Mahogany Too (2018) by Akosua Adoma Owusu is an experimental “sequel” to the 1975 Berry Gordy film, Mahogany. Owusu’s “Mahogany” is played by Nigerian actress Eosa E. who evokes the charisma of the original character in a bustling three-minute performance.

In Mahogany, Diana Ross’ Tracy Chambers is a talented and ambitious fashion student who is routinely sidelined for less than deserving white women in the field of design, modeling, and business management. Mahogany merges critical questions about design, public imagination, real estate, and architecture as key interventions for Black political consciousness. Moreover, the men in Tracey’s life (from her paramour Brian to her photographer Sean) are often the conduits for her travel, success, and political awakening.

Following the Nollywood production of “sequels,” Owusu creates a moving portrait that captures the essence of Tracey’s character on the basis of fabulation. Fabulation, defined by Saidiya Hartman, refers to the strategic emphasis of directing spectators to develop a sense-recognition around the image that exceeds narrative fulfillment. Through the director's use of fabulation, spectators are encouraged instead to imagine character alternatives and the passage of time that emerges beyond the scope of the frame.
In this way, Mahogany Too imagines our “Tracy/Mahogany” roaming through the streets of the city unaccompanied with abandoned glee. These shots are overlaid with her hand drafting garments that may shape her body and the bodies of others. We hear her hum, tap, and create sounds that make up the experimental soundtrack. The frequent tight shots of her designing hand connected with images of her applying makeup suggest that her ability to create plays an equal role in her desire to experiment with performance and gender.

Throughout the short, Owusu commits to evoking the glamour from the original film through the costume, hair and makeup of the character. This commitment could be a realization of Black beauty that the director shares with other Black women from witnessing Diana Ross’ performance. Owusu takes audiences back to that particular 1970s glamour aesthetic with her use of Super 8mm tungsten film. The film stock along with the formal aesthetics serve as an intervention into physical spaces where a Black woman’s mobility and imagination are pursued on her terms alone.

Follow Akosua Adoma Owusu on Twitter and her website.

Ayanna Dozier

Ayanna Dozier is a film/performance artist and PhD candidate at McGill University. Her dissertation, *Mnemonic Aberrations*, examines the formal and narrative aesthetics in contemporary Black feminist experimental short films in the United Kingdom and the United States. She is also the author of the forthcoming 33 1/3 on Janet Jackson's *The Velvet Rope* (TBD). Select writings on Black feminist theory, cinema, and performance art can be found in *Cléo, Another Gaze, Feminist Media Studies*, and *Liquid Blackness Journal*. Dozier is currently a Joan Tisch Teaching Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art. She resides in Brooklyn, NY.