



Making Waves: An Odyssey through Black Cinema

Embark on a monthlong journey with 29 films that explore the legacy and impact of Black film.

Alexandra Warner, DaeQuan Alexander Collier, Melissa Lyde, Sam Pollard, Stephanye Watts, Yasmina Price

Feb 1, 2024

***She Gather Me.* 2021. Miatta Kawinzi**

Multidisciplinary artist Miatta Kawinzi's *She Gather Me* was a discovery from a superb program at Maysles Documentary Center, curated by filmmaker Christopher Harris. For me, Miatta's art exists in the space you inhabit when you close your eyes and drift into the in-between, a poetic invocation of levitating. *She Gather Me* is titled after a line from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and invites witnesses into a refuge of remembrance. It was filmed over three years in New York and various locations around the world. Every detailed frame is filled with images and sounds that exude the fragrance of Miatta's labor and love. I am deeply moved by her commitment to memorializing the brilliance of Black women, in film, song, science, and sacrifice. This work is already an iconic contribution to Black millennial women's video art. —**ML**

The Art of Pain and Discomfort

Claudia Ross | Reviews | 18 August 2022 | ArtReview



Judy Chicago, *Immolation*, from the series *Women and Smoke*, 1972, archival pigment print, 102 x 102 cm. Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

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The Condition of Being Addressable at ICA LA takes its lead from Judith Butler to mine the spaces where bodies, language and visual life collide

Is language an affliction? The exhibition's title quotes theorist Judith Butler's response to a question about why 'language is hurtful', excerpted in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). For Butler, language is one distressing result of sharing a world with other people. We are exposed to each other and create categories (race, sexuality, gender) that constrain unique subjectivities. These categories, for guest curators Marcelle Joseph and Legacy Russell, appear in the strange, violent collisions of language and visual life, uniting 25 international, intergenerational artists in this exploration of identity, visibility and power.

Pain and discomfort are central in the exhibition. In Judy Chicago's *Immolation* (1972), red smoke obscures the nude body of a female figure in green body paint. Evoking political events of the era, her pose recalls those of the Vietnamese monks who set fire to themselves in protest against the Vietnam War. Elsewhere, Jessica Vaughn's *After Willis (rubbed, used and moved) #012* (2022) rearranges the worn, stained seats from Chicago public transit vehicles historically used to bus Black students into predominantly white schools, placing them vertically along a wall. Fifty years apart, Vaughn and Chicago recontextualise the material results of oppressive governmental policy, reckoning with the destructive ways state power affects marginalised groups.



Jessica Vaughn, *After Willis (rubbed, used, and moved) #012*, 2022. 36 individual pairs of used machine fabricated public transit train seats (Chicago Transit Authority 1998-2011), 248.9 x 571.5 x 0.6 cm. Courtesy the artist.



Tiona Nekkia McClodden, *The Backlight 5.10.2016*, 2016. Digital C-print on Hahnemuhle Fine Art Barya, 61 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Photography and video contends with how omnipresent technologies both enable and negate the representation of the body: in Tiona Nekkia McClodden's *The Backlight 5.10.2016* (2016), a smartphone camera flashes at the artist's lens. The bright light illuminates a white jacket, throwing the rest of the image into dark contrast and rendering the photograph's Black subject inseparable from the background. Anaïs Duplan, in *The Lovers Are the Audience Who Watch* (2019), 'datamoshes' frames of found footage from popular music videos and documentaries, a technique that partially destroys digital images and text, forcing faces and scenes to melt into one another. Miatta Kawinzi's *sweat/tears/sea* (2017) features a first-person speaker who is broken down over the video's course, resulting in disjointed letters placed over images of beachy landscapes. Image-based technology allows us to capture ourselves, but only under its terms, fracturing the depiction of subjectivity.

Joseph and Russell take a broad approach to Butler's ideas: here, language produces a landscape of images, icons and symbols that is both inevitable and confounding. These are works that contend with the complex, painful processes of identity and self-making, ruminating on the relationships between people and power, body and earth, language and living.

The Condition of Being Addressable at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, through 4 September

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Prismatic Ground Year Two: Documentary Waves



by James Hansen in Festivals & Events on May 4, 2022

Prismatic Ground

In the introduction to their co-edited collection *Documentary Across Disciplines*, Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg articulate contemporary documentary practice not as a category or genre, but “an attitude – a way of doing, engaging, and creating that accords primacy to the multiple and mutable realities of the world.” Emerging from the Berlin Documentary Forum, the collection embraces a vision of global documentary that spans “film, photography, contemporary art, anthropology, performance, architecture, cultural history, and theory.” If this sounds like a lot—it is, because it is. Still, rather than become amorphous in the ways terms like “glitch” or “expanded”-as-an-adjective have become, documentary retains a crucial connection to actuality, even while questions of uncertainty and authenticity remain paramount.

The sprawling and wildly ambitious second edition of *Prismatic Ground* (taking place May 4-8) is clearly committed to documentary across disciplines. Launched last year as a virtual festival, Prismatic Ground pivots to a hybrid model this year, with events taking place at the co-hosting Maysles Documentary Center, as well as the Museum of the Moving Image and Anthology Film Archives. For non-New Yorkers, most films in the programs (entitled “waves”) are also available for streaming during the festival’s five-day duration. This year’s edition has exploded from last year’s relatively modest four waves into an overwhelming panoply of 13, ranging from 40 to 210 minutes (!!!), as well as in-person only opening night, centerpiece and closing night programs.

Centered on experimental documentary and avant-garde film, each wave takes a somewhat thematic focus, though the titles suggest something more oblique (wave 1: look at that round ass shit; wave 3: memory of memory; wave 5: after months of total darkness; etc.) Creatively curated by Inney Prakash, each wave’s films speak to each other from quite different formal terrains. Numerous short films precede features; silent, abstract films play alongside talking-head portraits of individuals. If audience members are looking for a consistent mode documentary (or experimental) practice, they have come to the wrong place.

Some of the most exciting work in Prismatic Ground is also the most confounding, of which “Wave 3: Memory of Memory” is emblematic. Camila Galaz’s *Vecino Vecino* presents a complex form of archival activism, beginning from degraded video footage. The camera sits in the backseat of a car while a man whose face is obscured in shadow speaks Spanish. A woman’s voice provides a live translation in English, setting the scene as July 1986, a day when a cameraman is accompanying the driver to witness daily activities of the Lautaro (MAPU Lautaro) youth movement, a guerilla resistance organization during (and after) the Chilean military dictatorship. The video shifts to a different man sitting on a couch with his arms crossed, a subtitle identifying him as “Gabriel Valdes, Démocratie chrétienne.” He speaks English while a French translator speaks over him. The footage comes from a French documentary about MAPU Lautaro and is the first—and most simple—of a series of alterations over the course of the film’s 21-minute runtime. *Vecino Vecino* moves through a shot-by-shot visual analysis of documentary footage before the frame is invaded by rapidly scrawled pink text defining key Spanish terms overheard in the footage. Later, contemporary studio reenactments of precise movements in the video footage disrupt the authenticity of the historical documentary with implied staging and performance. Additional Instagram Live footage of 2019 protests fully enmeshes the viewer in a trans-historical, multimedia dialogue with alternative forms of power and protest.

Titled after a line from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Miatta Kawinzi’s *SHE GATHER ME* works across analogue and digital media forms to reflect on sonic, textual and visual evocations of the African diaspora. The film immediately establishes a sense of multiplicity and dislocation as the frame is filled by a shot of train tracks whizzing by; overlaid on the right, a smaller 16:9 frame displays a shot of the ocean rocking back and forth. Meanwhile, a voice softly sings on the soundtrack, “dat ol / black gal / keep on grumbilin’” as the lyrics appear on the edges of the larger frame. (End credits explain the song is an interpretation of a Black American work song for railroad spiking archived by Zora Neale Hurston). The image vanishes, leaving a breathy soundscape as fractured words spread across the screen like written poetry. When images return, multiple frames that were overlaid are now side-by-side, creating a dual channel separation that is nonetheless intimately interconnected. With footage from South Africa, the Dominican Republic and several locations in the United States, Kawinzi carefully constructs the transformation of stable ground into something more, um, prismatic.

Various modes of portraiture emerged across the waves, of which Younes Ben Slimane’s *We Knew How Beautiful They Were, These Islands* is perhaps the most evocative. Shot in deep chiaroscuro reminiscent of Pedro Costa, Slimane showcases the labor of a lone gravedigger. The man never speaks, though he does acknowledge the camera when revealing personal objects of the deceased. There is at least one completely startling moment amidst this object study where the tone of mournful isolation skirts the edge of horror. At the same time, Slimane refuses to psychologize his subject, preferring instead his tools of light and time to speak volumes.

Paige Taul’s *Goat* is a lovely micro-portrait of a young girl and her basketball sneakers, namely mid-top retro Air Jordan 1s. In 16mm black-and-white cinematography, the girl carefully describes the sneaker design before confidently commenting on girls becoming more interested in sneaker culture and the overall versatility of the shoe. Does she wear the shoe, or does the shoe wear her? Though it feels slight and understated, Taul’s shots of the girl leaping off the ground, trying desperately to reach out and touch the net, suggest the power and promise of self-confidence.

Rajee Samarasinghe’s *Strangers* takes a more reflective tone in portraying the reunion of his aunt Kamala and mother, who lived with Kamala in Sri Lanka after being sent away from her own parents and siblings for a number of years as a child. Samarasinghe shows Kamala as herself but recasts his mother as a young girl, perhaps the age at which she first arrived to Kamala’s home. Early on, the film shows one old photograph of the “real” aunt and mother together; however, for the rest of the film, the figures remain apart, rarely (if ever) sharing the same physical space, an effect enhanced further by anamorphic lens distortion, while another moment in which they share cinematic space is abstracted via reversal film stock. Meanwhile, Samarasinghe highlights the changing landscape of Sri Lanka with an unexpected color sequence along with recurring motifs of broken reflections, decay and death. *Strangers* is difficult to pin down but, taken as a film portrait of both individuals and their landscape, it conveys a clear sense of abstraction and alienation.

Like *Vecino Vecino*, Michael McCanne and Jamie Weiss’s *A Minor Figure* unfolds in fascinating, unexpected ways. Asking “What happens to the person history forgets?” the film tells the story of a “he” who arrived in New York from a plane in Tokyo. A woman narrates in Japanese as various archival documents (passports, photographs, innocuous location footage, etc.) pass by on screen. “He” buys a used car from a salesman in the Bronx who remembers him as quiet and friendly. “He” wants to see America. As the archival images pile up, revealing maps, hotel rooms, and, eventually, explosives, the tone becomes eerily disquieting. What emerges is an event and a person I was unaware of—yet, for so much of the 17-minute run time, *A Minor Figure* comes across as a familiar, almost routine exploration of America and its mythology, wondering how ideologies become deeply embedded in spaces, cultures and individuals.

A Minor Figure’s archival impulse is apparent throughout a number of waves. Jason Osder’s *Condition/Decondition* highlights three short films found in the Navy Motion Picture Archives (1939-47) of subjects identified as Combat Psychiatric Casualties A, B, and C. Over on-the-ground footage of sailors under attack, rapidly loading and firing weapons at assailants in the sky and on the sea, Osder uses the *Manual of Military Neuropsychiatry* to postulate on the actions seen. By mimicking actual battle, the manual says, soldiers become desensitized to stress and, thereby, when battles take place, soldiers respond in a desensitized way. Osder indicates the military’s strategic use of pre-enactment and representation for psychiatric conditioning without even a hint of considering the consequences. An inverse form of psychiatric conditioning appears in Merete Mueller’s *Blue Room*, in which participants within two US prisons take part in a “mental health experiment” by watching nature videos on loop. When one participant describes thinking about the room where he watches the nature videos when he sees glimpses of trees outside, one only hopes that deconditioning is still possible.

While it doesn’t actively recondition psychic spaces, Libertad Gillis and Martin Baus’s *open sky / open sea / open ground* achieves maximum effect by reorienting visual and sonic expectations of space. Using distinctive blue and red filters on rapidly edited shots of sky and sea, the film’s chaotic presentation whizzes through space, adopting a subjective bird’s-eye view of a topsy-turvy world. Enhanced by a jarring soundtrack of harsh whips of air and underwater gurgles, the film unsettles representational expectations and coordinates a unique terrain for human-animal relationships. Linnea Nugent’s *A Vessel, the Ideas Pass Through* also starts with images of birds—Pigeons in the case— and similarly quickly unsettles our expectations of the image and perceptual understanding. Elliptical and extremely enigmatic, the film initially appears as barely perceptible flashes of light, as if a flashlight is being waved around in darkness. The sounds of insects rise into a punctuating reverberation, while the images become even less stable. Fluttering either through an extremely distorted lens or perhaps an image processor, nearly indecipherable images of landscapes, statues, and birds flicker in and out of sight, from darkness to light and back again. Prismatic Ground will surely be introducing many new artists to its audiences—Nugent is certainly one to watch.

Meanwhile, purely sonic, imageless narratives reveal themselves in Pablo Alvarez-Mesa’s *Infinite Distances*, a 25-minute soundpiece (film?) composed of found answering machine recordings. Though it takes a little while to settle in place, once some characters and themes begin to emerge (the asshole of a dude named Rob, ongoing frustration with callbacks, medical scares, missed dinners, nearly identical messages with multiple time stamps), I found myself admiring both the ambition and conceptual thrust of the piece. Longing to see and connect with people, places, persons on the other side of the phone line requires (or, perhaps, asks for) a form of visualization of something that cannot be seen in the moment. Do you imagine what someone else is doing when they aren’t there? How many times do you call before you start worrying—or stop calling? Will you ever see them again? What would that mean? For whatever it says about documentary as a discipline, Prismatic Ground’s programs time and again lead into a serious reflection on our methods of communication. What is it that we need to see or hear to connect with another? What is it that is necessary to visualize, commemorate, and document our friends, our past, our histories? Prismatic Ground doesn’t provide one answer, which is part of what makes the festival so rich, timely, and necessary.



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NEWS

September 20, 2021

Miatta Kawinzi Illuminates Spaces of Connection and Possibility Across Place, Space, and Time

Lineage, cultural hybridity and multiplicity, the liberatory and regenerative potential of softness, and the deep and steady yearning for the reparative are fundamental to the Fall 2021 Teiger Mentor in the Arts.

By Patti Witten

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Miatta Kawinzi, Untitled (Santo Domingo) (2019), digital photograph, dimensions variable. photo / provided

Brooklyn-based multi-disciplinary artist, writer, and educator Miatta Kawinzi is a Kenyan-Liberian-American raised in Tennessee and Kentucky. In her practice, she traces the various complexities of the global African diaspora, exploring questions around hierarchy, Indigeneity across continents, multiplicities and complexities of Blackness, cultural fragmentation, and what she calls "the deep and steady yearning for the reparative."

Kawinzi's recent work has taken the form of sculptural multi-media installation, analog and digital film/video, soundscape, and embodied photography.

"My work is driven by questions and my process of making often involves embodied research, travel, and improvisation as I trace ideas through different forms, piecing together fragments into larger wholes," she says. "I see poetics, appearing as constellations of text and language across different media, as a connecting thread."



Installation views at CUE Art Foundation, New York City. Left: *SHE GATHER ME* (2021), HD color video and 16mm color film transferred to video with two-channel audio, three wooden rocking chairs, silver mylar floor. Right: *SHE GATHER ME* (2021), detail. The title is taken from a character and dialogue in Toni Morrison's 1987 novel, *Beloved*. images / provided

Kawinzi's Black U.S. Southern cultural background and familial influences from Liberia, West Africa, and Kenya are deeply evident as she engages an ongoing exploration around cultural hybridity and multiplicity. She finds radical possibility in what she calls an exploration of the liberatory and regenerative potential and language of softness, "illuminating and questioning structures of hardness, meditating on dual notions of fragility and strength."

The exploration of softness has roots in her personal life.

"Growing up I was always called 'sensitive,' sometimes dismissively," she says. "Yet I have come to embrace this attentiveness to the world around me as a rich place from which to reflect on connectivity. There are many restrictive societal tropes in the U.S. surrounding Black women and unflappable stoicism. I find it important to deliberately claim and expand on softness as well."



Detail from *New Patterns* (2021), colored pencil on paper transferred to digital print; inset *The fragrance of our blooming* (2021), archival pigment print, 20" x 24". image / provided

"Currently, I am turning to my maternal familial lineage to expand on research and creative interpretation that thinks through historical, contemporary, and speculative relationships between the U.S. and Liberia — the West African nation founded in the 1800s in part by the American Colonization Society and as a destination for Black people to return to the continent from the Americas," she says.

"As always, with this work, I am seeking to find and illuminate spaces of connection, renewal, and possibility across time, space, and geography."

"This contemporary moment feels incredibly fraught, and that makes the impulse to *feel* even more important to cultivating spaces from which to consider and enact alternative possibilities, together." Miatta Kawinzi, 2021 Teiger Mentor in the Arts



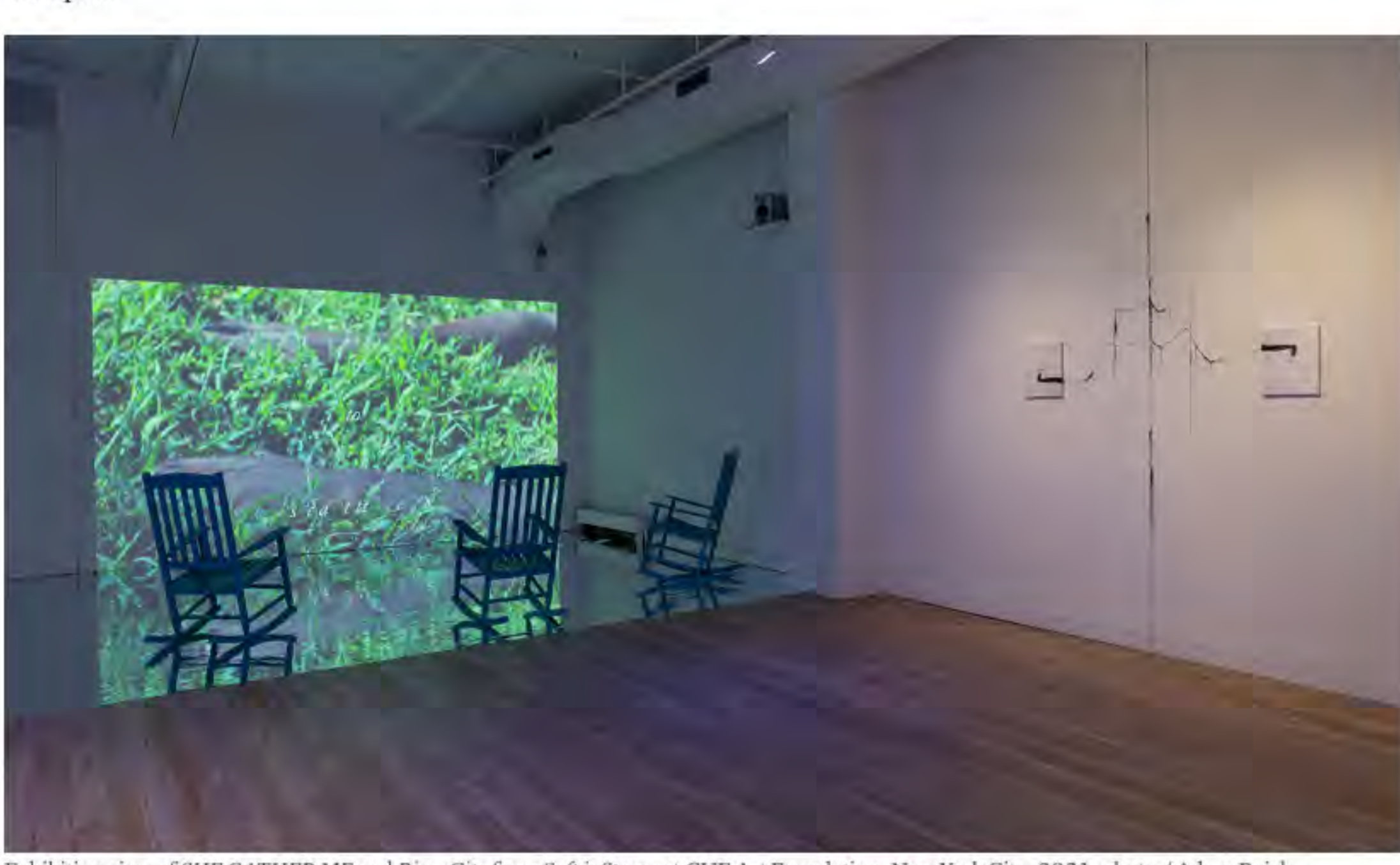
Libration (2019), HD color video projection, four-channel audio, elastic, thread, installation view from *Resident Artist Exhibition* at Red Bull Arts Detroit, Detroit, Michigan. photo / provided

"The Department of Art is pleased to invite Miatta Kawinzi's teachings and share her voice with our students and the Cornell community," says Paul Ramirez Jonas, department chair. "As an artist focused on radical possibility and reimagining, her mentorship and dialogue with graduate students in their studios this fall will bring unique insight into our current moment, both culturally and as it relates to art practice, and so immense value to the development of their creative practices."

Kawinzi also looks forward to thinking with and alongside M.F.A. students in both classroom and studio environments. Her graduate seminar is thematically centered around the idea of "imagining otherwise," after artist and scholar Ashon Crawley's concept of "otherwise" as a space of radical possibility.

"For me," she says, "teaching is always about a reciprocal exchange creating space within the classroom to consider and imagine things differently."

In addition to studio visits and her seminar, Kawinzi will present an **artist talk** titled *Notes on Possibility*, on September 30 at 5:15 p.m.



Exhibition view of *SHE GATHER ME* and *River City* from *Soft is Strong* at CUE Art Foundation, New York City, 2021. photo / Adam Reich.

Kawinzi's work has been presented in New York City at CUE Art Foundation, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Museum of the Moving Image, as well as MoMA PopRally and Red Bull Arts Detroit, among other spaces. She is the recipient of the 2021-22 Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, the 2021 New York Artadia Award, the 2019 Bemis Center Alumni Award, and the 2018 Barbara Hammer Lesbian Experimental Filmmaking Grant administered by Queer|Art. She has taught at Hampshire College and the University of Richmond, and her artist residencies include the Tulsa Artist Fellowship, P.O.V. Spark in partnership with the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture (New York City, Washington, DC, and Venice); and the Cité International des Arts in Paris.

The Teiger Mentor in the Arts is a program in AAP's Department of Art that hosts internationally acclaimed artists to work with fine art students.

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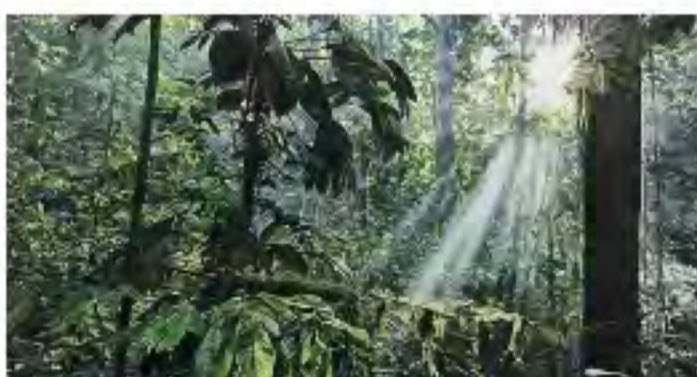
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- Miatta Kawinzi's Website
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“Miatta Kawinzi: Soft is Strong” in “Your Concise New York Art Guide for May 2021.” Hyperallergic. Dessane Lopez Cassell and Cassie Packard. 4 May, 2021.
<<https://hyperallergic.com/643473/new-york-art-guide-may-2021/>>

Miatta Kawinzi: Soft is Strong



Installation view of Miatta Kawinzi_ *Soft is Strong* at Cue Art Foundation (image courtesy the artist and Cue Art Foundation, photo by Miatta Kawinzi)

When: through May 12

Where: CUE Art Foundation (137 W 25th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan)

A warm, patient embrace of an exhibition, Miatta Kawinzi’s *Soft is Strong* offers a balm for the frazzle and fragmentation of the present. Fittingly titled, the exhibition mulls ideas of belonging, hybridity, and regeneration across media, its references rooted in the literary traditions of Black feminism. *SHE GATHER ME* (2021), Kawinzi’s video installation titled after a line from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, is a particular highlight. Catch it before it’s gone.

HYPERALLERGIC

FEATURES

Queer Artists in Their Own Words: Miatta Kawinzi Carries a Heart of Hope

LGBTQ Pride Month is now. Every day in June, we are celebrating the community by featuring one queer and letting them speak for themselves.



Zachary Small June 9, 2019

The month of June is a time to celebrate the LGBTQ community and reflect on the advances of queer people to strengthen civil liberties around the world, even in a moment of great political uncertainty. It's also a good opportunity to spotlight the richness and diversity of culture we have within the community. Hyperallergic is commemorating Pride Month by featuring one contemporary queer artist per day on the website and letting them speak for themselves. [Click here to participate.](#)

Miatta Kawinzi

Age: 32

Location: Brooklyn, New York

Artistic Medium: Video, sound, sculpture, performance, and installation



Miatta Kawinzi with her installation “breath/string/body” at the Cité internationale des arts in Paris (2018) (image courtesy the artist)

Who are you and what do

you do?

I am a multidisciplinary artist, writer, an educator. Born in Nashville, Tennessee to a Liberian mother and Kenyan father and now based in Brooklyn, I grew up moving through various geographic, cultural, and linguistic spaces, which informs my work and my interest in hybridity and layered imagery and content. I work with images, objects, sound, space, the body, and language to explore practices of reimagining the self, identity, and culture through abstraction and poetics. I am invested in exploring and questioning themes of selfhood, diaspora, and belonging. In recent work, I trace performative and experimental impulse by abstracting the body through sculptural sound and video installation. My work proposes techniques of experimentation as a means to imagine the body, language, social structures, and social relationships differently.

What are the top three greatest influences on your work?

Currently, string theory (always striving for harmony), African diasporic culture (the treasure trove is endless!), and walking (a praxis to witness and understand the world).

Describe your coffee order.

Dark roast with raw honey.

What is your greatest accomplishment?

Still carrying a heart of hope in the face of ongoing heaviness.

What constitutes a perfect day?

Thinking, making, and connecting without anxiety of scarcity.

What would your superpower be if you had one?

To fly.

Tell us a lie about yourself.

I have a trust fund!

What is one question you wish somebody would ask about your work?

What do you need to keep this going?

What is the greatest threat to humanity?

As Octavia Butler expounded upon: the drive for hierarchy.

What did you make when you first started making art?

Elaborate fantasy stories on floppy disks in elementary school, strange looping drawings with disembodied heads and layered eyes, pointillist landscapes imagining an Elsewhere.

Do you prefer spilling the tea or throwing shade?

Throwing shade but spoken sweetly, for everyone is doing their best. I hope!

What is your all-time favorite work of art?

Senga Nengudi's [R.S.V.P.](#) series. The stretch. The strain. The resilience.

What are your plans for pride month?

Letting my feet catch up to my body after many months of constant movement. Reconnecting with folks over home-cooked meals. Making our own celebrations.

What is the future of queerness?

Transcending time, transcending space.

Back in my day..

We chased lightning bugs and made up worlds in the woods.

Greatest queer icon of the internet: Babadook, Momo, or a pervading sense of existential angst?

A pervading sense of existential angst.

Is there enough support for queer artists where you live?

Nope, especially not for folks from low-income backgrounds, who are dark-skinned, who do not fit the glossy, mainstream-peddled mode.

How do you stay cool during the summer?

Following the water.

“Queer Artists in Their Own Words” is an ongoing feature happening every day in the month of June. For prior posts in the series, [please click here](#).

Miatta Kawinzi’s video work directly across from the hair wall makes a germane complement to it: an overhead web of elastic strips sewn together must be navigated through, whether visually or physically, in order to watch the video being projected on the wall, which is obscured slightly by the web, creating an intentional partial silhouette. The web, Miatta explained, is a wall that can be traversed, which relates to the content of the video, derived from the artist going on walks around Detroit and negotiating her way through crumbling walls of abandoned buildings, holes in fences, and other surmountable barriers. She was also thinking of string theory and the idea that you could exist both here and somewhere else simultaneously. Ambient singing plays overhead as well as snaps, a DIY soundtrack recorded in the shared studio provided by the residency. “I came across a text about spiders. I found out that spiders tune the strings of their web like a guitar, which is how they sense their prey. I became obsessed with this idea,” the artist explained. Understanding an environment through sound, as well as movement through space being simultaneously restricted and free, which is expressed through her physical presence on the screen, her slow, methodical movements set to her own music, became her central focus—especially in Detroit, where all these ideas actively coalesce (music defines the city, movement defines residents’ relationship to it). Poetry enters the work as well, letters dispersed across the screen must be pieced together, the words sometimes coming together, sometimes not. “English is a colonial language. I wanted to find my own relationship to it by breaking it up and specializing it, find a space of empowerment within.”



Above: Stills from 'Libration', by Miatta Kawinzi

ARTFORUM

NEWS



Red Bull Arts Detroit 2019 residents and fellows.
December 27, 2018 at 10:30am

RED BULL ARTS DETROIT ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF EXPANDED RESIDENCY AND FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Red Bull Arts Detroit, the experimental arts program and exhibition space located in the historic E&B Brewery in the city's Eastern Market, has named nine artists who will participate in its newly expanded residency program and the recipients of its new writing and curatorial fellowships. Red Bull Arts revealed that it planned to ramp up its contemporary art initiatives in Detroit earlier this year.

According to the organization, the 2019 residency and fellowship cycle will provide artists, curators, writers, and thinkers the space, time, and resources necessary to push their practices forward. Selected from a pool of 665 artists, seventy-nine curators, and seventy-seven writers, the sixteen awardees will be provided with access to a 14,000-square-foot studio space and on-site living accommodations. They will also be introduced to Detroit's creative community and have the opportunity to engage with visiting curators and writers. Each residency cycle will culminate in a group exhibition.

The selection committee comprised Deana Haggag, president and CEO of United States Artists; Detroit native and poet Airea D. Matthews; Lucy Mensah, visiting assistant professor of museum and exhibition studies at the University of Illinois in Chicago; independent curator Laura Raicovich, the former president and executive director of the Queens Museum in New York; and dancer and choreographer John Michael Schert.

“I love the range of this program—from the span of practice, to the resources it provides, to how it simultaneously supports artists working in Detroit as well as welcomes those from elsewhere to be in residence in a remarkable city,” Haggag said. “We’re all very excited about the first cohort of artists, writers, and curators selected to inaugurate the residency, and are animated by each of their practices individually and the breadth they represent collectively.”

Raicovich added: “It wasn’t easy to narrow the field, but the residents selected reveal a great deal about the concerns and interests of artists working right now, and the urgencies they seek to address through an extraordinary diversity of means and craft. I can’t wait to see what each of them does with their time in residence.”

Working in a diverse range of disciplines, including performance art, wearable sculpture, new media, dance, photography, and ceramics, and with areas of focus such as post-colonial identity politics; the African diaspora; standards of economic vitality; material culture of 90s hip-hop; and consumerism, the awardees are as follows:

Artists-in-Residence

Holly Bass

Pamela Council

Kearra Amaya Gopee

Miatta Kawinzi

Claire Lachow

Tiff Massey

Michael Polakowski

Patrick Quarm

Hui-Ying Tsai

Visiting Writing Fellows

Dana Bassett

Andrew Berardini

Brian Droitcour

William E. Jones

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko

Ruslana Lichtzier

Curatorial Fellow

Taraneh Fazeli

ALL IMAGES

NEWS



Miatta Kawinzi.
December 06, 2018 at 1:12pm

SECOND BARBARA HAMMER LESBIAN EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING GRANT AWARDED TO MIATTA KAWINZI

The New York–based filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist Miatta Kawinzi has been named the winner of the second Barbara Hammer Lesbian Experimental Filmmaking Grant. Kawinzi received the honor at the IFC Center in New York’s Greenwich Village during a celebration held on Wednesday night. Administered by the nonprofit Queer|Art, the \$5,000 grant will support the making of the new film installation *SHE GATHER ME*.

Known for creating sculptural sound and video installations on the themes of selfhood, diaspora, and belonging, Kawinzi was chosen from a pool of ninety-four applicants. Her work *SHE GATHER ME*, named after a line from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, will combine analog and digital film and video, abstracted soundscapes, and sculptural elements in an installation that will explore the language of bodily gesture as an alternative form of communication. After the piece is completed by June of 2020, Kawinzi plans to document its exhibition and use the footage to create a new iteration of the work, which she will submit to film festivals.

Kawinzi's work has been exhibited at institutions such as BRIC, A.I.R. Gallery, and Anthology Film Archives, as well as the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Aljira Center for Contemporary Art, New Jersey; and the FNB Joburg Art Fair, South Africa. The judges for this year's grant were Carmel Curtis, a film digitization specialist at Indiana University's Libraries Moving Image Archive; video artist, photographer, and writer Cecilia Dougherty; and video artist Ayanna U'Dongo. Shortlisted artists included Kim Anno, Erica Cho, Kimberlee Veneble, and collaborators Anna Burholt and Tandis Shoushtray.

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'Alchemy' at BRIC, Brooklyn

BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS July 19, 2018 4:32pm



Installation view of "Alchemy," 2018, at BRIC, Brooklyn.

JASON WYCHE

Pictures at an Exhibition presents images of one notable show every weekday.

Today's show: "Alchemy" is on view at BRIC in Brooklyn, New York, through Sunday, August 12. The group exhibition, curated by **Elizabeth Ferrer** and **Jenny Gerow**, features work by **Nicole Awai**, **Borinquen Gallo**, **Kennedy Yanko**, **Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels**, **Anna Riley**, **Phoebe Grip**, **Miatta Kawinzi**, and **Nana Poco**, among others.

01



Installation view of "Alchemy," 2018, at BRIC, Brooklyn.

JASON WYCHE

Installation view of "Alchemy," 2018, at BRIC, Brooklyn.

JASON WYCHE

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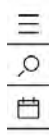
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Art in America



Picturing Their Own Harlem

In July, The Studio Museum in Harlem opened the summer season with *Their Own Harlems*. The title of the exhibition comes from an interview Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) conducted with the Archives of American Art in 1968. In the interview, he comments on his early career spent living in Harlem; Lawrence believed that people of African descent could find similarly powerful and positive experiences in “their own Harlems.”



Miatta Kawinzi, *Streetspeak* (detail), 2016. Courtesy the artist

The exhibition, organized in honor of the centennial of the birth of Lawrence, explores this idea of life in the city and looks at how the urban environment has inspired work by artists in the Studio Museum’s permanent collection. I spoke to Frank Stewart and Miatta Kawinzi, two of the artists in the exhibition, about their work and what Harlem means to them.

For Frank Stewart, Harlem is revealed through the camera lens. While attending Cooper Union in the late 1960s, Stewart landed a job with Romare Bearden. The opportunity to work alongside an artistic figurehead of the Harlem Renaissance was pivotal: Stewart learned firsthand about the culture of “Old Harlem” from someone who had been a direct participant and a primary contributor. Stewart returned to Harlem in the ‘70s and sought to rediscover the glory of Old Harlem that he had experienced while working for Bearden. In *Secret Societies* (1978) we see a gathering of black Masons in front of a home. The bright white gloves, shining chain, and crisp aprons with masonic symbols provide telltale signs of the meeting about to take place. The history of black Masons dates back to 1812 when the first lodge was established in New York City under the name African Lodge of New York.

While Stewart is interested in capturing Old Harlem, Miatta Kawinzi embraces the energy and dynamism of the Harlem we know today. *Streetspeak* was originally created for the Summer 2016 edition of Harlem Postcards at the Studio Museum. In expressing her vision for *Streetspeak*, Kawinzi describes Harlem as a state of mind. “It is the assertion of self,” she explains, “a particular jaunt of the hat and jangle of bracelets on brown skin.” In *Streetspeak*, we can see the visual translation of this assertion of self. The four pairs of hands framing each side recall the gestures used to call out or point to people on the street. This acknowledgement of people is further emphasized by the use of the text “my sista” in the middle of the work. The words operate in a multiplicity of meanings, as words of “affirmation, a recognition of kinship, a demonstration of solidarity.”

Stewart and Kawinzi acknowledge Harlem through their respective practices. Stewart’s photographs work to preserve the past while Kawinzi’s images capture the energy of communication in the present. Working in different mediums, both artists present Harlem in a positive and hopeful light. Stewart puts it best when he says, “For me, and I think for most of black America, Harlem is like Camelot: it remains in our minds with glittering romance and unending optimism.”

—Abigail Kim

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OF SOIL AND TONGUES

CURATED BY AMY HALLIDAY AND JOCELYN EDENS 06F
6.1-10.1 2017
HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE ART GALLERY



Of Soil and Tongues

The *Of Soil and Tongues* exhibition at the Hampshire College Art Gallery, which wrapped up on October 1, had its roots in an invitation to three alums: **lê thi diem thúy 90F**, **Miatta Kawinzi 07F**, and **Sahar Muradi 98F**, who collaborated with **Laimah Osman** of Parsons, The New School. “Install poems in space,” the curators told them, “considering poetry as a form that is heard, read, graphic, performed, and embodied.” So thúy adapted a novel-in-progress, joining utterances from Emmett Till and naming the victims of the My Lai massacre in a study of American violence and exceptionalism. And Miatta mixed footage from the west coast of Puerto Rico with slowed-down shots of her own body defying rules of gravity, leading viewers to experience her work in nonlinear time. Sahar and Laimah presented two graphic series on the heartache and play of learning to voice a mother tongue. Each of the artists gave shape to places while inviting the witnesses who visited the gallery, on the library’s lower level, to follow horizons and rivers, dashes and diacritics, seams and sutures. What follow are insights into the creative process as described during a panel discussion with the artists, and images of the creations themselves.


“You’re all recovering histories, summoning histories and creating counter-narratives, invested in embodied research.”

"I'd like to drag a river in the United States through a ravine in a village in Vietnam. There are some people I need to get off the ground."

MODERATOR: About seven months ago we sent you an email. "We're interested in having a conversation with you about language, about poetry in a space and a place. Thinking about poetry as a read form, but also a heard form and an embodied form, we're wondering what it might look like in the Hampshire gallery." We're curious. What was your process for working through this prompt? Was there a question you were trying to answer, a puzzle you were looking to solve?

LÊ THI DIEM THÚY: I was in my kitchen when I got the email, leaning against the counter. My partner came home and I said, "Peter, I got this email inviting me to . . . I'm not even sure what." I came

to campus to meet the curators, and I was wearing like a Thelonious Monk hat and I remember not taking it off during the whole meeting. I think we met for two hours. Initially I thought I wanted the space where the William Calley quote is. I claimed it that day. I said, "I'd like that space because it's tall, narrow, and you could easily walk right by it." I thought I'd hang a headphone in the two-foot space playing a recorded piece of mine, and that would be that. Then I proposed expanding a project I'd been working on that never really came together, a libretto about young Vietnamese women who had served on the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the war. I thought maybe I could bring that into this space. About a week later I wrote and said, "Heads up, I'm not going to do that. What I'd like to do is something related to the novel I've been writing. I'd like to drag a river in one country, the United States, through a ravine in a village in another country, Vietnam.



In this story I drag a river through a ravine because there are some people I need to get off the ground.

I originally had no idea what that meant in the context of this space. But I wanted to work with the fact that a wall divides this space. I wanted my piece to move along the wall, so when you're in the heart of either side, the other side isn't visible. But there are connections conceptually between them, like the ghosted tracings that permeate the wall. And on each side are two moments in American history documented photographically. *Photography*, in the Greek, is "to write with light," and I wanted to create a piece that has a quality of light. It's dark in its subject

but has the quality of light, of grace, in a sense. So we have an open casket and a mother's words, "I want the world to see what they did to my son," or the My Lai photographs by Ronald Haeberle, where all the villagers are lying on the ground. I wanted to pull the river, the Mississippi River, not north to south but west to east, across and over. Its current would be so strong it could move bodies. It could move them from night into daylight.



“My piece was sparked by an itinerant seminar in Puerto Rico. The work reflects on how landscapes tell stories, and how space is regulated.”

SAHAR MURADI: It's a dream to be given an opportunity, the autonomy, to create, to think about your poetry, to have no limit on how you might imagine. I was delighted. Then it became . . . madness. I started to imagine crazy things, which Laimah will attest to.

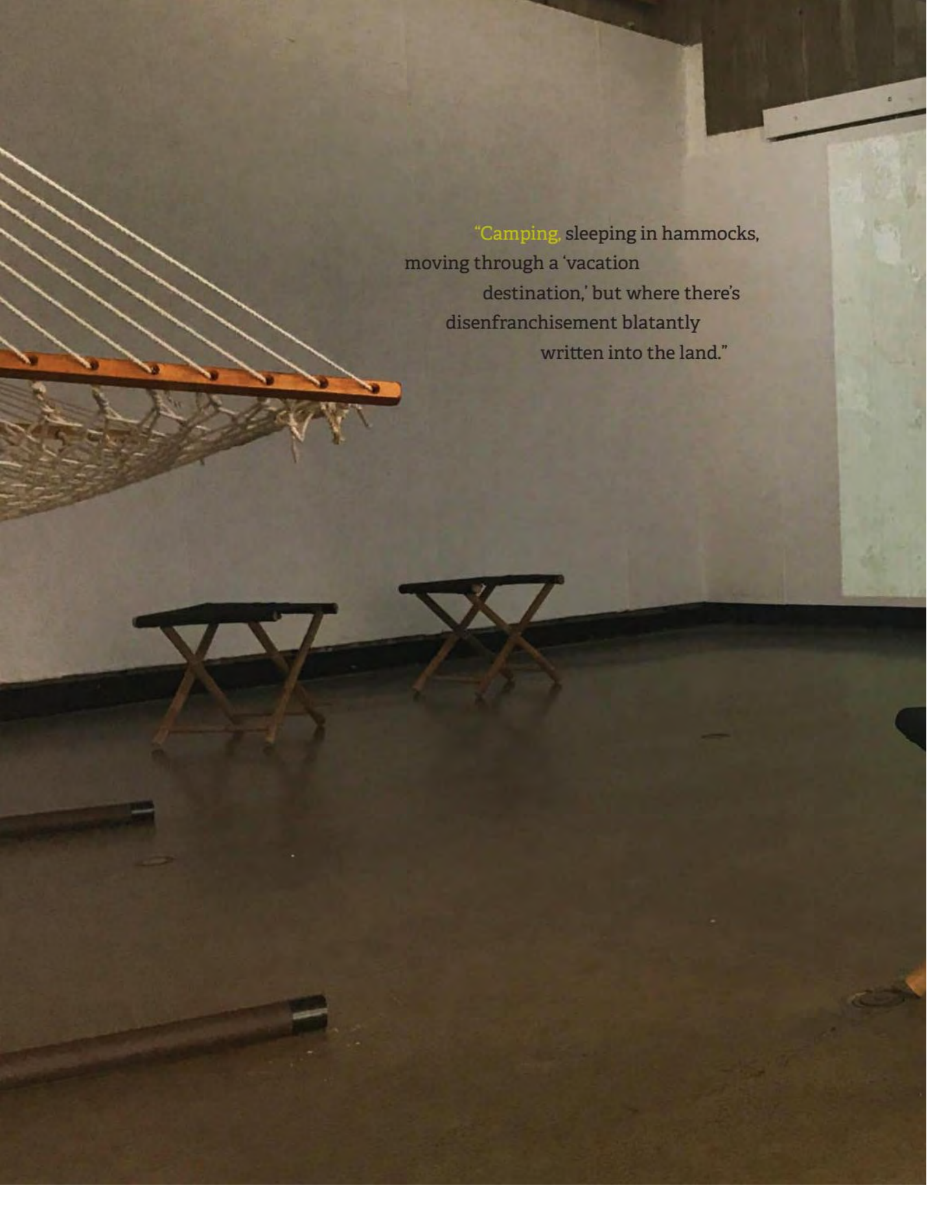
LAIMAH OSMAN: I remember that.

SAHAR MURADI: I do work with paper, book objects and collage. And I love ephemera, my family's ephemera. I've saved all these handwritten notes from my parents growing up that were half English, half Dari. My parents owned a café, so it would be like, "Salaam, John, please don't forget to go to Costco and get us croissants." So they're lovely, but they're also loaded. As I grew up, the letters got longer. And when I came to Hampshire, they would send me birthday cards, all in Dari, and in an easy cursive I couldn't read. My initial thought was, I want to work with that, with my inability to know my parents. I couldn't understand my father, and he just passed in the last year. I think for me, especially since then, there were multiple levels of loss. It's like the loss of the parent, but then the loss of the longing to know the parent, that it's no longer a possibility to understand the parent.

So I came to Laimah. I was like, "Girl, I got a lot of letters and I want people to experience the difficulty with text and one's own tongue and one's most immediate persons." I was thinking of PVC, of hiding letters, visibilizing letters, and Laimah was like, "Calm down. Calm down."



Collaborators, presenters, creators. The artists, clockwise from the top, in the gallery space: Sahar Muradi, at left, with Laimah Osman; Miatta Kawinzi; Lê thi diem thúy.

A photograph of an interior space, possibly a museum or gallery. On the left, a hammock is suspended from the ceiling by a wooden bar and white ropes. In the center, two wooden stools with black seats are positioned on a dark floor. A floor lamp with a long, dark, cylindrical shade is visible in the foreground. The walls are light-colored, and a large, light-colored panel is visible on the right wall.

"Camping, sleeping in hammocks,
moving through a 'vacation
destination,' but where there's
disenfranchisement blatantly
written into the land."



LAIMAH OSMAN: You had a lot of ideas and we had a month. One month and you wanted to do twenty-five projects.

SAHAR MURADI: Twenty.

LAIMAH OSMAN: Okay, twenty. I understood “visualizing poems.” But we’d never done that together before. I thought it would take some time to actually think about which poems we were going to use. When I teach printmaking, or any art class, it’s like, let’s just draw it out. What will this look like? Think about scale and composition. So we were sketching a bit. Then it just happened organically. We came up with ideas pretty quickly and kind of went with it.

SAHAR MURADI: What eased me amid all the excitement was that monoprinting was new to me. I was learning a new language, and that you can continually return and layer. And there might be multiple layers still to come. I felt at ease that maybe the play didn’t have to end, that we just had a pause.

LAIMAH OSMAN: Yes. We came up with a monoprinting technique that’s much simpler and more immediate. Initially I was thinking about screen-printing, because that’s what I’m doing most. But it’s so labor intensive. It would have taken weeks just to make the screens, expose everything, and make the stencils.

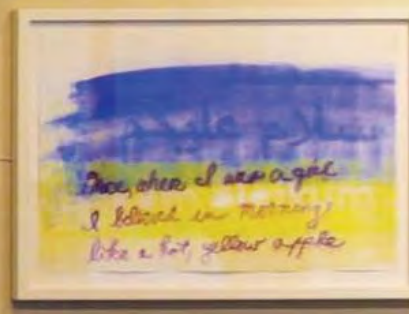
MIATTA KAWINZI: My piece, especially the video installation, was sparked by an experience I had, an itinerant seminar in Puerto Rico. We walked for three weeks down the western coast of the island. I’ve never lived outside for that long before. Camping, sleeping in hammocks, and a lot of discussions about what it means to move through a space that is sort of a positive, “tropical paradise vacation destination,” but where there’s poverty, disenfranchisement, inequality just blatantly written into the land. The hammock is meant to be a way to take in the video.

The work reflects on how the landscape tells these stories, is involved in these stories, is marked in different ways. And also how space is regulated: who has access to what spaces. Sounds were important to me, like the crickets and croaky frogs. There is also a performative element that I brought in afterwards, and I like how you all described it. You said it was like “her body defying gravity,” and that’s just what I was thinking. I mean, the language of movement is a kind of writing, and combining that with the text that appears in the video is a way I can break up a linear left-to-right kind of writing. To me it spatializes text, and lets you think of text like a landscape.

When I saw the email I was excited. A lot of my work has writing as its backbone, but “text” doesn’t always make it into the final form in a way that I feel like maybe it should. So with this invitation, I felt now’s the time to play, to experiment with the way that the text appears.



MODERATOR: It seems to me that you're all recovering histories, summoning histories, and creating counter-narratives. You're invested in experiential, embodied research. How does your research make its way into your work?



MIATTA KAWINZI: Sometimes I struggle with understanding something through just reading about it. There are levels of remove. I'm interested in finding different ways to break them down, and experience can do that. My piece grew out of the experience of walking, of one foot in front of the other, all day, every day, for three weeks. I had to see and feel and hear things to inform my thinking. The idea of "theory from the soil" came up in a lot of our conversations, and that's in the poem. I'd been thinking about organic kinds

"I was like, 'Girl, I got a lot of letters and I want people to experience difficulty with text and one's own tongue and one's immediate persons.'"

untitled

august in mississippi
a stuttering boy saying mississippi
whistling
his way through
the word
whistling
in order to
make his way through
the word

he is on the train
no
he is on the bus
no
he is a boy
much beloved
by his mother
she saved up to send him from chicago
to mississippi
that
long lettered
far away
place

he is going to the land of
so many so many so many
s's
by train whistle
down
he goes
our emmett

14 year old
beautiful
hazel eyed
boy
riding the train whistle
down

bye now
boo

she doesn't need to say
behave yourself
he is her pride
he is her boy
he is her boo
he knows he is
carrying the both of them
now
inside the whistle she taught him
to sound

so many so many so many
s's

of knowledge, and the different places where knowledge can spring up, and I wanted to reflect on them, give space and importance to them.

LÊ THI DIEM THÚY: To pick up on that, the last poem in my piece is drawn from the William Calley quote. I limited myself to only the words that appear in the quote, and wanted to extract some degree of consciousness that doesn't seem to exist in it. How must I reorient these words to bring light to what's not visible in the statement itself? So, when you ask about research, sometimes language traps us. How do you arrange it so the viewer encountering it shakes loose from the language, and on some level is released from it? Research is a scaffold. But we're always trying to get to something more, right? To know is not enough . . .

SAHAR MURADI: Perhaps I think of research as gathering, gathering information, but that seems limited. Gathering and assembling. Material can enter a poem from many different spaces and times and can take shape in many ways. For me it's planes and conversations. Things are very webbed. I'll just leave it at that. I see them as webbed.

"Material can enter a poem
from many different spaces
and times and can take shape
in many ways. For me it's planes
and conversations."

MODERATOR: I think I'd like to open it up to the audience, if anyone has questions.

QUESTIONER: One thing I've observed seeing the exhibit is how important the horizon is for each of you. You flipped the Mississippi River to run west to east. And a hammock works best in a horizontal position! Were you thinking during the creative process about the horizon?

SAHAR MURADI: I think about the page when I think about a poem. So perhaps horizon for me is not the "center" but a point to reach.

MIATTA KAWINZI: Thanks for the question. I hadn't considered it before. But it makes me think of how often the horizon appears in the video, and how a few nights of the seminar we were in the water, looking out, and everything kind of blended together, where the horizon disappeared into hues of sky and sea, becoming seamless for a few moments. It has me thinking about how a horizon can symbolize a sense of possibility, and of the "not yet here." In editing video you slice and dice and reconfigure and reverse and the horizon comes in and out of visibility. The horizon is aspiration.

LÊ THI DIEM THÚY: I appreciate these comments. My piece is so much about arrivals and departures, which horizons suggest. But there's also a sharp vertical: I'm doing excavation work at the same time, if you could excavate through a horizon! During the creative process

you're working with a certain "shape," say, and lo and behold, it manifests in something else as well. It's very much "the novel in progress."

"During the creative process
you're working with a 'shape'
and, lo and behold, it manifests
in something else. It's very much
'the novel in progress.'"

MIATTA KAWINZI is a multidisciplinary artist. She explores the figure, the inner and outer landscape, and culture as sites of reimagination and possibility. She works with images, objects, sound, space, the body, and language. She also works as a community teaching artist and museum educator. She was born in Nashville to a Liberian mother and a Kenyan father. Now based in New York, she has exhibited or performed her work in Mexico, South Africa, Switzerland, Trinidad & Tobago, and Liberia, as well as in the United States. Her work is in the Art-in-Embassies public collection in Monrovia, Liberia; in an Art Connects New York public collection in the borough of Queens; and in private collections. She has been awarded artist residencies at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Beta-Local, Greatmore Studios, IAAB, Flux Factory, and the SOMA Summer program and has received additional awards from the New York Community Trust, Hampshire College,

and Hunter College. She concentrated in interdisciplinary art and cultural theory at Hampshire and went on to earn an MFA in studio art from Hunter College.

LÊ THI DIEM THÚY is a writer and solo performance artist. Born in southern Vietnam and raised in southern California, she often explores the role of the body as the site of memory. She is the author of the novel *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, and her prose and poetry have appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Muae*, and *The Best American Essays*, as well as in the anthologies *Killing the Buddha: A Heretic's Bible*, *The Very Inside*, *Half & Half*, and *Watermark*. Thúy's solo performance works "Red Fiery Summer," the "bodies between us," and "Carte Postale" have been presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the International Women Playwrights' Festival (Galway, Ireland), the New WORLD Theater (University of Massachusetts Amherst), and the Marfa Theater Company (Texas), among other venues. She has been awarded residencies from the Headlands Center for the Arts, the GAEA Foundation, and the Lannan Foundation and fellowships from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and United States Artists.

SAHAR MURADI is a writer, performer, and educator. Born in Afghanistan and raised in the United States, she is the author of the forthcoming chapbook *[GATES]*, coeditor, with Zohra Saed, of *One Story, Thirty Stories: An Anthology of Contemporary Afghan American Literature*, and a cofounder of the Afghan American Artists and Writers Association. She has published most recently in *Brooklyn Rail* and *Dusie*. She is the recipient of the 2016 Stacy Doris Memorial Award and twice received the Himan Brown Creative Writing Award in Poetry. She is a Kundiman Poetry Fellow and an AAWW Open City Fellow. Her BA from Hampshire is in creative writing; she has an MFA in poetry from Brooklyn College and an MPA in international development from New York University. She directs the poetry programs at City Lore.

LAIMAH OSMAN is a Brooklyn-based artist and educator whose production takes the form of prints, drawings, and artists' books. Her work has been displayed in numerous exhibitions and is archived in various libraries. She has been awarded residencies at the Lower East Side Printshop, Kala Art Institute, and Women's Studio Workshop as well as grants from the Brooklyn Arts Council and the Jerome Foundation. She teaches at Parsons School of Design and makes prints with local poets. She holds a BFA from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and an MFA from Pratt Institute.



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OtherPeoplesPixels Interviews Miatta Kawinzi



Yield, 2016. Digital Photograph. Dimensions Variable

Interdisciplinary artist MIATTA KAWINZI gives thoughtful attention to rhythm, cadence and metaphor, delving into human malleability and responsiveness to time, language, physical space and sociopolitical context. She isolates, repeats and remixes sounds, words, hand gestures and whole body movements. In video, performance and photography, she reveals a universal human condition—that we all must interface with the surrounding world through our bodies—while

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also hinting that every-body does not have the same experience in this world. Miatta earned her BA in Interdisciplinary Art & Cultural Theory from Hampshire in 2010, and went on to earn her MFA in Studio Art at Hunter College of the City University of New York. She has been an Artist-in-Residence at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts (Omaha, NE), Beta-Local (San Juan, Puerto Rico), Greatmore Studios (Cape Town, South Africa) and International Exchange & Studio Program (Basel, Switzerland). This summer, Miatta will debut a new sound/text/video installation in [Of Soil and Tongues](#), a group show at the Hampshire College Art Gallery (Amherst, Massachusetts). The show runs from June 1 – October 1, 2017. Miatta is based in Brooklyn, NY, where she also works as a community teaching artist and museum educator.

OtherPeoplesPixels: In looking at your work in a variety of media—video, performance, sculpture, installation, text and photography—all together, I would describe it as poetic because of its attention to rhythm, cadence, repetition and metaphor. What does that word mean to you? Is that how you think about your own practice?

Miatta Kawinzi: I am definitely working within a framework of poetics. I am interested in poetics in terms of language, structure and conceptualization, which I think you're picking up on. Words are line, language is a dwelling place, a phrase can be a journey with starts and stops. In my work, I play with spatially orienting thought in new ways. Poet [Nathaniel Mackey](#) wrote, "I tend to pursue resonance rather than resolution." I have always felt affinity with this idea: to not be

naively in search of easy answers to deal with the magnitude of the upside-down world, but to instead be willing to follow various strains of thought and feeling down different paths to perhaps uncover alternate ways of seeing and being. I also think about [Audre Lorde](#) stating that "poetry is not a luxury," and the ways in which, throughout my experience, words have consistently been a balm and salve for me in the face of sometimes harsh socioeconomic realities. The poetic becomes the through-line, the way to string things together and highlight points of connection.

In my work, I think about the rhythms of life, the repetition of history, how one thing can become something else. All of these notions for me are related to poetic impulses and poetry's ability to allow us to re-imagine our selves and our situations.



Star Spangz, 2013. HD Color Video, Sound.16:9, 04:12 min.

OPP: I was really struck by the visual imagery of

language in *Clay* (2014), especially the (raffia?—not sure exactly what that is) dyed the same color as your lipstick. The chewing of it, the casual tossing away, the stuffing of it back into the mouth and then the spreading out and offering of it toward the camera. And then of course the connection—and disconnection—between language that comes directly from the mouth and language that comes from the fingers. Can you talk about language as it relates to sound and written text, both of which you use in your work?

MK: The blue material is indeed raffia! One thing I am invested in is tracing the way in which language can manifest in both verbal and non-verbal forms. How can language be embedded into other kinds of materiality, and how does communication take place through means other than verbal speech? In *Clay*, I was really interested in putting these different forms of communication alongside one another, all on the same plane. The kalimba as a musical instrument references a musical way of communicating, with roots in a certain African diasporic tradition. The fingers texting on an iPhone represent this other kind of digital communication, a way in which many people around the globe keep in touch in the contemporary moment. And there is spoken text in the video that is semi-audible and semi-obscured. Then the raffia references this physical manifestation of verbal language, making it tangible, able to be extended, able to become involved in a kind of dance with the body emanating from the mouth. Here and elsewhere I am constantly engaged in a dance between different forms of language as they originate from the body, from words, from place, from material.



Clay, 2014. HD Color Video, Sound. 16:9, 03:25 min.

OPP: You made this video while in residence at Greatmore Studios in Capetown, South Africa. How did the location, so far from home, feed into this piece?

MK: There are eleven official languages of South Africa, and many people are multilingual, so the location sparked new angles of consideration for ideas I explored in this piece. Cape Town is a very beautiful, dynamic and vibrant city, yet there are also these ongoing inequalities, and I am thinking about that tension in placing myself in front of the barbed wire in the video.

Regarding the audio, one of the ways through which I use sound in my work—my own vocalization, improvisation, analog/digital instrumentation, and remixing—has to do with my interest in the potency of wordlessness that nonetheless carries an emotional import. Often my work in sound goes in and out of legibility which relates to my interest in illuminating different kinds of knowledge, some of which can

be mysterious or even unconscious, yet still resonant. I am also invested in exploring the act of remixing as a way of enacting alternative temporalities. . . to move beyond linear time, to stretch time, to hold time in different ways. It's a way of working with the materiality of time.



But I Dreamt We Was All Beautiful&Strong, 2015. Color Video Projection & Sound on Loop in Corner. Dimensions Variable.

OPP: Last year, at another residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, you created *Push & Pull*, a “performative photography series.” Tell us what inspired this work and how it directly responded to the space.

MK: I was very excited to be granted a residency at Bemis. I went there from Brooklyn at a moment in which I had no physical studio space and very little space otherwise to make or think in. Upon arrival there, I immediately felt a sense of bodily unfolding through my access to a sizable private studio and large shared spaces, which directly inspired that photography series. I was thinking also about how there is a politic to all of this, to something as basic as having enough space to stretch in, and I wanted to utilize this access—while I had it—to explore the geometry of my body in relation to this open space. I was reading a book by Michio Kaku

called *Physics of the Impossible*, and in the book Kaku was highlighting the ways in which things like teleportation could become possible under the right conditions. From there I began thinking about these ideas of possibility/impossibility not only in relation to the laws of science and theoretical physics, but also in terms of how they may relate conceptually to pushing against sociopolitical limits. The performative actions in the series are meant to embody this through bodily metaphor.



Rhombus, 2016. Digital Photograph. Dimensions Variable

OPP: Can you address the fact that this is a series of photographs, not a live performance and not a performative video?

MK: I actually also created a live performance that explored these same ideas and created the series afterwards based on that performance. For me, it is quite difficult to capture the energy of live performance through documentation, so the photographs were a way through which that work could take on another life to be shared in a different way beyond the initial audience.

OPP: I've been thinking about the creation of these frozen movements as dance. . . but are they frozen moments from a fluid action or

poses? What's your relationship to dance, both in your art practice and in your life outside art?

MK: They are a mixture of both. I don't necessarily consider myself to be a dancer because I never studied dance, but I do use terms like 'embodiment' and 'movement' to describe my approach to such work. I am very conscious of how much can be expressed through the body both in my art practice and daily life.



gatherin' space, 2016. Color Video Projection & Sound on Loop, Aluminum Foil; Acrylic Paint & Oil Pastel on Wood Panel. 128 x 163 x 249 in.

OPP: Could you talk about the variety of hand gestures—reaching, drumming, climbing, worship and hands up, don't shoot, to name just a few—in *gatherin' space* (2016)?

MK: *gatherin' space* is a meditation on ideas of containment and expansion as expressed through the language of hand gesture. I am thinking about the hands as bodily extensions through which we shape, make, feel, sense, probe, praise, labor, surrender, assert, resist. I wanted to bring all of these different connotations together on the same plane because they all exist together in the lexicon of the body. So much of how I experience the world emanates from the

hands—to touch, to write, to grasp, to lift. It’s also a way of abstracting the body, of resting in that place of multiplicity. The hands have the potential to shape space and reality, too.



La Tercera Raíz, 2015. HD Color Video, Sound.
16:9, 9:22 min.

OPP: “the strength in yielding, in taking on the shape of that which sits stoically, to then regain one’s form.” This text, which comes from your video *La Tercera Raíz* (2015), is a beautiful articulation of a range of themes that run through your work: the power of fluidity, responsiveness, malleability, shape-shifting. How do these themes and the metaphor of water relate to how you think about the diasporic condition and cultural identity?

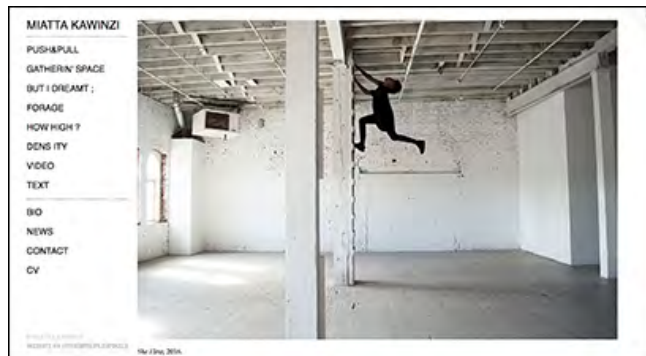
MK: I think about diaspora as an active process of exchange, as a gesture, as a reaching towards. My mom is Liberian and my father is Kenyan, and I grew up in the U.S. South navigating multiple cultural and linguistic worlds, which informs my work. I have found power in being adaptable. I am also interested in how

cultural identification is an ongoing, shifting context-based negotiation. This is part of why travel is important to me; it is a form of drawing in space, a mode through which to find and explore connections between place and culture, and to try to stretch the arms to skillfully balance both the similar and the disparate.

La Tercera Raíz arose out of my research into the history and presence of the African diaspora in Mexico during my participation in the [2015 SOMA Summer program in Mexico City](#).

Research often goes into my work, and then there is a process of abstraction through which I generate writing that becomes another way of considering an idea, of opening it up through poetics and finding a more personal relationship to the topic at hand.

Toni Morrison wrote about how water has a memory and I am interested in this idea of material memory, in the sea as a bridge between worlds. I think we have so much to learn from the elements and how they exist in and interact with the world. Water bears so much, has such a consistent and deep presence, yet the sea also teaches me that weight is conditional. I can float in it and be suspended, held, weightless. Something becomes something else.



To see more of Miatta's work, please visit

mkawstudio.com.

Featured Artist Interviews are conducted by Chicago-based artist [Stacia Yeapanis](#). When she's not writing for OPP, Stacia explores the relationship between repetition, desire and impermanence in cross-stitch embroideries, remix video, collage and impermanent installations. She is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Fiber and Material Studies at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where received her MFA in 2006, and was a 2011-2012 Artist-in-Residence at [BOLT](#) in Chicago. Her solo exhibitions include shows at Siena Heights University (2013), Heaven Gallery (2014), the Annex Gallery at Lillstreet Art Center (2014) and [Witness](#), an evolving, durational installation at The Stolbun Collection (Chicago 2017), that could only be viewed via a live broadcast through a Nestcam. Now that the installation is complete, you can watch it via [time lapse](#). Her upcoming solo show Sacred Secular will open in August 2017 at Indianapolis Art Center.

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