

risdpainting

mfa

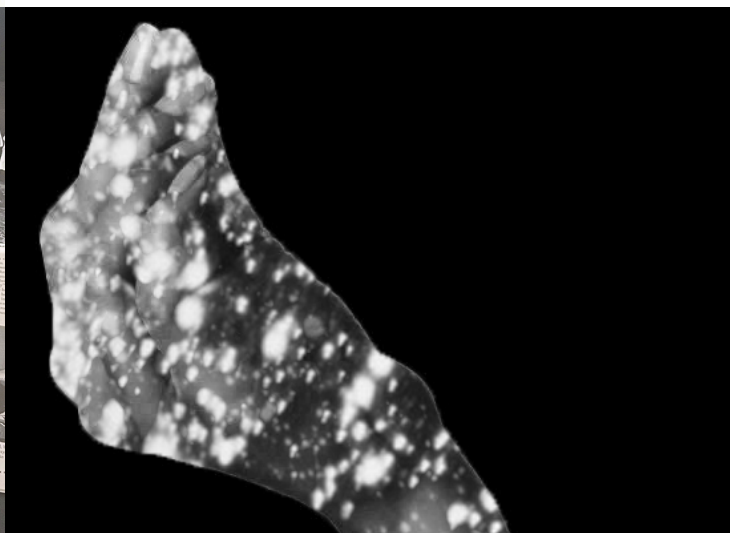
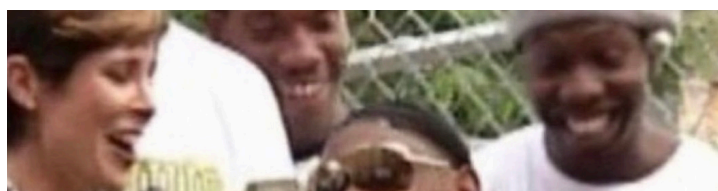
2023

# *jahi kijo lendor*

**FTM.**

thesis

i nvr needed acceptance from all u outsiders



**KISS MY BLACK ASS,  
AMERICA! [LAUGHING]**









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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Painting  
at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

Approved by Master's Examination Committee:  
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*jahi* kijo *lend*or



thesis

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**\*FTM.**

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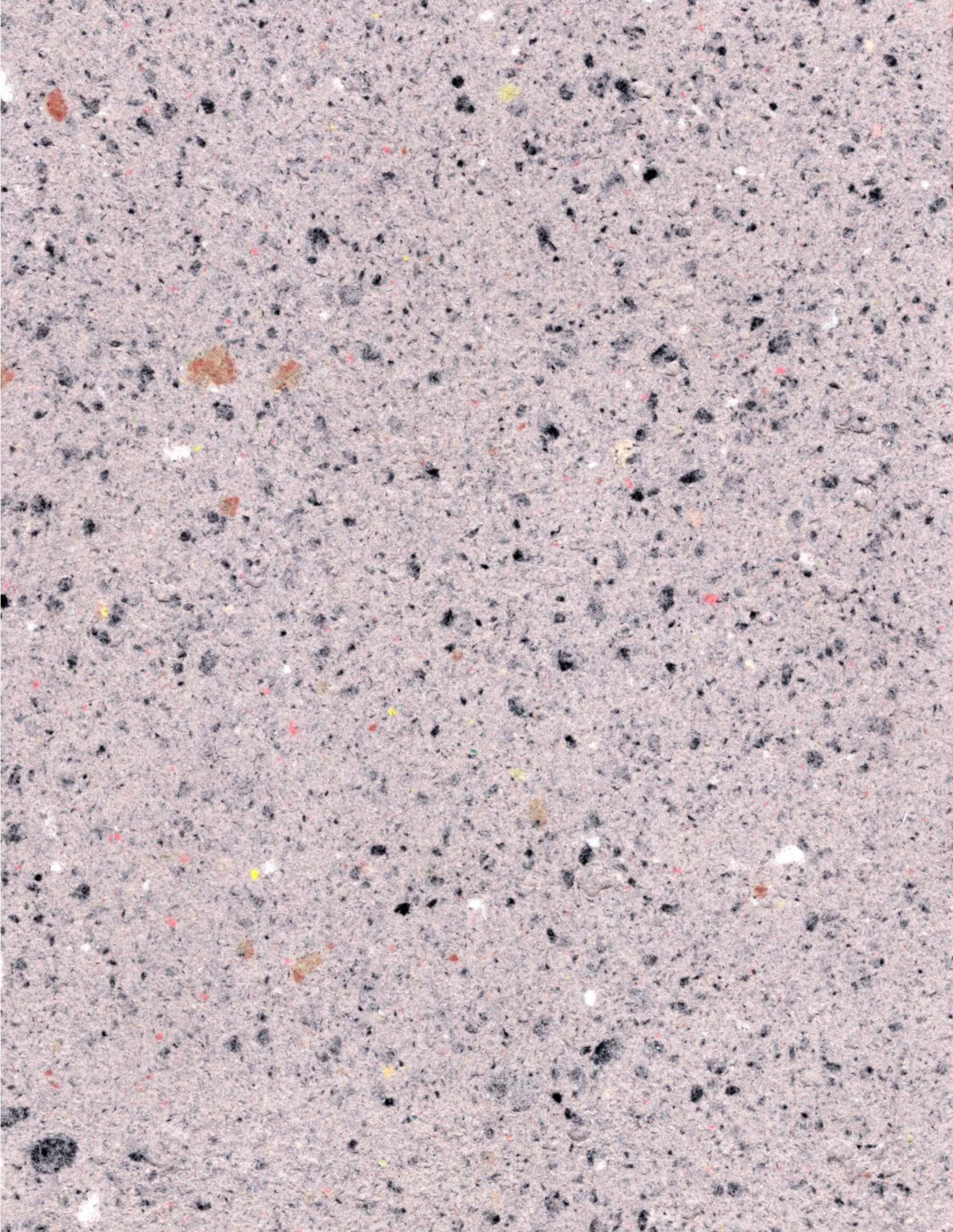


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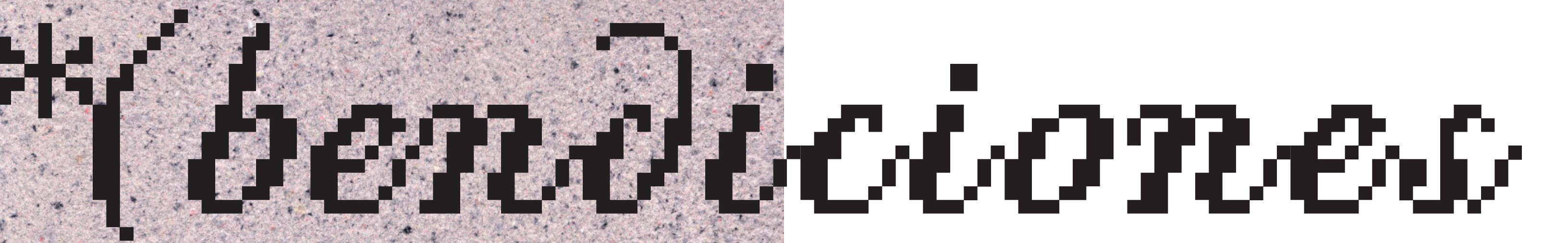


...exhale

shoop, shoop, shoop  
shoo be doop shoop shoop  
shoo be doop shoop shoop  
shoo be doop shoop shoop  
shoo be doop shoop shoop  
shoo be doop shoop shoop  
shoo be doop shoop shoop  
shoo be doo







thank u

mom (donna)  
dad (enriquillo)

friends+family (too many of yall)

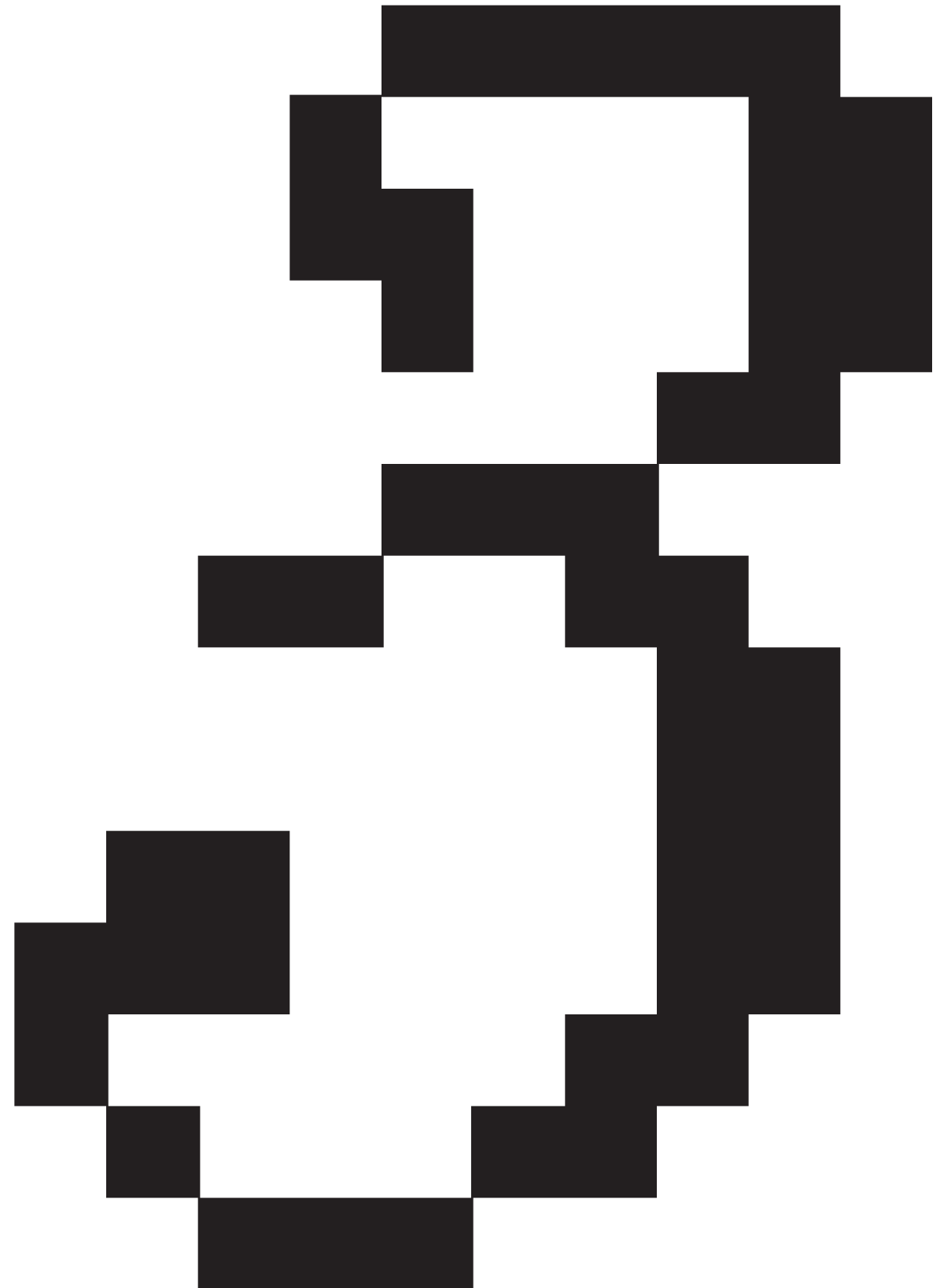
bendiciones  
*behn-dee-syohn-es)\**





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# *prologue*





*abstract*



illustration by jahi kijo lendor

A comedian said, *"American pie isn't made out of apples, it's made out of whatever you can get your fucking hands on."* With that, my work seeks to provide an honest representation of the infinite value of the everydayness and behavior of blackness ranging from trauma to beauty. Various mediums explore culture, class, collective memory, identity, and erasure. While resisting institutional and systemic boundaries between disciplines my practice actively seeks fluidity between media. The work often translates to (social) poetic-bricolage visualizations that combine gestures of assemblage, sculpture, installation, and painting.

The work focuses on reflecting on how I see life and my environment, which translates to a multimediated reality of the Black experience. I'm learning and pulling from history and retelling and making a new history from the present within the present. Like the wildstyle subway graffiti artists, I'm stating "I WAS HERE".



# good morning



above:  
Untitled, 1981 Jean-Michel Basquiat ©  
Broad Collection, Los Angeles, USA

right: Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31*, 1950, 1950  
Oil and enamel on unprimed canvas,  
8' 10" x 17' 5 5/8"  
Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection Fund (by exchange)



ii so boom let's sort of start from the beginning, Jackson Pollock's *One: Number 31*, 1950 was the first painting I loved. Before the redesign, I use to sit mesmerized on the bench positioned in front of the Pollock at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) countless times. It was my favorite spot in the museum. I found a humming peace within the middle of the madness that is MoMA and the action-spilled gestures in *One: Number 31*. If I'm being frank with myself the first time I recall being seen in a piece of artwork was Jean-Michel Basquiat's 1982, *Untitled (Skull)*. At the time I didn't know. In the present time, *Untitled (Skull)* makes me ponder the words of Ralph Ellison; *"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."* Then discovering Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) flipped

everything upside down. The *Fountain* all-pun cleansed my art palette. I've only recently come to terms with these truths. But also unlearning and relearning truths or decolonizing my knowledge of art. It wasn't until the very end of my undergraduate tenure and post undergrad that I discovered artists such as Charles White, Kerry James Marshall, Emory Douglas, David Hammons, Horwardena Pendel, Betye Saar, Sam Gilliam, Senga Nengudi, Jack Whitten- FUCKING ROCKSTARS!!! I knew Faith Ringold before I knew Faith Ringold. I was raised on Tar Beach. I didn't eat green eggs and ham. For the majority of my life, adolescent, young adult, and adult, clueless. Those weren't names mentioned in Art Since 1945, two times. The erasure and omnipresence of the black aesthetic and figure in the canon of art, discourse, and contemporary culture is a central concern of mine. I'm like that famed archaeologist but instead of a fedora, I wear a fitted juu heard.





In a 2018 conversation between artist Lorna Simpson and Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio in Harlem, at Hauser & Wirth London for Simpson’s ‘Unanswerable’ exhibition, when answering a question basically about if she would ever incorporate white people in their work Simpson replied with “*I have the arrogance that being African-American that my shit can be very universal an in that arrogance I’m forcing everybody else to get on the same page. And so therefore if I can go through I don’t know ten years of art school and that I can sit there and I can look at Kiki Smith’s work and understand the universality of her work and the skin and the body and its absence in being flayed. How is it that I can understand that as universal but mine isn’t.*”<sup>2</sup>



Throughout this whole conversation, I was swelled with more praise and admiration for Lorna. Her language, tone, and confidence were profoundly hers. There was no code-switching. I heard myself through Lorna’s breath and demeanor. I sat in those same classes she referred to and felt alone and not educated enough. The absence of my people in those rooms and conversations left me upset and eager for “new” knowledge or thought. I felt like I was being forced to learn histories that weren’t completely mine. WTF can I have in common with Joseph Beuys or Yves Klein. It’s not even that I dislike these artists (white artists) I love them. they have very much inspired me and my work. I am in conversation with artists such as them. But being force-fed this information isn’t my cup of tea.



above and left:detail from Watchmen

**"who watches the watchmen?"**

It was as if I was stuck in a Stockholm Syndrome carousel. Remember that scene in the 1995 film, *The Fifth Element* when Leeloo learns about the human race and Humanity and selects War? They were devastated by humankind's unkind self-destructive developed nature. That's kind of what it feels like.



mystical fact/super power

"im from brooklyn and i dont give a f\*\*k  
(nah i really do)"  
we live in brooklyn baby





*pSa :*

*"This is a public service announcement sponsored by ██████████ and the good folks at ██████████ Fellow Americans, it is with the utmost pride and sincerity that I present this recording as a living testament and recollection of history in the making during our generation"*

I'm from Brooklyn and I don't give a fuck. This isn't a subtle art of not giving a fuck. This isn't the act of not giving a fuck. This is the definition of not giving a fuck.

Y'all love a good New Yorker, right? Y'all love getting on TikTok and making fun of our accent, our Timbs, our dances, our bacon egg and cheeses, our Knicks? Y'all love watching a video of any guy starting a fight with "I'm from New York" before he gets his ass whipped, right? That's cool for the rest of New York, but I'm from Brooklyn so I don't give a fuck. The world sees brash but we see bold. You could call it arrogance because we call it pride. We call it style. Brooklyn style.

I move like this because we move like this. The NYC you love was the Brooklyn you hated, but we don't give a fuck.

Who else makes this melting pot of a city stir up and get shit cooking? We love NYC like the rest of the world, but we'll quickly separate ourselves from the pack for our town, for our borough, for our pride, for our style. The backgrounds, the cultures, the people who don't get along with each other outside of our town, we all come together when it comes to Kings County because we don't give a fuck.

We call it heart and y'all call it ego. We crown our ego and take it to new heights on a daily. There's no time for us to stay down in our town. We got no choice but to make it to the top of the hill and hold down our fort. You must have sties in your eyes if all you can see is ego so put those thoughts to bed. That's just the tip of the berg regarding this bullshit we're on.

It's the joy that America tried to quiet down because they couldn't make noise like us. Y'all had to move in and capture that noise for your own and then have the nerve to claim this shit. I get it. It's a Godzilla feeling, we didn't die as the villain. We lived long enough to watch ourselves become the hero and yet we still don't give a fuck.

The most hated mammals in this concrete jungle because we can't be tamed. We didn't ask to be this way. We looked for treats and got tricked. We looked for kisses and got kicked. So yes, of course, there's no taming Brooklyn. We take our noise on the road. We carry that heart, pride, that boldness with us everywhere we go. We get this movie started any time, any place. It's an ode to our style, Brooklyn style. We know you hate our disruption but we don't give a fuck.

*why materials/things:*



\*from the margin posters 2023

*whats the catch?*

*the catch is its dangerous.*

*that aint the catch, its the fun*





left: detail of For Ari Sorry Vaughn (7)  
below: detail of \*from the margins posters



above: aftermath of \*from the margins posters  
right: wip detail of whitey on the moon; diamonds on my neck, diamonds on my grill (2022)



Wanna know why I use materials, why I collect things, why I care? Maybe it's like Donda said, "We came from somewhere. Not just from the wombs of our mothers and the seeds of our fathers. But from a long line of generations who came before us." I am my mother's son. I was alongside her in and out of thrift stores, junk stores, Salvation Armies, and Goodwill's. Paying attention to things thrown away. Vetting objects for their usefulness; sometimes not even for their initial/intended purpose. Teaching me the value of things. Albeit trash salvaged from the street to Tiffany Hardware discovered in a secondhand store. I briefly mentioned care before. The root of "curate" comes from the Latin word "curare," which means "to take care of" or "to attend to." In general, curation is about creating value by carefully selecting, organizing, arranging, and presenting information, artifacts, content, or works of art in a way that enhances its impact and meaning engagingly. I personally collect an array of things that have social and (pop)cultural meaning. Care is an element of my practice that isn't necessarily new, but my full awareness of it is fresh. I voice awareness specifically because at the root of my work and practice care was always there but I didn't know it.

From low to high I distinctly recognize and understand the value, significance, and commentary of things. I allow myself the capacity to see the material possibilities. I don't allow myself to limit the ability of an object to become something greater than itself. Never come in low. In undergrad I had a professor come into class and emphatically with the utmost confidence as if the opposite of truth didn't exist say "*Everything means something*". That has stayed with me to this day. It is one of the layers of how I view and make things. Coming to understand my work incorporates elements of curation. Through the practice and action of curation, I attempt to activate my archive of tangible and non-tangible things ranging from meaningless to meaningful. Sometimes I feel like I'm juggling something specific like a Spawn comic book or a conversation had with a friend or picking up a failed lottery ticket or scratch-off. Each of these things is an example of the extension of my care for things found.



When asked about his relationship to things/ things he creates, video artist Arthur Jafa articulated, *“I just think like Black people are things. Like we are in some very weird classically speaking, the split between subjects and objects. But just because of our history, the center ontological structure, how we came into being. You know we are in this weird non-classical relationship between being an object and a thing. I mean the object and the subject. So I feel this whole question of things is fascinating to me basically typically things don’t have a certain kind of agency. Like the subject has agency, but the object doesn’t. You know the subject can move the object around. The subject can place the object. The subject can contemplate the object or the object is supposedly just sitting here. But I just think the whole idea of a black person, like say on a, um, auction block. Like slave block. That’s like a pedestal. It’s like your thing, they place you on it.*

*You can’t walk off. You can’t say, I don’t want to be on this no more. I’m walking off of this, you know, like nah, but the ability to say, I don’t want to be on it is why we never completely worked as a thing. Even though they tried to turn us into things. And so the kind of, the term I would use is discrepancy. The sort of discrepancy between what the sort of, material universe. What the social structure that we found ourselves in was insisting was true for us and even in those circumstances where we were chained or whatever, and we couldn’t sort of extricate ourselves from it, it, it didn’t, it kind of ultimately didn’t matter, in a sense of we knew internally that we were not things. You know so that the split or tension between living as a thing, but not being a thing or being a subject, but not living as a subject. That discrepancy between those two states is I think a fundamental part of blackness in a way.”<sup>3</sup>*

With that idea and placement in mind, it opens a pathway to understanding why I’m attracted to using found/bought materials, objects, and things in my work. It allows me to draw attention to the everyday objects that surround us, and question our assumptions about what is valuable or important. By repurposing, transforming, and at times just placing these materials, I’m uncovering their potential for creative expression and social critique. The use of materials reflects my curiosity about the history and cultural context of the objects I work with. Many of the pieces incorporate Black cultural idiosyncrasies, symbols, and motifs, such as basketball hoops and liquor bottles. By exploring the social and cultural meanings attached to these objects, I am able to comment on larger issues of class, race, and identity. The materials in my work often have a tactile or sensory quality that invites the viewer to engage with the artwork on a physical level. For example, installations made with handmade (sunflower seed shell pulp) paper, paper towels, and tar paper have a raw, rough-hewn quality that contrasts with the sleek, polished surfaces of more traditional art materials. This creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy that draws the viewer into the work and encourages them to explore its meaning and significance.

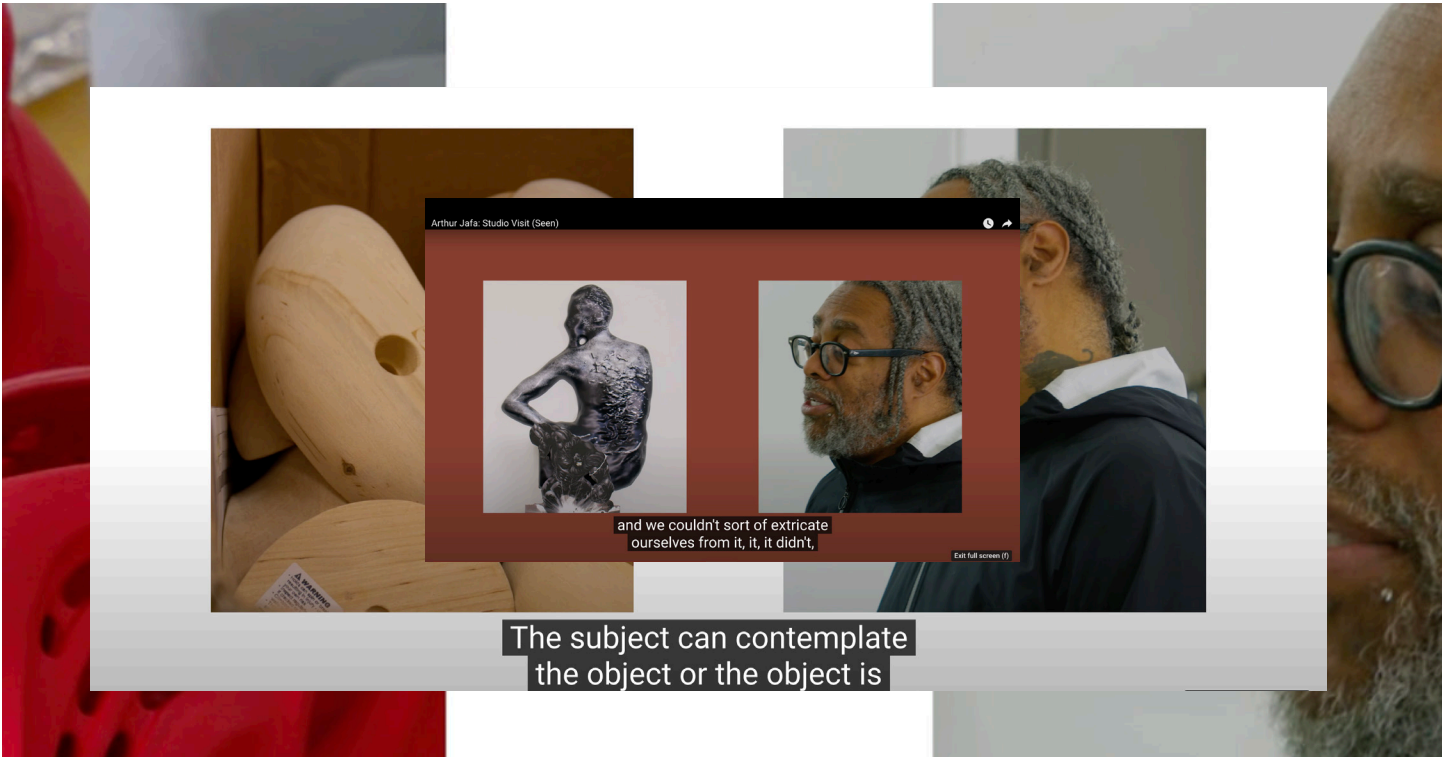


illustration by Jahi Kijo Lendor  
screenshots from youtube video



EGO  
EGO  
EGO

22

EGO

EGO  
LT

RUN THAT  
16 SQUADRON

23



→ ROBERT FERRIS THOMPSON  
→ FLASH OF THE SPIRIT

RISD  
9.23.2021  
STUDIO VISIT  
MEENA

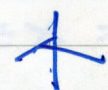
MICHAELA COLE EMMY SPEECH

+ DRESS

→ NEON YELLOW



U WYIN & SHEED



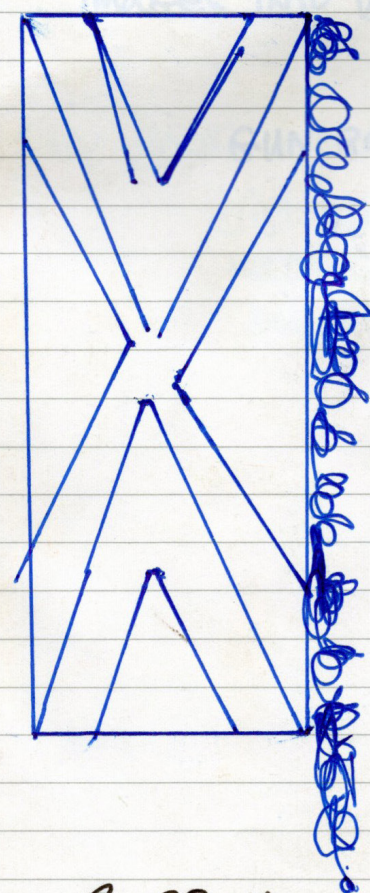
Take out the  
Bull before its  
on the field.

JUMP HIGH  
leap

### STUDIO NEEDS

• extension  
cords  
• outlets

- another table \*
- flowers/plant
- ladder
- lights \*
- air fresheners



\$ 8Ball

NOVA Gel 5 Gal  
industrial chalk  
oil paint  
acrylic paint  
GESSON  
Gel mediums  
GAMSOI  
KRINK/Molotov  
CANVAS  
DYE

## 24 bell hooks

'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness'

from *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (1989)

reading

**bell hooks**

choosing the margin as a  
space of radical openness

As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, 'the politics of location' necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision. When asked, 'What does it mean to enjoy reading *Beloved*, admire *Schooldaze*, and have a theoretical interest in post-structuralist theory?' (one of the 'wild' questions posed by the Third World Cinema Focus Forum), I located my answer concretely in the realm of oppositional political struggle. Such diverse pleasures can be experienced, enjoyed even, because one transgresses, moves 'out of one's place.' For many of us, that movement requires pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination. Initially, then, it is a defiant political gesture. Moving, we confront the realities of choice and location. Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial. It shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts. It informs the way we speak about these issues, the language we choose. Language is also a place of struggle.

To me, the effort to speak about issues of 'space and location' evoked pain. The questions raised compelled difficult explorations of 'Silences' – unaddressed places within my personal political and artistic evolution. Before I could consider answers, I had to face ways these issues were intimately connected to intense personal emotional upheaval regarding place, identity, desire. In an intense all-night-long conversation with Eddie George (member of Black Audio Film Collective) talking about the struggle of oppressed people to come to voice, he made the very 'down' comment that 'ours is a broken voice.' My response was simply that when you hear the broken voice you also hear the pain contained



within that brokenness – a speech of suffering; often it's that sound nobody wants to hear. Stuart Hall talks about the need for a 'politics of articulation.' He and Eddie have engaged in dialogue with me in a deeply soulful way, hearing my struggle for words. It is this dialogue between comrades that is a gesture of love; I am grateful.

I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. I have confronted silence, inarticulateness. When I say, then, that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name that location from which I come to voice – that space of my theorizing.

Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words. Language is also a place of struggle. I was just a girl coming slowly into womanhood when I read Adrienne Rich's words, 'This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you.' This language that enabled me to attend graduate school, to write a dissertation, to speak at job interviews, carries the scent of oppression. Language is also a place of struggle. The Australian aborigines say 'that smell of the white man is killing us.' I remember the smells of my childhood, hot water corn bread, turnip greens, fried pies. I remember the way we talked to one another, our words thickly accented black Southern speech. Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination – a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle.

It is no easy task to find ways to include our multiple voices within the various texts we create – in film, poetry, feminist theory. Those are sounds and images that mainstream consumers find difficult to understand. Sounds and scenes which cannot be appropriated are often that sign everyone questions, wants to erase, to 'wipe out.' I feel it even now, writing this piece when I gave it talking and reading, talking spontaneously, using familiar academic speech now and then, 'talking the talk' – using black vernacular speech, the intimate sounds and gestures I normally save for family and loved ones. Private speech in public discourse, intimate intervention, making another text, a space that enables me to recover all that I am in language, I find so many gaps, absences in this written text. To cite them at least is to let the reader know something has been missed, or remains there hinted at by words – there in the deep structure.

Throughout *Freedom Charter*, a work which traces aspects of the movement against racial apartheid in South Africa, this statement is constantly repeated: *our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting*. In much new, exciting cultural practice, cultural texts – in film, black literature, critical theory – there is an effort to remember that is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able

to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality. Fragments of memory are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a 'new take' on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation. We see this in films like *Dreaming Rivers* and *Illusions*, and in books like *Mama Day* by Gloria Naylor. Thinking again about space and location, I heard the statement 'our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting'; a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.

I have needed to remember, as part of a self-critical process where one pauses to reconsider choices and location, tracing my journey from small-town Southern black life, from folk traditions, and church experience to cities, to the university, to neighborhoods that are not racially segregated, to places where I see for the first time independent cinema, where I read critical theory, where I write theory. Along that trajectory, I vividly recall efforts to silence my coming to voice. In my public presentation I was able to tell stories, to share memories. Here again I only hint at them. The opening essay in my book, *Talking Back*, describes my effort to emerge as critical thinker, artist, and writer in a context of repression. I talk about punishment, about mama and daddy aggressively silencing me, about the censorship of black communities. I had no choice. I had to struggle and resist to emerge from that context and then from other locations with mind intact, with an open heart. I had to leave that space I called home to move beyond boundaries, yet I needed also to return there. We sing a song in the black church tradition that says, 'I'm going up the rough side of the mountain on my way home.' Indeed the very meaning of 'home' changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting. 'Our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting.'

This experience of space and location is not the same for black folks who have always been privileged, or for black folks who desire only to move from underclass status to points of privilege; not the same for those of us from poor backgrounds who have had to continually engage in actual political struggle both within and outside black communities to assert an aesthetic and critical presence. Black folks coming from poor, underclass communities, who enter universities or privileged cultural settings unwilling to surrender every vestige of who we were before we were there, all 'sign' of our class and cultural 'difference,' who are unwilling to play the role of 'exotic Other,' must create spaces within that culture of domination if we are to survive whole, our souls intact. Our very presence is a disruption. We are often as much an 'Other,' a threat to black people from



privileged class backgrounds who do not understand or share our perspectives, as we are to uninformed white folks. Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them. Mostly, of course, we are not there. We never 'arrive' or 'can't stay.' Back in those spaces where we come from, we kill ourselves in despair, drowning in nihilism, caught in poverty, in addiction, in every postmodern mode of dying that can be named. Yet when we few remain in that 'other' space, we are often too isolated, too alone. We die there, too. Those of us who live, who 'make it,' passionately holding on to aspects of that 'downhome' life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive. Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice.

For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance.

In the preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, I expressed these thoughts on marginality:

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.

There were laws to ensure our return. Not to return was to risk being punished. Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.

This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world-view – a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity.

Though incomplete, these statements identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such,

I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

This is not a mythic notion of marginality. It comes from lived experience. Yet I want to talk about what it means to struggle to maintain that marginality even as one works, produces, lives, if you will, at the center. I no longer live in that segregated world across the tracks. Central to life in that world was the ongoing awareness of the necessity of opposition. When Bob Marley sings, 'We refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are, and that's the way it's going to be,' that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins. And one can only say no, speak the voice of resistance, because there exists a counter-language. While it may resemble the colonizer's tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed. When I left that concrete space in the margins, I kept alive in my heart ways of knowing reality, which affirm continually not only the primacy of resistance but the necessity of a resistance that is sustained by remembrance of the past, which includes recollections of broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings. Once mama said to me as I was about to go again to the predominantly white university, 'You can take what the white people have to offer, but you do not have to love them.' Now understanding her cultural codes, I know that she was not saying to me not to love people of other races. She was speaking about colonization and the reality of what it means to be taught in a culture of domination by those who dominate. She was insisting on my power to be able to separate useful knowledge that I might get from the dominating group from participation in ways of knowing that would lead to estrangement, alienation, and worse – assimilation and co-optation. She was saying that it is not necessary to give yourself over to them to learn. Not having been in those institutions, she knew that I might be faced again and again with situations where I would be 'tried,' made to feel as though a central requirement of my being accepted would mean participation in this system of exchange to ensure my success, my 'making it.' She was reminding me of the necessity of opposition and simultaneously encouraging me not to lose that radical perspective shaped and formed by marginality.

Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expression. The struggle may not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated, colonized community and family. So I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as 'pure.' I want



to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance. And since we are well able to name the nature of that repression we know better the margin as site of deprivation. We are more silent when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance. We are more often silenced when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance.

Silenced. During my graduate years I heard myself speaking often in the voice of resistance. I cannot say that my speech was welcomed. I cannot say that my speech was heard in such a way that it altered relations between colonizer and colonized. Yet what I have noticed is that those scholars, most especially those who name themselves radical critical thinkers, feminist thinkers, now fully participate in the construction of a discourse about the 'Other.' I was made 'Other' there in that space with them. In that space in the margins, that lived-in segregated world of my past and present. They did not meet me there in that space. They met me at the center. They greeted me as colonizers. I am waiting to learn from them the path of their resistance, of how it came to be that they were able to surrender the power to act as colonizers. I am waiting for them to bear witness, to give testimony. They say that the discourse on marginality, on difference has moved beyond a discussion of 'us and them.' They do not speak of how this movement has taken place. This is a response from the radical space of my marginality. It is a space of resistance. It is a space I choose.

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'Other,' to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak. Often this speech about the 'Other' is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if we were there. This 'we' is that 'us' in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. Often this speech about the 'Other' annihilates, erases: 'No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.' Stop. We greet you as liberators. This 'we' is that 'us' in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. This is an intervention. I am writing to you. I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different, where I see things differently. I am talking about what I see.

Speaking from margins. Speaking in resistance. I open a book. There are words on the back cover, *Never in the Shadows Again*. A book which suggests the possibility of speaking as liberators. Only who is speaking and who is silent. Only who stands in the shadows – the shadow in a doorway, the space where images of black women are represented voiceless, the space where our words are invoked to serve and support, the space of our absence. Only small echoes of protest. We are

re-written. We are 'Other.' We are the margin. Who is speaking and to whom. Where do we locate ourselves and comrades.?

Silenced. We fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us, because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in a voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.

Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice.

As Pratibha Parma notes, 'The appropriation and use of space are political acts.'

To speak about that location from which work emerges, I choose familiar politicized language, old codes, words like 'struggle, marginality, resistance.' I choose these words knowing that they are no longer popular or 'cool' – hold onto them and the political legacies they evoke and affirm, even as I work to change what they say, to give them renewed and different meaning.

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world.





IT

30 NIGHTS  
INTO THE FUTURE

COLUMBUS LEFT THE  
NEW WORLD AND I AM THE  
ONE TO RETURN FROM IT

EDOUARD GLISSANT

Every diaspora is the passage  
FROM unity to multiplicity

OPAQUE / TRANSPARENT

is it racially closed off?

is it accessible  
to all

NEGITUDE = BLACKNESS

false transparency  
cheapens transparency.

NEW GREAT MIGRATION?

21<sup>st</sup> black artist white & black

class

PLIGHT  
MIGRATION

BLACK FLIGHT  
POOR FLIGHT

SCRATCH OFF  
SCRATCHIE

losing tickets  
FRAMING

FRAMING THE  
TICKET

FROM THE MARGIN

"SCRATCHING" AWAY FROM  
THE MARGIN TO THE CENTER  
LIQUOR STORE  
BODEGA

I DRINK  
TEA RICK  
a get off  
eyes open

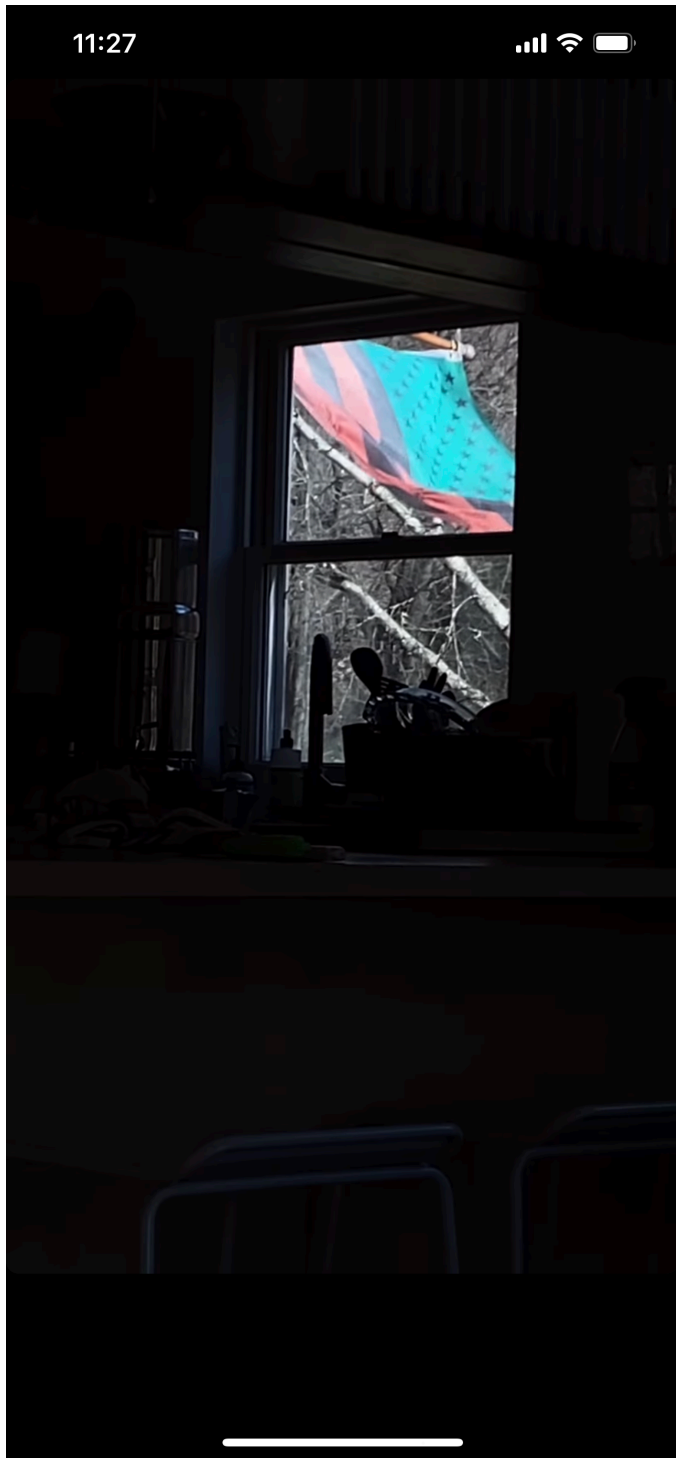
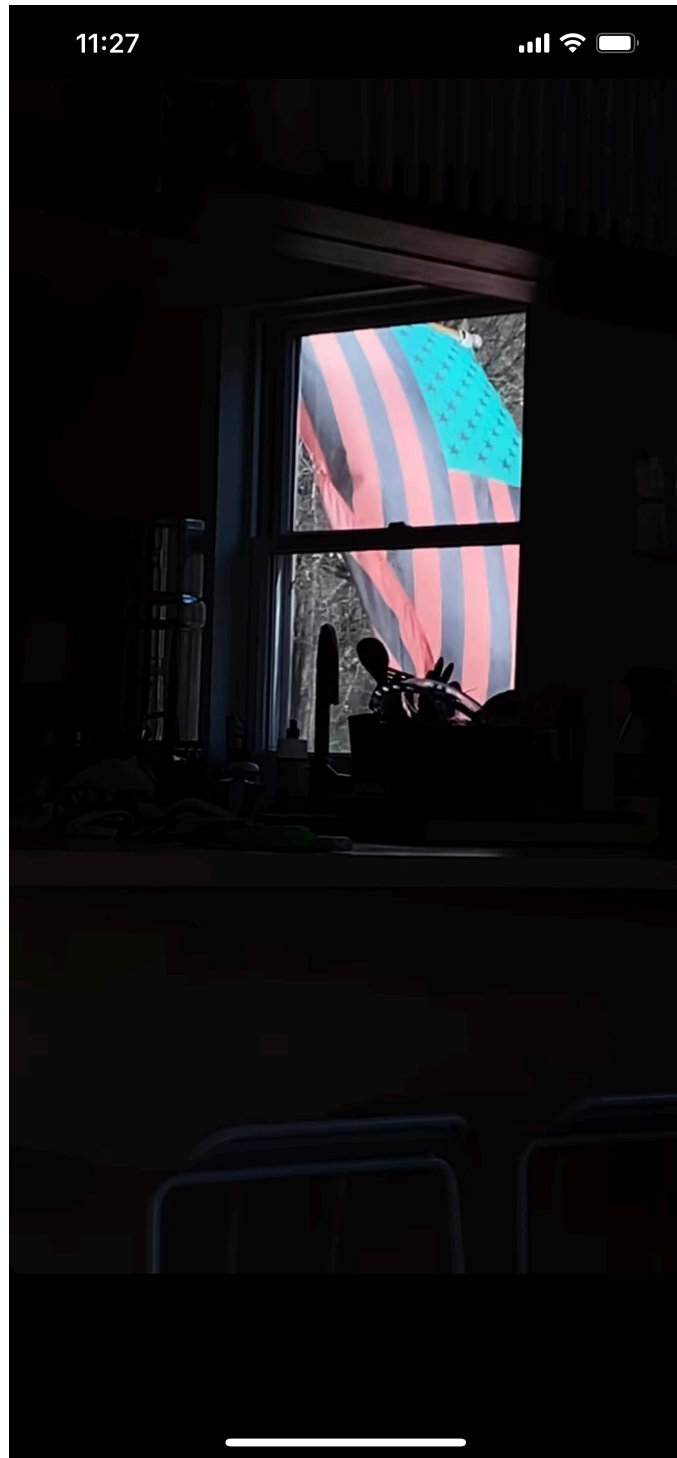
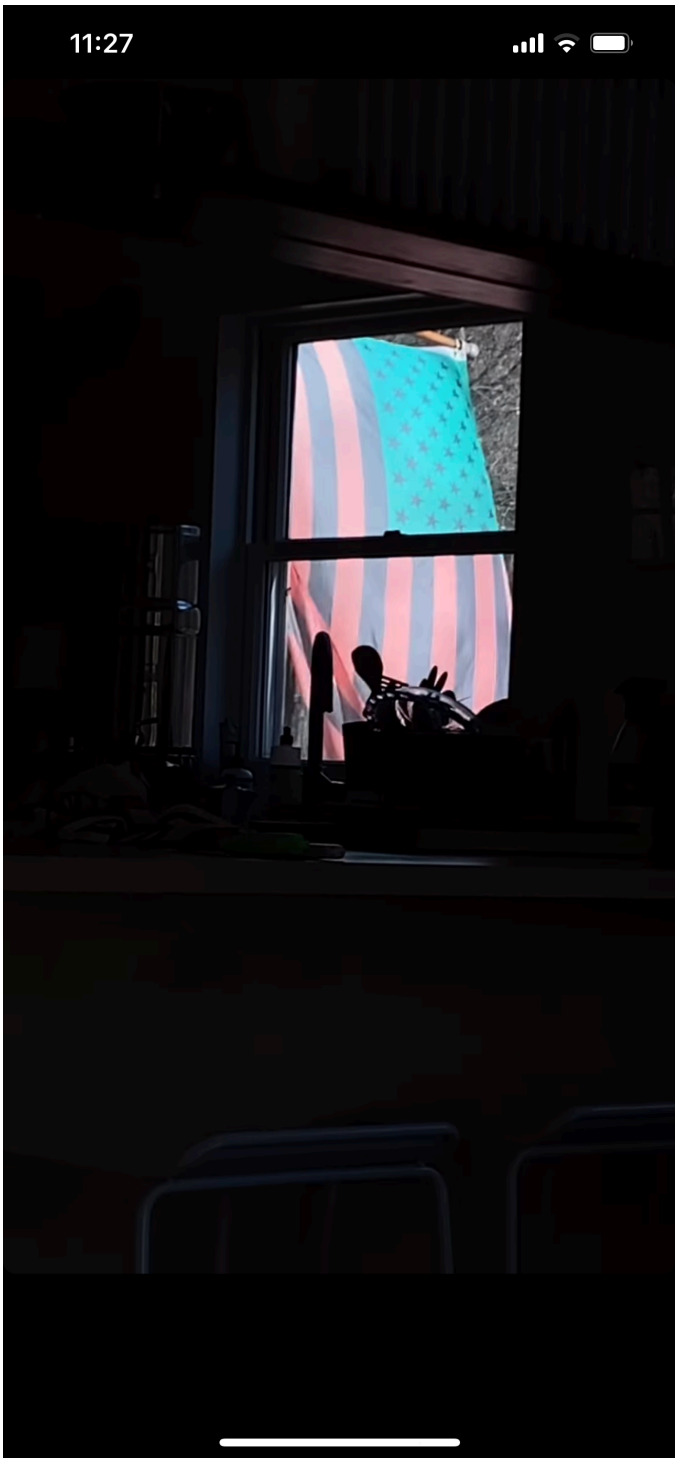
... created culture  
in free fall...  
ARTHUR  
JAPA



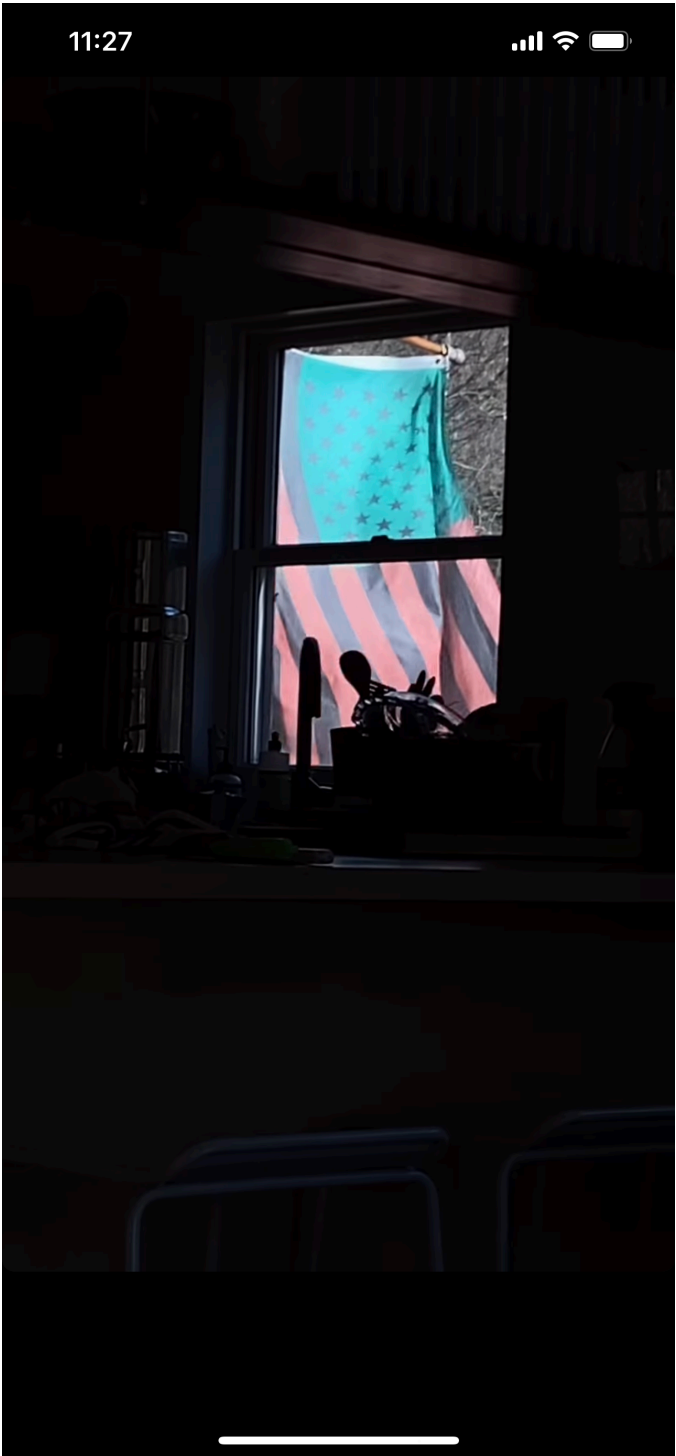
ski mask and the  
fake murakami louis bag  
do the math  
tell me what time  
im on i aims high  
the diet is based off of slavery  
fuck that we clean now  
fuck that we free now

*interlude*









instagram screenshots

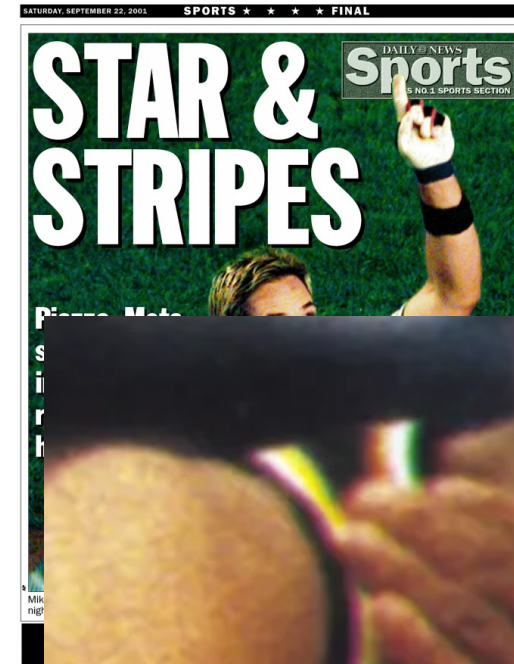
Life is a journey

and 1234  
up you mighty race  
5678  
u committing felonies w/that  
black nasty  
cliff notes  
twiddle thee twittle dumb  
what will be what I'll become  
dont fight with gravity



MAY 16-17, 2022  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

I feel a little funny  
THINK ITS JUST MY MOOD  
I ENJOYED HANGING OUT W/  
EMMANUEL + JENNA  
I MISS THEM  
IM SCARED  
I HOPE JENNA IS OK  
I REALLY DO LIKE HER  
I NEED TO STAY THE COURSE  
FINISH THE WORK  
GROW, CHALLENGE  
THERE WAS AN ECLIPSE YESTERDAY  
I HATE  
TRUST YOURSELF  
TRUST YOURSELF  
TRUST YOURSELF  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS  
TRUST YOURSELF  
TRUST YOURSELF  
TRUST YOURSELF  
TRUST YOURSELF



*twerk miley, miley twerk  
somewhere in america*



illustration by jahi kijo lendor



When inducting Jay-Z into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Dave Chappelle states *“American pie isn’t made out of apples, it’s made out of whatever you can get your fucking hands on.”* With those words in mind, when I’m making things everything is up for grabs. There are limitless possibilities when it comes to making something in my practice. It’s not just the obvious or more traditional art methods and materials being employed. Within my work, any combination of acrylic, oil, cement, tar, cardboard, cotton/paper towels, T-shirt, chewing (chewed) gum, glitter, nail polish/lacquer, chalk, dye, ink, charcoal, sneakers, foam (styro), trash, sunflower seed shells, music, conversations, social media (Instagram, Twitter, tik tok) can be found. It has taken me time to arrive at this point.

I never fully understood why I was using such items. Discovering and doing research on David Hammons and Jack Whitten has given me more insight into my decision-making. Tom Finkelpearl discusses the power of the dirty, used objects David Hammons prefers and how they relate to the clean” art exhibited in conventional gallery settings in his “On the Ideology of Dirt” essay. Tom Finkelpearl discusses the power of the dirty, used objects David Hammons prefers and how they relate to the “clean” art exhibited in conventional gallery settings. Finkelpearl described dirt (literal and metaphorical) as history, a physical record, and evidence of time and use. Finkelpearl states *“Hammons has always chosen the dirtiest materials available. He looks for traces of time*



left:  
dont call it jazz, continuation of  
the coolest 2022  
77(L) x 125(W)inches  
Cardboard, paper bags,  
paper towels, pool noodles,  
sneakers, nitrile gloves, fabric,  
oil paintstick

right:  
WYLIN CUZ IM YOUNG  
2022  
Cardboard, paper towel,  
sleeping bag, aluminum mesh  
Screen, dye, oil paintstick, chalk,  
no parking sign, plastic



*in his dirty materials, the physical evidence of human use. Like Arte Povera artists he admires, Hammons seeks to draw on the strength and poverty of rough materials – always choosing a painted and scratched, discarded board over a new one, and relying on handmade, dirty construction. Hammons’ use of dirty materials relates directly to the social and economic status of dirt, a cheap substance, and to his own ability to control his means of production, like the dirt farmer. His found materials are imbued with traces of use and time; he does not clean them up or sanitize them.”<sup>4</sup> He makes his art from refuse and the detritus of African-American life. In an interview with Beryl J. Wright, Jack Whitten goes on to say “I used to find things in the street. My studio used to be filled with things that I found in the street. I see now that that was a way of finding myself. When you pick up something and bring it home, you see something in that object. You see a part*

*of yourself in a found object. Why did you pick up that one and not that one? I had never thought about it like that. I just always knew that I had to pick this one up because I identified it with something. Now I see, in retrospect, that that was the beginning of my piecing things together. I see now that personal aesthetics is basically a chain: you link it together. You find these links and you keep linking them. Every time I would find one of those found objects, it was another fragment of something.”<sup>5</sup> From Hammon’s “dirt” and “dirty” materials to Whitten seeing himself in a found object, and Jafa’s idea of black people being in between object and subject I’ve begun to better understand my artistic choices for making. Things have come into focus more. Being aware of my mother’s influence on my personal and artistic identity and how I express that through my own visual language and aesthetic. My inclination is to use more obscure, humble materials. Swapping*



canvas for things such as discarded cardboard and salvaged rags/textiles in my work versus more typical materials and mediums allows me to operate at the fringes of art (painting, sculpture, design, installation, assemblage, etc.) and life and to create works that are more participatory and engaged with social, political, and cultural issues, thoughts, and ideas of past, future, and present realities. The "left" or "right" of center things I choose to pick up represent abstract metaphorical poetic nods that redirect black and brown communities to the center. My decision to use (in my mind) honest materials gives me the ability to reflect on the vicissitudes of everyday (black) life on a material level which helps challenge traditional ideas about what art could be and what it could represent. Big shoutouts to Abigail Deville, queen. I use the term honest to relate back to Jafa's Black and in-betweenness; although I have a preference and somewhat comfort level with materials/objects they bring a level of resistance to the discussion. The object is going to be what it is regardless of the agency I bring to it. The work aims to be delicate subtle flourishes of interconnected representations of existence. Hymful gestures of beauty and grit.

ICON VISION SYMBOL

AFRICA

C  
F  
RAINBOW

the "rainbow"

spectacle  
the fantasy  
the power 17644  
to activate the  
visibility of a RAINBOW.  
How is a Black  
RAINBOW activated

MONDAY  
DEC. 6. 2021  
12/6/2021

I WANNA wake up CP TIME

EFF THAT  
OK SH  
SHIT

TWERK  
Miley  
Miley  
TWERK.

GRIEVING  
when someone dies  
you don't think  
of failure.

more spiritual  
TURN UP the  
volume.  
It's NOT consumerism  
it's more energy.

connected FORM

Boobies in space

TORKWASIE DYSON

THE paper 17644

WHERE DOES THE WORK HAPPEN?  
inside me. How does it grow.



## you viral baby

Growing up in Brooklyn, I watched neighborhoods predominantly populated by people of color be washed out by the effects of gentrification. To witness neighborhoods I inhabited ebb and flow from deconstruction, and construction, to stasis of decay, my witness played an essential role in the development of my critical and artistic consciousness and vision. Seeing a Whole Foods or Apple store open up evoked the same feeling and reaction Charlton Heston's character George Taylor expressed at the ending of Planet of Apes when discovering the remnants of the Statue of Liberty on the beach. Being the child of a Black mother and a Dominican father, I am aware of the different lenses of diversity. I'm in search of essence; to magnify and grow upon the beauty of the communities I grew up in. When graffiti began to populate sides of subway trains and walls in the '70s and '80s in New York City it was less an act of vandalism but an act of timestamping, journaling of life, and form of expression. In a July 2021 interview with Mathias Ussing Seeberg in connection with his exhibition MagnumB at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, Los Angeles-based artist Arthur Jafa stated...

*“What’s the last visual, new visual art form of the 20th century; it’s clearly like Wildstyle subway graffiti. I’m not, I don’t care about what you think about it. It’s not about whether you value it to be good or bad. It’s just like, that’s the first last new thing of the 20th century. Subway graffiti and it’s so powerful as a visual form that is outside of any kind of economic superstructure. We’re not talking about there were no patrons, there no people by large buying these things, you can go to any city in Europe and that subway graffiti is everywhere. It’s on the walls, it’s on abandoned walls right so that means that thing has a viral dimension just like the music that’s kind of undeniable...”*<sup>6</sup>

When cavemen stamped their handprint on the walls of their cave they were expressing and claiming their existence in the same vein as Dondi, Lee Quinones, Zephyr, and Phase 2 throwing up a tag on the side of a train that travels for the most part throughout the entire city. Phase 2 is noted for saying that tagging provided disadvantaged urban teens “the only significant vehicle to represent their existence.” As I continue to study art history and non-(art) history I’ve begun to have a better understanding of the marriage and barrier between art and life. With that, I more and more realize the cross-generational conversations I’m having with Arte Povera artists such as Jannis Kounellis, Luciano Fabro, and Michelangelo Pistoletto then eventually over to Nari Ward and Theaster Gates. My eyes can’t be wide shut to the present; the infiniteness of the everyday charges my practice.

Circling back and expanding on Jafa’s very accurate sentiments of graffiti and ultimately Hip-Hop. His thought was an assessment of Hip-Hop culture, with Graffiti being a key tenet of Hip-Hop. Its viral-ness and ubiquitousness allowed the culture to grow and reach beyond its desperate beginnings from a housing project community room in the South Bronx, New York City in the 1970s across oceans to places unimagined. And has since spread globally, becoming one of the most popular and influential cultural movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. Hip-Hop culture has had a significant influence on art, music, dance, fashion, and language. I heard once that whenever this nation (USA) is dug up the three things of most significance that our ancestors find will be the Constitution, baseball, and Jazz. At this current moment, I would like to amend that thought. What they will remember us for is the genocide and stealing of land from Indengious people, slavery, erasure and manipulation of Black culture, capitalism, Jazz, and Hip-Hop. The latter being this nation's last combination to humanity. Under this revision, we’ve been living in the Hip-Hop generation since the last quarter of the 20th century. Having been born within this timeline, Hip-Hop has been significant to my art practice. It’s definitely one of the elements that informs my work, and I am proud of that truth. Going deeper into the significance, the production of the music. Of the many ways beats are made the usage of sampling has had an everlasting impact on me. The practice of sampling involves taking a portion of an existing sound recording and incorporating it into a new musical composition. That description mirrors me using discarded Target, Gap, or regular paper bags, dirty paper bags from McDonald’s, or a local pizzeria that refers to consumerism culture in the studio for me to recontextualize into my own particular vocabulary. 1+1=3 Bringing in different objects and materials that reference different elements of life and my experience.

Twenty years ago then-deputy director for exhibitions and promotions and now director and chief curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, Thelma Golden selected 28 up-and-coming artists for its “Freestyle” exhibition – introducing a new generation of visionaries emerging at the dawn of the new century. Many of the artists featured established critical and commercial successful practices. In the “Freestyle” catalog Golden introduced terms like “post-Black”, “post-Basquiat”, and “post-Biggie” to describe the cohort of artists.

*“They are influenced by hip-hop, alt-rock, new media, suburban angst, urban blight, globalism, and the Internet-the felicitous device of international communication and new optimism in the wake of the initial postmodernist urge to define the avant-garde as dead. They live in a world where their particular cultural specificity is marketed to the planet and sold back to them. As a group, they exemplify the presence of art school training in that they create work that refers to multiple histories of contemporary art and culture-both non-Western and that of the Western Modernist tradition. Their influences are rich and varied. They are both post-Basquiat and post-Biggie. They embrace the dichotomies of high and low inside and outside, tradition and innovation with great ease and facility. Like the generations before them, they resist narrow definitions.”*<sup>7</sup>

In the two decades that have passed, there has been a continuum of the conversations and discourse that was initiated in 2001. My work is in a direct line of contact but a divergent line. We find ourselves in a world at what feels like the end of history; post-Basquiat, post-Biggie, post-freestyle, post-9/11, post-Obama, post-trump, and currently Covid era. Where I don’t completely agree with Golden’s term “post-black” there is no leaving Black.



Congratulations, if you made it this far you weren't supposed to make it past 25; jokes on them you survived.

In essence, my work is an honest representation of a multi-dimensional experience exploring the material possibilities of beauty. At times the outcome reflects the collapsing of different fields, blurring the lines of painting, sculpture, installation, design, and assemblage. In whichever direction the work swivels I am curating an experience, trying to evoke feelings and emotions. By any means necessary. In complete control or to use a better term, awareness. But not trying to be a master (sorry Kerry James Marshall). That term fits firmly in white supremacy culture; and so does the art school and the art world. Respectfully. Most things are up for grabs in my practice with the work constantly evolving second, third, and fourth viewings of the work may not be the same as the first encounter. I view medium, material, and object as a way to process and express the world around me. Due to these constant ebbs and flows my practice isn't confined to any category or lens. I'm allowing the viewers to explore and question what their feeling and seeing fluidly. Objects are in dialogue with each other. I'm reflecting on how I see life and my environment. I'm reflecting on how I see life and my environment which translates to a multimediated retelling and revaluing of the post-postmodern (contemporary) Black experience.

The work is not a call to racial exclusiveness, but clearly, race is a part of my experience and expression. My intent is to reverse the erasure of Black culture by centering blackness in the materials, objects, history, and cultural moments that are rendered disposable and disregarded but intensely resonate and activate my consciousness. I'm learning and pulling from history but also leaving history. I'm retelling and making a new history from the present within the present; sharing everydayness that makes up our lives that we neglect acts as entry points for revealing and discussing life's complexities. Ranging from trauma to beauty with various mediums to explore identity, class, collective memory, and erasure. The work is an invention with materials on shared and personal identity and experiences with diverse and hybrid references pointing to personal and other histories, hip hop, sports, pop culture, film, and daily activities, making up the intricate vocabulary of my practice. If you do not identify as Black/African-American/Caribbean/Latino approach the work with care, patience, time, curiosity, caution, and humanity. If you identify as Black/African-American/Caribbean/Latino approach the work with care, patience, time, curiosity, caution, and humanity.



margins (i nvr need acceptance from all you outsiders)  
2023  
humble materials





*epilogue pt.1;*

*it aint ova,*

*the party aint ova*

left: image courtesy of bimpé fageyinbo

mentally im infinitely brooklyn  
only move in love  
if it 2016, im not cool  
about love  
nothing but love



*bibliography*

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*footnotes*

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3. “Arthur Jafa: Studio Visit (Seen).” YouTube, 14 Dec. 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=coTGOWC4COA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coTGOWC4COA).

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6. ““a Big Part of What I Do Is Just Compiling Images.’ | Artist Arthur Jafa | Louisiana Channel.” YouTube, 28 Oct. 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujb3a-Y2zkw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujb3a-Y2zkw).

7. Golden, Thelma, and Hamza Walker. Freestyle. Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001.



*epilogue pt.2;*  
*its wa godspeed*

