officers discussing the death of Charleena Lyles, the project itself was kept secret by its co-curators who put a call out for Black people across the city and globe from all walks of life to record their answers to questions provoking them to imagine a space in which they felt loved, safe, and valued.

Marin and Sims have commented on the hundreds of responses they received with the caveats that the questions themselves were panic-inducing for participants.

How can one create joy and healing in a white supremacist world? This exhibit was an attempt to create a space of Black Imagination beyond the white gaze.

In front of the CORE Gallery, I and my fellow attendees are greeted cheerily by Marin. She welcomes us at the exact appointed time, 7:30 pm, on schedule with the thirty-minute intervals in which the exhibit takes place. We're led inside the shrouded door and told to leave our things by the entrance. The room is quiet and dark with only a flickering candle providing light, and the majority of the gallery obscured by thick black curtains, providing a feeling of timelessness. Marin presents each of us with a blindfold, telling us we must use them to go forward. One by one, she takes our hands. "Put your hand on the wall. Walk slowly. When you reach a tack or knot in the rope, count out two 'Mississippi' before stepping forward."

One Mississippi, two Mississippi. I walk forward into an assault on the senses. Sounds and voices come from all directions; some I can't quite hear or understand. Despite having the wall as a guide in the small gallery space, it was disorienting; like travelling through and in time, far from the world we left on the Seattle street. More voices. I hear a child singing, then an older woman interrupts the song with a command. Were the artists in the room with us? The path curves and I hear laughter, drums, and songs in languages I don't know. I've lost all concept of time. My imagination roams, forgetting who's in the room with me. I could swear that drum was being played right in front of me—like I could touch it. I almost reach out when a smooth deep older man's voice, "I just love that Blackness." I wonder, had I ever heard that before?

Marin returns, and again leads each of us by hand to what feels like a long bench on which to sit.

My eyes still covered, I try to sense if others are sitting with me and anticipate what would happen next. Through the darkness, Marin explains we were blindfolded to rid us of the judgment of our outward appearances and what's ascribed to them by the white imagination. In this space, she said, we are away from that. She informs us that the voices and sounds we heard were from Black folks across the world—of different nationalities, sexualities, ages, genders, abilities, and classes—who were asked, “What is your origin? How do you heal?” Sitting, immobilized by the experience, I don't know who's around me anymore, or how much time has passed. I'm overwhelmed, dizzied by questions. Am I alone now? Does my Blackness authenticate these voices, or do they validate me? What's tying the voices I hear and my own together? What's keeping them apart? How can a blindfold possibly rid me of anything, let alone my Blackness or its relationship to the white gaze? The sonic sensations continue. More laughter and singing. At one point I think I hear a rocking chair, chanting, police sirens. The juxtaposition of joyful sounds with echoes of pain making each that much more heartrending. All at once the cacophony washes over me, and I feel the burning threat of tears in my cloth-covered eyes. Then it was over. As abruptly as one can imagine.

In dark silence, we're led back to the front room with our things. The woman behind me is audibly in tears, almost sobbing. Marin offers hugs, as if parting after a long journey together. She comments that I look angry. Perhaps I was. How many emotions has she witnessed as the result of this trip into the Black Imagination, and from whom? As I walk away from the CORE gallery onto the cold white streets of the city, I hear Marin repeat the welcome to the next group of exhibit attendees. Only thirty minutes has passed.

One Mississippi, two Mississippi. Black bodies in the Mississippi river not yet recovered come to life. One Mississippi, two Mississippi. Hands feeling through the darkness along the wall to unknown places like slave forts on the Ghanaian coast. But this what I see through the white gaze, my own imagination snuffed out by colonialization and white supremacy. Black Imagination challenges us to explore beyond that. The collaborative project attempts to break us free of what has been stolen, in whatever form that may be. The exhibit warrants multiple visits, cultivating the practiced skill of escaping time to find origin, healing and joy in our realities on the white clock, to which at the end of the day, at the end of 30 minutes, we all must return.

JOY MA NIMOCKS

We Are Empress Myeongseong: An Analysis of *Queen Min* from Tavares Strachan's Constellation Series

The Constellation Series from Tavares Strachan's show, *Always, Sometimes, Never* is showcased at the Frye Museum during a typical winter in Seattle characterized by gloomy weather, black clothing, and seasonal depression. As I walk into the Frye to see Strachan's show, I am met, again, with darkness. But this darkness is married to bright, and hopeful lights that most of the pieces are carefully impregnated with. Even though it is much darker in Strachan's show than it is outside, my visceral response is joyful curiosity based purely off of the aesthetics of the artwork and curation.

Strachan's collection of work features collage portraits of historical figures whose narratives have been overlooked or underrated for various reasons. Queen Min, also known as Empress Myeongseong, is one of those figures, a fierce Korean empress whose resistance to colonialism prompted her assassination. Queen Min situates herself in the midst of the gallery and is a collection of precisely cut out images that emerge from a purely black canvas. All of these images have been reduced to a miniature size compared to the original productions and their black-and-white color compositions create the texture and possibility of this portrait.

Queen Min, similar to other works in the exhibit, is

illuminated by a small fluorescent light shining above it just enough to rest on the entirety of the piece. All the works in the exhibit operate as stars in this galactic universe the artist and curator have created. The tiny, precisely cut images are a mixture of black and white with specks of color emerging mostly from the outer spaces surrounding Queen Min's head. The Empress is at the center of this universe populated by several shining, violet stars, colorful air balloons, satellites, and other typical and atypical objects including a mammoth. She is looking dead on at the viewer with her hair up in a tri-part bun. Other photos of Queen Min have interpreted this hairstyle with colorful ornaments, but it is not clear if there are any in this portrait. A close up of the bottom right of Queen Min's updo reveals a myriad of figures including Aretha Franklin, John Lennon, Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela, and a few figures I do not immediately recognize or know the names of.

Either their heads or their bodies are cut out to give Queen Min's hair a grainy texture and all in black and white, which consequently means that Queen Min is depicted in black and white. The images that are in color include a satellite with true blue panels, violet, beaming stars, red and yellow air balloons, an orange, textured moon, and an earth, which rests towards the bottom left of Queen Min's hair and on her shoulder. Stars that are placed throughout the collage fall outside of Queen Min's actual figure, but brighten the whole frame giving off striking luminations against the dark background.

I am intrigued by the concept of historical figures that came after Queen Min's death making up her portrait, almost suggesting that time is irrelevant.

According to historian, Synn, Gee Sue, Queen Min's last known depiction was used by assassins hired by Miura Goro, a lieutenant in the Japanese Imperial Army, to identify her and her body was burned and ashes dispersed. Ashes dispersed. And ashes now reunited through the presence of these figures as reminders of the recycling of stories that helped disrupt the status quo in past, present, future and spaces not limited by time. Strachan makes it clear that Queen Min's legacy is interconnected with the celebrated histories the western world has widely accepted.

A story such as Queen Min's was not just relevant for her time alive, but it is significant for many of the figures with similar stories of resistance to dominant narratives. How does the accumulation of other historical figures fit into a collage that reimagines Min? A particular point of focus is a young Aretha Franklin who is positioned on the bottom of the photograph in Queen Min's hair. My first response is of frustration that a Black woman is used to make up a non-Black empress' royal locks. After further consideration, though, I am convinced of something else. Aretha Franklin's presence does not act as one of the "pieces" for a simple portrait of Queen Min, but the immortal presence of Queen Aretha works to reveal the immortality of Queen Min's triumph.

Queen Min's rejection of cultural erasure and domination through resistance of foreign interference in Korean economic affairs is a noble narrative that deserves its recognition in popular culture. Why have I never heard of empress? Maybe we will each begin to rely on collective imagination to justly construct our own boundless galaxies.

KHAIRAT SALUM

The Witnessing

On Monday April 23, 2018, the University of Washington Bothell opened its doors, ears, and attention to Avery R. Young's series of *de skin off my blk* (2018), a performance that captured and spoke to the history and trauma of living in America as a Black person—all while taking us to church.

Young is an award-winning teaching artist, a Cave Canem Fellow, and a UW Bothell artist-in-residence who is perhaps known best as a poet, songwriter, performer, producer, and composer. Pulling from his life as a Chicagoan, his childhood in the Church, and his relationship with Sunday mornin' jook joint, Young blends the rhythms and influences of Hip Hop, hymns, jazz, and gospel to speak to issues around race, gender, and sexuality in the history of America; to challenge today's America. Today's America of endless murders and violence's of Black people under police brutality; today's America of xenophobic, islamaphobic, sexist, and racist narratives from the "man" who sits in the White House. Young's challenges the American history of racism, misogyny, and homophobia celebrating queer identity, black identity, equity, and social justice through his historical framework and presence.

Performed in the large, semi-lit space of the North Creek Event Center, *de skin off my blk* takes on the feeling

of a runway as audience members find themselves seated across from one unable to avert each other stares. The feeling of being watched and being the watcher. As the audience finds their way to a seat, they cannot escape the torn blue and white sheets of paper laying on the grey carpet ground or avoided their eyes to the paper-constructed brick wall where some of the many names of Black brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, children, friends, and partners whose lives were taken away due to police brutality. As the room began to fill up and as time trickled toward the start of the performance, conversations around the wall took shape around me: *I wonder why the wall is lit up? Why are the names written in pencil instead of Sharpie? Why is it so hard to see the names on the brick?* These were just some the questions people started to ask themselves as they came face with the installation, the room, and Young's performance itself, commenting on the importance and urgency of the performance as much as the magnitude of Young.

de skin off me blk begins with a slow blues song called "It Apple Drinks Legend" honoring, as Young references the wall, "the names that behold the room." Riffing on the melody of Drake's 2005 song "Legend," Young sings the chorus:

Oh, my God Oh, my God
How come murder makes us legend.
"Oh, my God Oh, my God
If they kill me and make me legend
Wouldn't be the first
They talked north and west
East and south
Theeee this systemic epistemic
...

My skin my only weapon
Oh, my God Oh, my God

How come murder makes us legend

As Young sings, he spotlights the hashtagging of Black people's names on social media sites such as Instagram and Twitter where their deaths are covered. In "It Apple Drinks Legend," Young points out that it is not their deaths that makes them legends but rather their essences, bringing our attention back to the names that surround the room.

From "It Apple Drinks Legend" to "I'm a Black boy with a bag of candy. You a grown man with a gun," Young comments on the injustice that takes place in the American criminal law system through the specific example of the unlawful death and verdict of Trayvon Martin. In the second act of *de skin off my blk*, Young continuously repeats

I'm a black boy with a bag of candy
You a grown man with a gun
I'm a Black boy with a bag of candy
You a grown man with a gun

As Young continuously sings the chorus, he begins to beat his tambourine along the side of his hip, continuing with,

Rock, paper, skittle
Rock, paper, skittle

...

Bang BANG
BANG BANG

...

And with each BANG, Young takes us deeper into the performance, his voice begins to break apart, his his movement scattered across the runaway as he stomps on the paper carpet.

Transforming the large semi-lit space to large upbeat church.

From Trayvon Martin, Young connects to those who passed before and after him, most powerfully in the third performance, which recalls the death of Emmet Till. Calling to our attention that no, we were not there, but here we are 63 years after Till's death living in an America where a Black person is killed for not getting off the street (Michael Brown, August 9, 2014), killed for being out on a sunny day (Rekia Boyd, March 21, 2012), killed over loud music (Jordan Davis, November 23, 2012), killed because of the *de skin off my blk*.

And as Young continues to ask *were you there?* you can't seem to miss the sweat building on his face as he raves deeper into the performance, as he kneels on the torn sheets of paper, as his voices trembles, and cracks of rage, of pain, of having to relive and retell another Black person's trauma, pain, and violence on his own body. Young performances of *de skin off my blk* in conclusion speaks to the labor, self-control and physicality of the of the artist through his ability to switch and walk between two personas as an observer and as the one being observed. All while transforming, capturing and speaking to the reality of living in American as a Black person.

REBECA MUNIZ

Basquiat's *Untitled*

Jean-Michel Basquiat began his artist career in the 1970s, and was also known as SAMO (Same Old Shit) for his graffiti street art in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Basquiat was born 1960 in New York City, and was raised by his Puerto Rican mother and his Haitian-American father. He died of a heroin overdose in his studio when he was 27 years old—although the painter's death heightened his appeal in the art world. His brilliance added a sense of urgency to his visions of history. He was known for his Neo-Expressionism and Primitivism aesthetic, encoding a series of symbols and words representing elements of his cultural heritage as a social commentary on racial segregation and alienation. With his curiosity, huge imagination, and Neo-Expressionist style we can see why someone like Jonathan Jones would describe Basquiat as “the artist that America needs.”

The 1982 *Untitled* painting—on view at the Seattle Art Museum March-August 2018—was created with oil stick and spray paint, depicting a skull with big sweeps of paint showing black dreadlocks. In May 2017, the piece set a new record for the highest price paid for an artwork by an American artist, purchased by collector Yusaku Maezawa for \$110.5 million. The painting also broke records by becoming the sixth most expensive work ever auctioned in the world.

In an Instagram post reflecting on the purchase Maezawa wrote, “When I saw this painting, I was struck with so much excitement and gratitude for my love of art. I want to share that experience with as many people as possible around the world—regardless of age or background or whether they are a collector or not.” Basquiat is positioned as an influential artist that continues to influence generations with his visceral politically inclined works, and this piece will tour globally thanks to Maezawa.

As I sat in front of the painting I had a wonderful conversation with a Black male security guard that was in this area. He added some commentary about the history of the piece and background information on Basquiat. The man stated, “Basquiat was known for his street painting all across New York City back in the day. He used to paint box cars, known for his street art within the community - was even houseless at one point. He later introduced himself at dinner to the famous Andy Warhol and caught his big break in this way.” Ironically, if one looks across from Basquiat’s piece, Andy Warhol’s Triple Elvis piece is placed there, a symbol of their close and dynamic relationship. Given Seattle’s currently inflated housing market and the homeless crisis at hand, I wonder what Basquiat would paint to provide some reflection on this current situation.

The outline of a skull collides with the blue background, with layers of white, light brown, and yellow. The painting is a collage of various layers of these colors painted on top of more layers. In the center of the canvas the skull’s outline is in blue, orange, black and white that start to give life to what looks like a face baring its teeth. This black brushing resembles a head of hair and we can see the use of spray paint for the eyes, nose, and some eyebrows.

The strokes are fragmented, broken, and crazed. There are dashes of blue, and white that surrounds the abstract outline of a skull. The eyes of the face have white pupils, with some thick red lines, behind it all, the big mouth is showing its teeth, wide open it is releasing some message loudly.

I wonder if the yelling communicates the struggle Basquiat experienced being a black man and having people not look beyond that, as a result no respect for his work during this 1980's time period. It is known that black artists at this time experienced spotty acquisitions, undernourished scholarship and token exhibitions. His work also focused on the suggestive dichotomies of the inner and outer experiences he had. There seems to be a lot of energy and frustration being communicated, perhaps Basquiat was struggling to be a black man in the art community and felt his identity would always be seen first before other things beyond that. The layers of bold and vibrant colors mirror the forces that ignored and didn't recognize his genius. As the first black artist to break into the powerful (and very white) downtown New York art establishment, this struggle is vocalized by the skull.

The longer we stare at the painting, the more the colors blend and the face becomes clear. The mouth is the biggest part of this piece and its black dreadlocks. The head is not attached to anything and we get the sensation that it is floating in space. There is no clear gaze in the eyes, but their placement suggests they are looking directly at the viewer.

When I see this painting I see frustration, and a face yelling. There is something in the white eyes and chaos swirling all around that recreates the deepest side of Basquiat's feelings.

The white paint used for both eyes is dripping down, and they look like bars, and the red beneath the eyes reminds me

of an erratic state of being. The state of being can be described like the moments when we stay up late into the night and a person begins to lose their sanity. The face depicts unprecedented emotional turbulence and aggression. The black lines overshadow the vibrant color and turn the face into fragments. These lines are a disease spreading across the face, one line even slightly protrudes the inner circle of the left eye, that looks like a long angry eyebrow. As depicted, the shape of the mouth is a square, in contrast to the usual circle, it encompasses a third of the face if not more. It is intentionally out of proportion to the rest of the face. Basquiat's deliberate use of various dimensions revokes and is exceptionally indicative of the importance of his need to be seen and validated.

The story of these colors and the energy they exude is nuanced. Each stroke charged with exasperation, uproar, havoc, anger, with a final; complete exertion of disillusionment that is displayed in juxtaposition to the face in blue paint. Basquiat's work breaks down our understanding of space, and visual perception. These artistic expressions are exemplified through a distinct technique of combining colors, shapes, and stretching the dimensions of the head to be larger than anything else in the painting. His work forces us to look twice and maybe three times in order to grasp what is occurring in the disarray. Basquiat invites us to enter this new space of disorder, chaos, and illusion by embracing the many colors and electricity captured by this exhibition.

NEJAT KEDIR

Routine of Black-Muslim Women's Labor of Love

Khairat Salum's exhibit *Self, Culture, language: A Critical Self-Reflexive of Kiswahili* was displayed at UW Bothell Cultural Studies conference in June 2018. The video installation exhibit was about being a black-Muslim woman with Zanzibari-American heritage. Central to Salum's installation is how African-Muslim women are the staunchest defenders and carriers of the wisdom of African culinary and sartorial practices as demonstrated in the video installation *Routine* and *Weave of Hair*.

Salum's video installation was projected on four screens that were built in rectangular shape. Each screen displayed a different video showing varying aspect of black-Muslim and Zanzibari-American social life. Each video was 2:30 to 5:00 minutes long and played on a loop. The four different video installations were called *Routine*, *Weaving of the Hair*, *Chapati*, and *To Celebrate*. In each of the videos we see how black-Muslim women continue to practice African cultural practices such as the preparing of Zanzibari meal as displayed in *Routine* and *Chapati*, African hair braiding practices as demonstrated in *Weaving of the Hair* and performance of traditional dances as demonstrated in *To Celebrate* which brings the community joy.

Routine starts with a young woman placing full plates on a red stripe mat. The young woman walks out of the frame of the camera empty handed after she places the food on the mat and walk back into the frame of the camera with plates and bowls of food.

After she is done placing the food on the mat, she then places paper plates around the food in a circular manner. In the next scene we see a family sitting around the food and enjoying their meal while striking light conversations in English and Swahili with each other.

This scene shows a black-Muslim immigrant family life in a way that resonates with a lot of African-Muslim immigrant families. Salum produced a scene shows black Muslim intimate and family life as it is rather than try to translate or make black Muslim familial life legible to non-Muslim or non-black audience. As a black-Muslim immigrant I also grew up in a family that shared meals sitting on a mat. My mother's soulful cooking made me a little less homesick, a little less alone, and a lot more appreciative of my parents' insistence on African ways of holding and sharing space for each other. Black-Muslim immigrant woman do most of the labor of cooking food from their country of origin to fill their families stomach and spirit. My mother's cooking nourished me and gave me the strength to digest the reality diaspora and diasporic life. Her cooking left my spirit nourished.

Hair is the name of the installation that was also displayed on one of the four screens. There is no audio coming out of this video, but we can tell that the two African women hair stylists talking to each other. The screen is split in two frames: one half of the screen focus on one of the hairstylists while the other focuses on the second hair stylists. The hairstylists are in conversation with each other orally and in their practices of braiding their customers's hair. Sometimes one of the hairstylists parts the hair into smaller sections while the other braids the hair. Sometimes they are both braiding.

Both hair stylists are in a skirt, one with green and black African patterns and the other in green with blue circles.

Hair in black culture globally has significant cultural and political meanings. Black-Muslim girls that wear hijab get asked ridiculous questions about their hair such as *Do you have any hair under your scarf?* and *Do you wash your hair?* and etc. This installation is generative because it shows how a black-Muslim woman is taking care of her hair by getting it braided and changes the conversation from silly question about hijab to black-Muslim women's aesthetic practices of self-fashioning and self-care done with other African woman.

The video installation is about diaspora and how black Muslim woman are using African culinary, and sartorial practices to make space for themselves and their families. This exhibit is unapologetic about centering African-Muslim women's labor in the domestic space which include but are not limited to culinary and self-fashioning practices. Black-immigrant and black-Muslim women are carriers of African traditional, and cultural knowledges. Without African woman so much of diasporic black life and it's connection to Africa would be lost in migration and translation. Salum's project is so crucial and important. It's important that we attend to and make space for black-Muslim woman to curate and exhibit their work on diaspora, race, and African cultural practices.

MARCUS JOHNSON

Lauren Woods: (S)Port of San Francisco

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when I was but ten years out of college, I visited the Paris Exposition of 1900. It was one of the finest, perhaps the very finest, of world expositions...I had brought with me, as a reason for coming, a little display showing the development of Negroes in the United States, which gained a gold medal. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.

— W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

The color-line W.E.B Du Bois spoke of in the dawn of the 20th century is more complex, implicated, destructive, and apparent today as when Du Bois attended the Paris Exposition of 1900. In the 21st century, black people continue to be marginalized—and executed—by various instruments of structural violence as the fight for civil and human rights persist. Central to Du Bois’s visit to the Paris Exposition was his concern with the imposed white gaze that objectified black bodies to involuntary erotic fantasies in which power and ownership circulated. As a mode of resistance, Du Bois wanted to present black people in a new image not captured by the mugshot or the auction block. What Du Bois set out to present in his procurement and curation of black bodies

in Paris was a counter-archive, a return of the gaze. In this same vein, Lauren Woods's work aims to challenge the hegemonic and normalized ways black bodies become racialized and gendered. Through choreography, music, aesthetics and embodiment, Woods repositions black bodies to return the gaze.

In this analysis I suggest that Lauren Woods's 2006 video, *(S)Port of San Francisco*, functions as a form of resistance against the white gaze. In this piece, Woods pushes the boundaries of how whites perceive blackness through performance and the gaze. The installation shown at the Henry Art Gallery was part of *THE TIME. THE PLACE*, an exhibition in Seattle, Washington. As you wind your way down the layered staircase of the Henry, you finally reach the ground level which brings you into a large white space showcasing other works of art. In order to reach Woods's piece; after a short journey, you finally reach a darkened area with a brown bench sitting in the center of a closed off area. The space invites the patron to sit on the lone bench positioned parallel to the large white screen.

At first glance, the images playing on the screen appear to be a public performance of black entertainers break-dancing as a side hustle for crowds of mostly white passers-by. When three split screens appear, however, the video slows as the shifts our mode of thinking when thematic music indicative of a 1950s LA Noir film provides a soundtrack for Woods's examination of race. The piece exposes something dark and sinister, the fetishization of black embodied experiences being consumed through the white gaze. In *(S)Port of San Francisco*, Woods draws on close camera positioning to shift the power dynamic from the white audience to the all-seeing eye capturing them in the process of endless consumption.

The music that accompanies the visuals leads the audience to a theoretical and performative crime scene leaving the audience with discomfort and on edge.

The transitions between one large frame and three separate frames with close to mid-range shots gives the spectator an up close and uncomfortable feeling. The closeness of each shot forces the spectator to explore their own biases, experiences and vulnerabilities. The grainy video resolution adds an increased sense instability as that in conjunction with the music transport you into a different time period. The closeness of the shots repositions the cinematic scope away from the black performer to the unsuspecting white gazer. The As the black bodies move out of our view as audience members, the reactions of the on-screen audience members are captured, and you fall into a sunken place. You see middle age and younger white men with their arms crossed and the look of disgust as they digest as much black flesh as possible. In other reactions, you see white women with the same look of disgust and others with looks of sexual intrigue. You draw a troubling conclusions of an angry lynch mob forcing the performers to dance for their lives. You want to warn the performers that they are in danger and need to seek a safe space. This piece begs the question of how black bodies continue to be surveilled and policed. The black body is always under a watchful gaze and surveilled as a method of controlling its history and movement through time and space. What becomes apparent as this piece focuses on the audience and *not* the black performers, however, is the that the *(S)Port of San Francisco* is a stage set to return the gaze. With the performers largely out of view, in other words, you yourself become the object being gazed upon.

