

BLACK ART SESSIONS PRESENTS
STRAIGHT LICK

Black Art Sessions Presents: *Straight Lick*

May 21, 2021

[Straightlick.com](https://straightlick.com)

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Introduction

The Black Art Sessions [B.A.S] started last year, in the Summer of 2020. These sessions were a response to the need for new, clear, accessible branches of entry for Black people to have more opportunities in the art world, specifically the commercial gallery. The call went out on Instagram and brought over 150 students from all over the world. The sessions aim to present and explain all of the possible roles in a gallery – from a gallery assistant to a gallery director – and strives to create a safe space for questions and conversations with the hope that we can meet, learn from, and stay connected with one another, and build our own network.

Straight Lick is B.A.S's first exhibition, and the members who have chosen to participate are running the gallery. We have artists, curators, registrars, archivists, web and design team, catalogue and publishing team, and event programmers.

B.A.S gallery is pleased to present 26 artists paired with 26 curators who, together, have created 26 exhibition rooms. Each room is a purposefully selected vibe that lends to a uniquely designed online gallery experience. Everyone in this exhibition has contributed to the ideation, infancy, and realization of this space and together, we have proven what can happen when you hit a straight lick with a crooked stick.

- Ebony L. Haynes

California

(Dis)Connected
Me, Myself...You
Party Girl House
Raw

Pomona, California
Laguna Beach, California
San Francisco, California
San Francisco, California

(Dis)Connected

Featuring works by Kikesa Kimbwalu
Curated by Shameka Jones

Across the diaspora, we relate to colloquialisms such as “you knew you grew up black when...” or “only black people do...” that remind us of our vast kindredness. As you narrow the scope into each subculture, there lie more idiomatic references where we happily relate to one another under these shared experiences. But outside of cross-cultural connections or societal conjectures, we come to face one question. Who are you? Kikesa Kimbwalu DeRobles, a Congolese-Mexican American artist, explores self-identity by examining her upbringing. In the exhibition *(Dis)Connected*, she shares this visual conversation across bold portraiture. In *La Nombraron Prieta*, Kimbwalu DeRobles uses vibrant hues of red and yellow that captivate Mexican pride through traditional dancewear. But in the same piece, she also addresses the marginalization of Black LatinX people within the culture while highlighting the derogatory Mexican term *Prieta*. Other artworks throughout the exhibition also examine this dichotomy, even adding complexities of religion into the discussion. Her final artwork, *We are what We need*, reveals a reciprocated connection. The background fills with deep purples and sunset tones that symbolize cast-away projections. Triumphant, each figure faces head-on in the foreground to embrace their singularity while supporting each other.

La Nombraron Prieta
Acrylic on canvas
24in x 30 in



Me, Myself...You

Featuring works by Abigail Albano-Payton
Curated by Shannyn Schack

Straight Lick is proud to present its first exhibition with Abigail Albano-Payton: *Me, Myself... You*. Albano-Payton uses her art as a tool for discussion of those that are often dismissed. Taking Nina Simone's quote, "An artist's duty is to reflect the times" as a call to action, she seeks to depict the contemporary moment in a truthful and distinctly candid way.

From a young age, she realized the importance that representation, or lack thereof, has in society and how those depictions can affect generations. Her work explores depictions of People of Color, with a focus on the Black community, and seeks to dismantle and repair our preconceived notions of them.

Her visual language consists of intimate moments of love and self-exploration as both she and the subjects consider themes of race, gender, and the intrinsic value of the human experience. In "Barbershop," a trip to the barber issues a challenge to the viewer to revisit their assumptions and perceptions of Black hair and the natural hair movement while imbuing the scene with an unmistakable love and appreciation for her community. She articulates both the meticulous thought of the barber as he focuses on the job at hand and the genuine care and sense of camaraderie so commonly found in Black barber shops.

With portraiture, Albano-Payton deftly combines figuration with backgrounds that extends into the realm of the abstract. In "Kaelon," she captures a young man in a moment of flux as he grapples with not only his natural hair journey, but also how he perceives and expresses his own sexuality. He gazes directly at the viewer with a vulnerability and a fearlessness only youth can have. The background lies unfinished; Albano-Payton affords Kaelon to finish his own story, something society rarely gives a young Black man the chance to do.

The culmination of the show is "Path to Resilience," a masterwork that deals with themes of traditions, family and, of course, hair. Portraying a pair of sisters combing out their hair in front of the television, this small moment of Black love perfectly summarizes how she wants to recharacterize depictions of Black people in art - two humans, sharing the human experience, passing on traditions and history in the form of a braid. The quiet contentment of Albano-Payton's scene is reminiscent of Vermeer's work, calling to mind the beloved scenes of the everyday that solidified their places in art history.



Path to Resilience, 2021, Oil, collage paper on canvas, 36in x 48in

Party Girl House

Featuring works by Ife Adeyinka
Curated by Sam Radlein

Party Girl House explores the complicated cocktail recipe that forms the female identity along with the vain and trivialized pursuits to evolve and sustain it.

Held up against a background of black and white photography, themes of otherness, black familial dynamics, and personal agency are weaved together by Ife’s struggle to define and accept her appearance during adolescence.

Despite the belief this phenomenon is central to to all women, the familiar, culturally-specific imagery used in these works reveal the singularly black experience of physically struggling with maternal figures in a bathroom to smooth nappy edges as routine beauty maintenance only to be ostracized, subtly ridiculed and ultimately appropriated for financial gain.

Topped off by bold, handwritten text, the collage-like pieces divide it’s audience with Ife’s message of “loving her hair.” Some people will just get it. It’s a black thing.



Untitled, 2020, Various dyed fabrics, aluminum

Raw

Featuring works by Lola Collins
Curated by Tiva Baloi

Definitions of the adjective “Raw”:

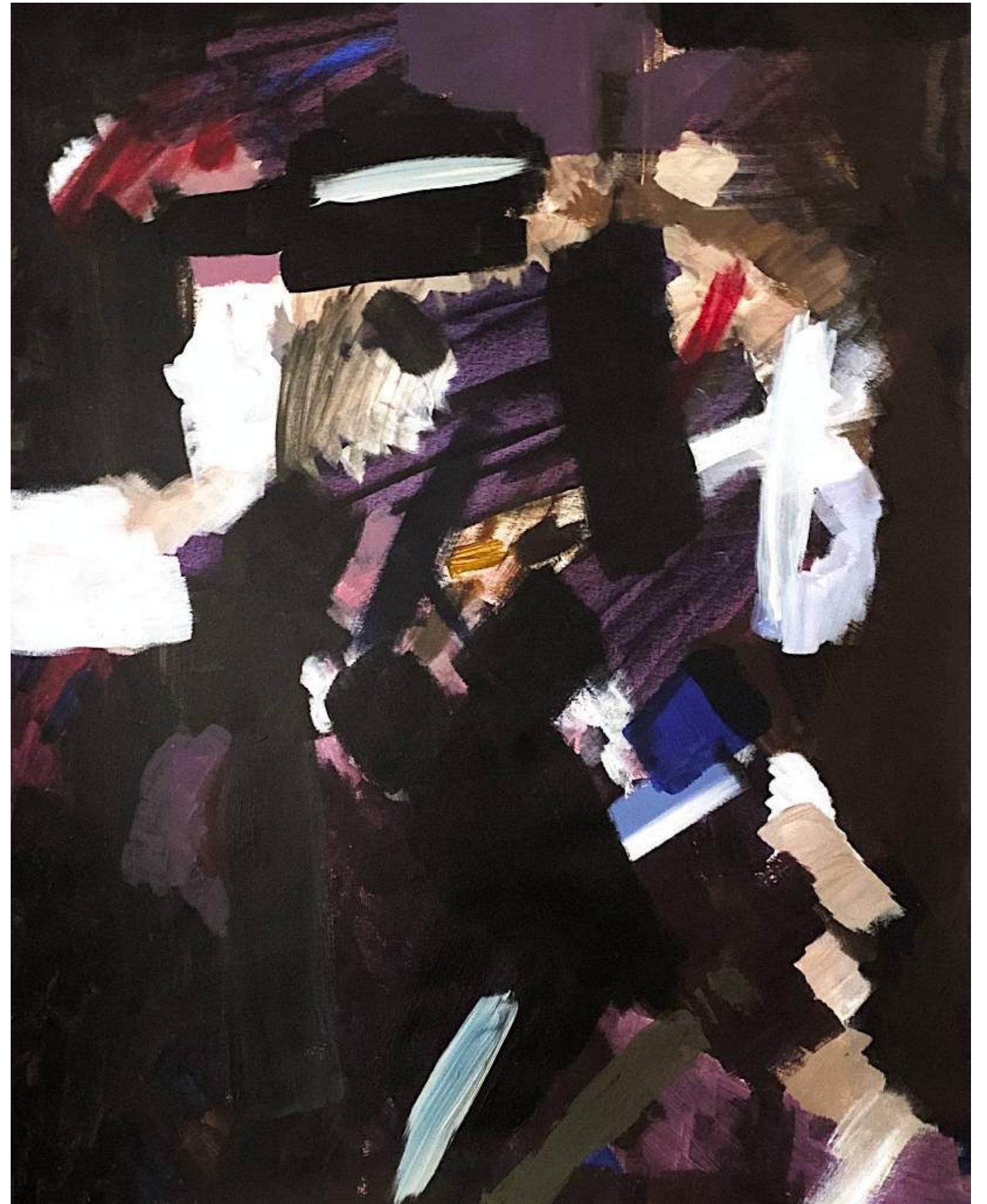
1. (of materials) uncooked; fresh; in a natural state
2. (of information) not analyzed or processed for use
3. (of the body) painfully exposed or inflamed; wounded
4. (of an emotion or quality) strong and undisguised
5. (of a person) new to an activity or profession

Raw is Lola Collins’ first solo exhibition, presenting a body of work produced in the last three years. Comprising ten abstract paintings, *Raw* offers viewers an insight into the artist’s inner world. Originally from Washington, DC, Collins has immersed herself in a deeply personal and private practice in San Francisco. Much of the work on view was created during quarantine, when Collins found her innermost moods outpouring on paper and canvas. The selected paintings are intimate expressions of Collins’ interior realm.

Browsing through *Raw* feels akin to probing a freshly healed abrasion, or peeking into the insides of an open wound. The paintings elicit a myriad of feelings, from tender pleasure to pangs of pain, and all of the nuances between, as reflected in their titles. Different layers of Collins’ emotional landscape are peeled back and revealed in each work through stark, deliberate strokes, and lurid slashes of color. From a sense of calm, to ecstasy, revulsion, and bittersweet heartache; everything Collins feels is exposed in vivid acrylics.

In her practice, Collins paints first and thinks later. She makes sense of her work by looking to her art for answers after their creation. This process offers the artist the opportunity to unpack emotions that are difficult to articulate. With *Raw*, viewers are given the opportunity to join in the anatomizing of Collins’ art.

Collins offers a refreshing take on the abstract, informed by intuitive senses and personal immersion in practice. Adding her voice to a litany of Black women abstract painters, such as Howardena Pindell, Alma Thomas, Mary Lovelace O’Neal, and Betty Blayton, Collins is concerned with understanding—and contextualizing—her visual abstractions as expressions of Black female subjectivity.



Dancing Man, 2020, Acrylic on Paper, 45.7cm x 61cm

Canada

Knowing Nothing, Feeling Everything

Halifax, Canada

Them years, these days

Montreal, Canada

Knowing Nothing, Feeling Everything

Featuring works by Morgan Mitchell
Curated by David Jones

[03.15 18:15:01] DavidJones: Yoooooooo Morgan

[03.15 18:17:11]MorganMitchell: Hey David, whats up?

[03.15 18:18:10] DavidJones: Oh, just working on our show exhibition statement. Can I send you what I have so far?

[03.15 18:18:14] MorganMitchell: Of course :)

[03.15 18:20:01] DavidJones: Knowing Nothing, Feeling Everything is an online show featuring the work of multidisciplinary artist, Morgan Mitchell and curated by David Jones. The title for the show observes the convergence between the limits of knowledge and the possibility of emotion. This past year in which the included interventions in the show were staged, encapsulate a period of reconsideration. How does the unfixing of what we know in a given moment, create space for how we feel at the same time? This a central question the show hopes to explore.

Based in Nova Scotia, Canada, Morgan Mitchell produces attentive meditations on memories and the permeability of histories through a practice situated on self reflection and consideration. Identity grounds Morgan’s practice, where painting, installation, performance, and drawing guide her explorations.

Morgan’s documentation style evokes the text of Hito Steyerl’s In Defense of the Poor Image. The documentation of the work does not supersede the purpose of the intervention. The image quality marks them as other in the hierarchy of the “rich image”. This otherness elicited by the quality of the photographs is in tandem with the pragmatism of the show’s interventions that operate on the praxis of emotional expression.

The installations featured in Knowing Nothing, Feeling Everything operate within and outside of the internet—merging interconnected computer networks and IRL interactions.

[03.15 18:20:30] DavidJones: No rush on reading. I’d be curious to hear your thoughts.

[03.15 18:21:25] MorganMitchell: Woah that’s so rad, I love it ! I was just wondering if I could add something though? I made these kits, they’re called Designated Crying Area Kits, they fit in an envelope and essentially they come with a sign to designate any area for crying and include a little care package for when you are feeling down and might need a good cry. I wanted to make those available to folks who want them so we can choose spaces to hold our emotions and maybe allow us some catharsis as well as remotely show some care for anyone who may need it.

[03.15 18:26:22] DavidJones: How can folks request a Designated Crying Kit? Are they Free?

[03.15 18:29:10] MorganMitchell: Yeah, they are totally free, and to request one folks can click here.

[03.15 18:30:33] DavidJones: That’s so kind of you. I’m hoping folks do ask. How many do you have?

[03.15 18:31:03] MorganMitchell: Hmm, maybe 20 to start ?

[03.15 18:31:40] DavidJones: That sounds Fair.

[03.15 18:31:52] MorganMitchell: Okay, bless!

[03.15 18:32:00] DavidJones is typing...



Honk, Scream, Shift, 2020-21, Window intervention documentation turned into animated gif

Them years, these days

Featuring works by Erzulie

Curated by Adama Dercilia Bari

Them Years, These Days, an online exhibition, presents artworks by Haitian-Quebécois Artist Erzulie who is currently based in Montreal. Seeking influences from popular culture, she tracks the utilisation of the body and image from the Black diaspora to re-appropriate. This is done predominately through her use of figurative paintings and drawings created as a method to critique the received associations of identity as product in mass media.

The focus in *Them Years, These Days* looks to Erzulie's play in visually parodying the memes and vines that are familiar to locals in Montreal, in the early 2000s. In addition to the ever-present Black cultural impositions in wider western-centric fashion trends. Comically sharing her personal and the local insight into the accumulative collection of self-referential memes in Montreal, she invites us to reflect on the misrepresentations that reduces Blackness, also present in wider western popular culture. Erzulie's success in hijacking both the localised and the more widespread trends highlights the dependency that images have on Black bodies, which she portrays through the following paintings and drawings.



Péter leurs chevilles, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 24in x 24in

DC

Soul On Fire: A Visual Essay On Identity & the
Black Diaspora

DC

Soul On Fire: A Visual Essay On Identity & the Black Diaspora

Featuring works by Naomi Soquar
Curated by Shelton Boyd-Griffith

Black Art Sessions presents, *Soul On Fire: A Visual Essay On Identity & the Black Diaspora* by Naomi Soquar. *Soul On Fire* is a brief, carefully curated film that serves as a visual essay, exploring themes of home, self-liberation and identity. The film questions the viewer to re-examine their preconceived notions of “home”. Through archival clips of rituals, migration, worship, dance, and mourning, one can see how collectivity is constantly forming and fracturing. This forming and fracturing positions people of African descent in a free-fall space while simultaneously facing pressure to exist in socially constructed identities. The film is constructed in dream sequences to raise questions about an individual’s sense of self within and outside the collective. Through Keguro Macharia and Stuart Hall’s theorizations on the black diaspora, Naomi invites the viewer to imagine what a post-hybridity, anti-essentialist future looks like.

Soul On Fire exists as an ongoing series of research in regards to digitally archiving the Black diasporic experience. Naomi’s work centers around this central idea of preserving and offering a critical analysis of Black new media.

As *Soul On Fire* is a complete visceral experience, the film is also accompanied by a curated playlist that evokes the essence of the film as well as digital show notes of Naomi’s research.



Still from *Soul on Fire*, 2020

Florida

The Book of Black Queer Spells

Yet, We Heal

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Miami, Florida

The Book of Black Queer Spells

Featuring works by Symphonii Smith-Kennedy
Curated by Jacarrea Garraway

The Black Art Sessions in collaboration with the artist Symphonii Smith-Kennedy is pleased to present the exhibition *The Book of Black Queer Spells*. Kennedy is a painter that hails from South Florida. At the age of 19, she has already started to create notable work that upholds her unique brand of visual storytelling and fascination with magical realism in relation to Black bodies. This exhibition features a series of paintings which explore mythology, spirituality and sexuality through surrealist imagery that hypnotically captures the magic which can come from a liberated Black imagination. The series portrays a melange of Black figures and animals depicting fables in still form. Given the legacies of Black fantasy outside the western lens, a series like *The Book of Black Queer Spells* aims to further put attention on Black narratives that evolve from more surrealist depictions of identity, legacy and cultural references via a queer perspective.

The oil paintings have a storybook-like quality that intentionally invites viewers into the fantastical tales hinted at within each image. Experimental Black storytellers tend to be overlooked when it comes to their influence on the historical art canon. Their avant-garde expressionism often intimidates those who choose to see Black communities as though they are a monolith culture. This is especially true for Black women whose voices fall within the avant-garde realm of artistic expression. Artists like Kennedy are a part of the ongoing and growing trajectory of Black artists who find a form of liberation within their artwork by not creating to appease the White male gaze. Heritage played a strong role in the conceptualization of this series, but the collection as a whole also demonstrate the individual spirit of the artist who adores the natural world and has created a way to maintain autonomy over her own personal image as a proud Black queer woman through her artistic practice.

Through Kennedy's emerging voice as a fine artist, *The Book of Black Queer Spells* exhibition poses to use the subjects depicted as a way to expand upon current mythologies while inventing new ones. Kennedy's aesthetic is boldly stylized and vibrant with paintings that are reminiscent of Rembrandt, but she instead strategically decides not to romanticize her subjects -- therefore subverting modern expectations of fantasy art and denouncing its colonialist history that upheld Eurocentric standards of storytelling as superior for centuries.



The Savior, 2021
Oil paint on paper
18in. X 24in.

Yet, We Heal

Featuring works by Kailyn Bryant
Curated by Morgan C. Mitchell

Kailyn Bryant (b. Birmingham, AL) creates dynamic, richly colored multimedia artworks that articulate the ways in which identity, whether individual or collective, shape personal and political manifestations of grief. The tactility of identity markers, such as gender presentation or the styling of one's hair, serve as a starting point for these considerations. In the video works two similar perspectives are exposed though unified symmetrically by animations, symbolizing the universal nature of loss that lies beneath the grieving process. By individualizing her subjects with varied colors, form, and textures, Bryant reconstructs the dynamic individual to highlight the scope of the fragments that synthesize into a community.

Untethered to any one medium, these paintings, sculptures, and films are multidimensional vignettes that facilitate a harmony between emotional and political healing. These explorations of interiority work to validate both the individual and collective experiences of loss; an increasingly quotidian circumstance following the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. *Yet We Heal* is a meditation for the future, a model for how we as a community can reconcile with individual and systemic trauma to acknowledge the past while remaining optimistic about the future. This young artist demonstrates a high level of technical skill and chromatic acuity that evokes, above all, a zeal for the limitless, restorative possibilities of a world that embraces curative spaces.

In *Strange Fruit* Hanging, the horizontal black line serves as a divider, symbolic of inequality and discrimination. The top portion of this work is white with red and blue stripes with three white stars and symbolizes the idea of American freedom. The 21 black stars below the divider represent the average number of Black citizens murdered (mostly by law enforcement) across the country every week, hence the white stars. Words from the 1954 poem and song performed by Billie Holiday, *Strange Fruit*, are embellished above the figure's head, reminiscent of American lynchings. Lastly, the phrase, "I don't want to be a strange fruit hanging", noted at the foot of the piece acknowledges the most recent cluster of baselessly murdered Black people, creating an intense feeling and awareness that as a person of color, any one of us could be next; continuing the harvest of "strange fruit" in America.

STRANGFRUITHANGING, 2021
Oil paint, oil pastel, acrylic paint,
Sharpie, masking tape, and China
marker on tar paper
36in. x 96in.



France

Attachements tressés

Paris, France

Attachements tressés

Featuring works by Attandi Trawalley
Curated by Amandine Nana

I remember the first time I met Attandi, she talked to me about her graduate memoir on black women's relationship to care. Few weeks later, we met again at a café in Paris. This day we probably waited a long time to be served, arguably longer than other customers...

But in reality I didn't keep any sensation of that waiting. Because if I have to remember my experience of that moment, it wouldn't be situated in the wait of a breakfast in a Parisian café, but in the space-time that our exchange revealed in the way of a tender veil, enveloping and protecting us from the rest. I rethought about that moment when discovering *Braid me*, at that potentiality that the moments between black women give rise to in space-time auspicious at the experience of a black feminine heterotopia.

Braid me is a performance and photographic series that stages two girls, one with a long unfinished braid and the other at the extremity that braids. Depending on the point of view, the first appears alone, sitting on a tapestry with an endless braid. She reminds me of the fantastic and sonorous image that was created in my head when Attandi told me, still in the café of our second time meeting, showing me her long and thin braids done alone. *You know this hair is my shit/Rode the ride, I gave it time / But this here is mine*. The result of a long way and still ongoing and often difficult re-appropriation of hair care freed from the gaze of others, hurting hands, and western beauty standards. *Rode the ride, I gave it time*. There is a certain ambiguity that works *Braid me*, between the desire of taking care of yourself individually and collectively, but also this feeling of captivity through this endless braid that seems to hold her back. These braided attachments that connect us to our past, which we try to untie in order to give them a new form of life can also be found in her work *Crochet me*. The hair here overflows with intimate and often silent stories of desire, revolt and communion of young black girls anguished by the conditionality of an uncertain future. Hair, but also hands that intertwine and manifest in *Their Hands* as Bell Hooks asserts, that love is not only a feeling but a practice. Attandi's artistic work thereby has this strength to take root in the daily life of our gestures, interactions, moments of communion, and to reveal their magical realism imbued with nostalgia

Braid me, 2020
Performance



Illinois

Underground Resistance

Chicago, Illinois

With Care--No Longer

Chicago, Illinois

Underground Resistance

Featuring works by Brianna Perry

Curated by Michele Akinsanya

I utilize textiles to imagine touch as knowledge, turning to the haptic and the visual in an effort of self-fashioning. Coming from a family of dressmakers and seamstresses, I imagine cloth as a site where tradition and reinvention meet and heritage is steeped in possibility. The fabric assemblages, consisting of torn colored cloth and found objects, reclaim quiltmaking as a process of putting oneself together. Identity through fabrication is not necessarily a deceptive act; it reveals personhood as material. Both the fabric assemblages and hand-painted textiles involve an extensive dyeing process. The fluidity of dye alters fabric through an accident, mark, or immersion. Dye allows me to explore the space where color ceases to be a guise and becomes somatic. The immersive action of dye translates to hand-painting the fabric. Looming over the fabric to paint with dye requires me to be submerged myself in the painting to complete it. The hand-painted textiles shift between abstract and symbolic imagery, in search of alternative representational language for blackness.



Born in the Caul, 2020, Various dyed fabrics and aluminum

With Care--No Longer

Featuring works by Alayna Pernell
Curated by Ashleigh Smith

It would not be far-fetched to consider stories as a form of compensation or even as reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive.
-Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*

With Care--No Longer is an exhibition that documents the loving act of remembering. Artist Alayna Pernell delves into the archive to recover the names and narratives of Black women whose stories have been lost in the shuffle of time. Using photography as a second language, Pernell photographs portraits of Black women from the archive, using her hands to intervene on the viewer's perception of the subject.

Black women have existed as both hyper visible and invisible all at once. Looking to bring balance to such a dichotomous existence, Pernell uses her hands to both shield and reveal the women she uplifts. Thus reimagining a reality for Black women that is honest, authentic and multidimensional.

Many of the photographs presented in Pernell's works are part of the Peter J. Cohen collection. As part of an archive owned by a white man, many of these photographs symbolize both a metaphorical and literal issue of narrative ownership. Pernell uses her titles to allude to this issue, and in each of her works, she makes an effort to uncover the stories of the women she depicts. Taking part of this recovery work is a loving act, rooted in a care for objects, stories and above all else, Black women.



With Care to Ms. Maudeline Bass Weston, 2020, Archival Inkjet Print, 6in x 6in

Iowa

Do rabbits dream of electric sheep?

Iowa City, Iowa

Do rabbits dream of electric sheep?

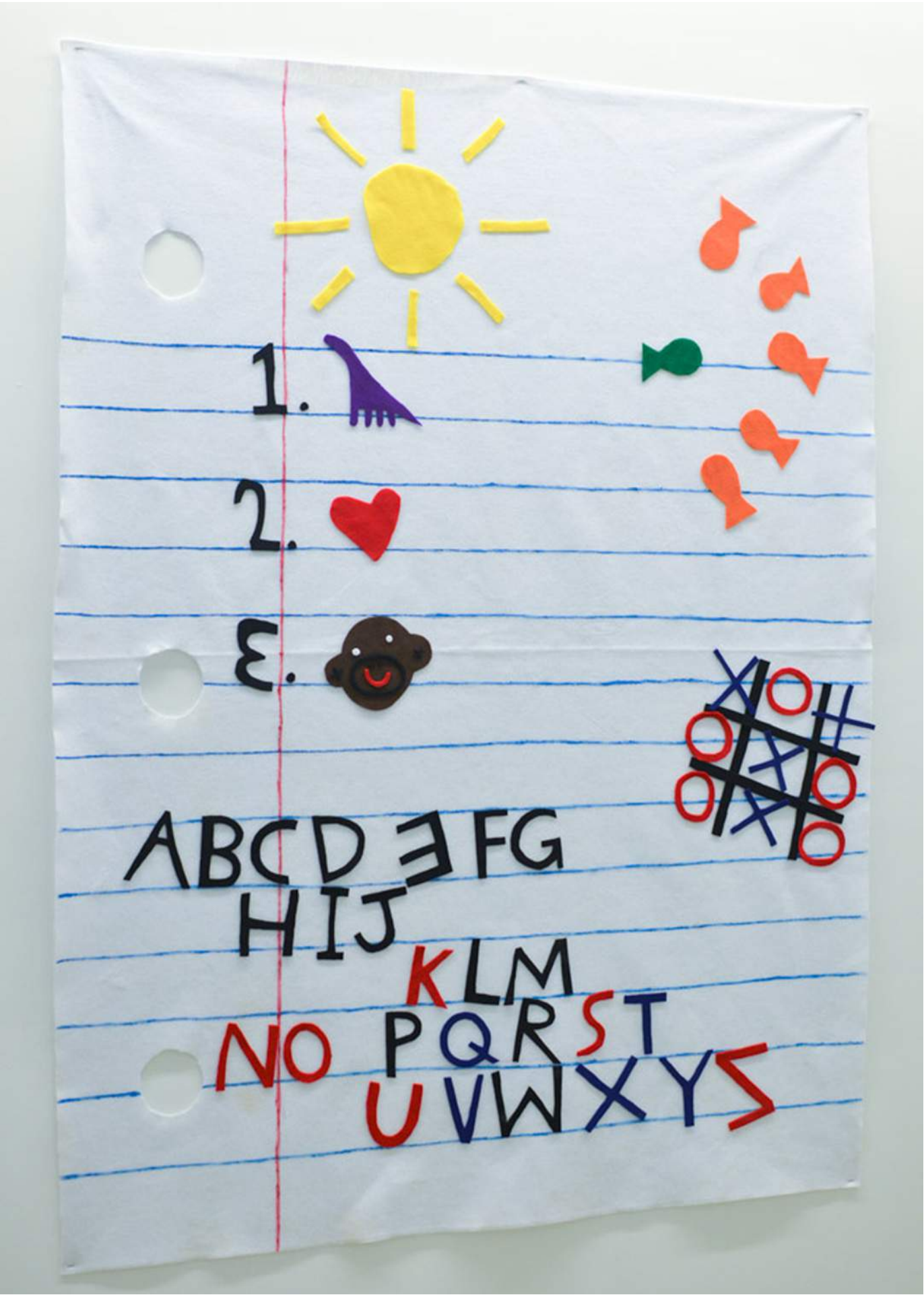
Featuring works by Janiece Maddox
Curated by Bojeung Leung

How can you know with certainty that the world you experience is not an illusion? *Do rabbits dream of electric sheep?* stands to facilitate a dialogue around the Matrix, identity, and childhood. These particular works have been chosen out of Janiece Maddox’s practice at large, because of their relevance to this concept of the Matrix and how simulations of digital reality have become the human experience. The artist is making this work reflect on how we have been manipulated by society through the digital realm.

Baudrillard argued that consumer culture evolved from a state in which we are surrounded by representations or imitations of things that exist, toward a state in which our lives are filled with simulations, objects that look as if they represent something else but have created the reality they seem to refer to. In such a situation, the world of simulations increasingly takes on a life of its own, and reality itself erodes to the point that it becomes a desert. Janiece Maddox explores this desert through the manifestation of childhood artifacts, reflecting upon the identity we construct during childhood and the world of imagination.

This exhibition will make the viewer question reality. What is real and what is imagination? Is the multitude of objects we view and download into our brains throughout digital life true? Maddox creates simulacra for the audience. As our current society has replaced reality and meaning with symbols and human experience is a simulation of reality. This exhibition never conceals reality - it is the reality that obscures that there is nothing “real”. The simulacrum is true. Our perception is the simulation. As media and culture construct our perceived reality Maddox brings forth a time where this reality was more authentic, childhood.

Learning to Play Nice with Others, 2021
Felt
4ft x 5ft



Korea

Dreams of flight in the round

Seoul, Korea

Dreams of flight in the round

Featuring works by Bakari Akinyele
Curated by Jenée-Daria Strand

Dreams of flight in the round, the first ever solo exhibition to feature the emerging artist Bakari Akinyele, utilizes the virtual space to deliver a glimpse into Akinyele’s artistic practice. An artist inspired by movement aesthetics—and his own embodiment of Capoeira—Akinyele pushes the boundaries of painting and textile art to examine dualistic concepts of Black liberation: both personal, and diasporic.

“In the round,” is a term often used in performative settings to indicate both the performer’s spatial pathway, and the and spectator’s vantage points as occurring in a circle. Often, the performer operates at the nucleus of the space, while the spectators view the occurrence on the perimeter, in a circuitous form. This provides an invitational and immersive experience rather than a hierarchical one, as traditionally seen in western modes of engagement. Similarly, Akinyele’s practice aims to combat traditional ideologies of painting by encouraging the viewer’s intimate relationship with his visually rich textiles and intricate drawings. He encourages the viewer to lean in closely, walk along the length of the canvas, and consider their own physical and theoretical relations to the work.

Akinyele intertwines traditional and contemporary practices, and ideologies, to create a highly technical and deeply relevant aesthetic. He draws upon an amalgamation of traditional shibori techniques from West Africa, South Korea, and Japan to physically bind storylines of historical references and personal narrative into the fabric, through the practice of resist dyeing. Resist-dye techniques allow Akinyele to control the movement of the dye; the dye resists certain areas of the fabric, and engulfs others, to create an image or pattern predetermined by the artist. Through his work, Akinyele encourages the viewer to consider: what ideologies might we resist, or embrace, to achieve liberation?



Capoieristas (1825), 2021, Cotton canvas dyed with natural indigo

Massachusetts

Between the Linoleum & Me

Boston, Massachusetts

Between the Linoleum & Me

Featuring works by Shantel Miller
Curated by Diallo Simon-Ponte

Bringing the private to the public, while not compromising your authentic vulnerability is a feat few are able to accomplish with the ease that is articulated as such in Shantel Miller's work. The daughter of Jamaican ministers who immigrated to Canada, it is her spiritual upbringing and continued lived experiences as she concludes an MFA from Boston University that she revisits in her paintings. Pulling from personal narratives, many of her figurative pieces look to encapsulate the experiences of black women and craft a window into plot lines that exist outside of the dominant stream.

In this exhibition, *Between the Linoleum & Me*, Miller captures the intense intimacy one shares with(in) the bathroom or what she calls the washroom due to her Canadian nationality. Across the three works *Woman in Tub*, *Lukewarm*, and *Suffering* she poses an introspective outlook at black femininity and what it means to exist in private, between those four walls. This collection is about the conversation one has with the architecture, design, and linoleum makeup of a washroom. As the repetition of entering that space of cleansing cements itself in daily routine, many movements in the washroom to us appear mundane. Here Miller entombs the regular and excavates narrative, where we once perhaps were blind to the active story we are always writing. Enunciated in these pieces is the profound ontological dialogue that the body and flesh communicate with its surroundings. How we entrust space to embrace (possess) our stories, what worldviews we drag around with us, and how our body language engages with scenery are all notions she suggests the viewer reconsider.

Toying with temporality in *Suffering*, Miller leaves some of the sections unfinished, but also returned later to draw back on top of her completed painting. The distinct appearance of stages of process fuse with the gestural allusions of internal dilemma. Paired, they form multiple dimensionalities of individual development. These compositional decisions interact with our depicted character in a fashion that carries the poetic gravity of a Toni Morrison novel affectionately sculpted and caressed down to fit into eight by ten inches. Her story is layered – informed by color, architectonic lines, and corporeal insinuations.

Miller unflinchingly invites us into the private. We the viewer are seated, intentionally positioned at a location of interiority, evident in the choice to use her own body as a model. She allows us into her vulnerability, into her pain, into her secrets, into her contemplation, and into her routine. Shantel entrusts herself to the linoleum.



Lukewarm, 2019
oil on canvas

New York

Black Bones White Flesh	New York City, New York
Embracing Da Shadow Self 1	Mount Vernon, New York
FIGURED out	Brooklyn, New York
HOODIES	New York City, New York
inflatableworld.site	New York City, New York
JUST LIE TO ME	Brooklyn, New York
Luke Francis Austin	New York City, New York
Mejorar La Raza: Bettering and Belonging	Queens, New York
This Side of Paradise	Brooklyn, New York

Black Bones White Flesh

Featuring works by Joe Ward
Curated by Bre’Annah Stampley

In this series, the Black and Brown body is both centered and forgotten, dead and alive. The skulls of formerly enslaved and Indigenous persons take center stage. Many of these skulls were taken captive after death by skull collector Dr. Samuel George Morton who, in 1839, published imagery and racist propaganda to depict Black and Indigenous people as inferior to White Europeans.

White hands and feet emerge from their bodies: a sort of abstract contrapposto for a white figure controlled by (or in control of) a Black and Brown mind.

These images, made primarily with graphite, are representative of memories and ideas from Ward’s life. The skulls are sourced from photos from The Morton Crania Collection at Penn Museum as well as drawings from the publication *Crania Americana*.



Untitled, 2021, graphite on paper, 7 x 10.5 in.

Embracing Da Shadow Self 1

Featuring works by Niara Jordan Flax
Curated by Yaira Matos

Art speaks for me when I can't find the words or am too shy to share them. The hope is to create as authentically as possible and take up ample space. In painting and sculpture especially, my stories are shared with symbolism that is detectable enough to relate to. Portraits are candid pictures reflecting the inner and outer states of us, using a selected palette, facial expression or specific backdrop for the subject. The pieces I create are threads weaving me to those who connect with them. I'm able to tap into the depths of myself and others, and learn just how vulnerable I am willing to be.

The Shadow Self helps bring us to “the light”, showing humans the sides of ourselves that tend to jump out because we’ve neglected them. Getting to know these sides made it easier to see others reflected in myself and vice versa. I wonder if others will see themselves too.



Fixing My Life One Face Mask At A Time, 2019, Acrylic Paint on Canvas

FIGURED out

Featuring works by Akhira Montague
Curated by Malaika Newsome

FIGURED out, by Akhira Montague, dates back to 2017. The artist mainly works with print material such as paper, ink, stencil, and photographic printing. Majority of Montague's work originates from photos of her own or the influence of her childhood and what she faces on the daily. Working with paper and figures, Montague is able to physically manipulate and collage her pieces, layering them to convey time passing and emphasizing details in the work.

The photographic prints in *FIGURED out* question what pieces are needed to construct a photo what happens when certain pieces of information are missing from the photo or manipulated. Montague purposely puts her viewer in a position of questioning " what time has to do with photography, and overtime what symbols and figures remain?"

The goal of this work is to highlight the fact that there are many pieces that can and will be put together to relay a bigger message. From the pixels that make up our screens to the messages relayed from all around the world over time. By physically hand printing and manipulating her images, Montague tries to slow down her consumption of information and images that she faces on a daily basis.

The use of saturated colors and contrasting backgrounds, is to achieve an alertness that devices have when you first turn them on such as phone screen or sirens. The layering and listing of names and human figures proposes an undeniable overlapping and unity we all have on this earth.



Around the World, 2020, Acrylic on Paper Stock, Hand Inked and Printed, Block Cut, Relief Print, Aprox. 42in. X 62in.

HOODIES

Featuring works by Precious Braswell
Curated by Yaa Addae

In *Hoodies*, Precious Braswell works through her relationship to visibility as a young Black woman photographer. Growing up in the secluded woodland area of Bushkill, Pennsylvania, she finds comfort in being able to choose how and when she is seen which translates to her observant eye and a medium where she is free to interact with others from behind a lens.

“I’ve always worn hoodies. Mostly because of comfort, the climate I grew up in, and how easy it was to just throw on and leave the house but also I wore hoodies as a way to not be seen. It was a way to ease my mind from outside judgments people probably projected on me because I didn’t feel like I stuck out in school or public places in general...The more I was showing this work to my peers and my instructors, the more I was able to flesh out why I chose the hoodie, why I chose to mask out the faces of those I was photographing,” she tells me.

Family Portrait II, 2020
Archival Pigment Print
19in x 13in



inflatableworld.site

Featuring works by Karinne Smith
Curated by David Lisbon

inflatableworld.site is an in-depth exploration of a somewhat universal online experience. From time to time we stray from our intended digital tasks in search of something out of the ordinary. Maybe we’re looking for a new pair of shoes, or a replacement part for an old gadget. Unknowingly we stray across some line and into a grey area. Is this where people who build counterfeits congregate? Am I wandering into a “shop” section that includes exclusively cryptocurrency based transactions and missing serial numbers? We think in some ways these communities offer a more truthful peek into the reality of the internet.



Still from AG 34 +35, 2021, Composite digital collage

Just Lie To Me

Featuring works by Sebastien Pierre
Curated by Darla Migan

JUST LIE TO ME is an art exhibition of the conceptual artist Sebastien Pierre (@bougieboybash) exploring possibilities for decentralized channels through a community-organized curatorial project in Brooklyn and Queens. As a professional graphic designer, Pierre's improvisational practice in newsprint collage misappropriates the vernacular of commercial media to show the competing and overlapping desires driving contemporary celebrity culture and social movements.

The six works presented in *JUST LIE TO ME* cut into the quiet arrangements driving our deepest desires for both social justice and staying cute. Between Pierre's Haitian heritage and coming of age in Atlanta, Georgia and New York City, the artist's consciousness grew with the recognition of how racialized identity remains context dependent. Whether being identified as bougie (read: acting white) or as too urban (read: threatening), the unwinnable game of Black representation was expressed through the nihilistic embrace of capitalist excess by the anti- aspirational 'Lil's' face-tat rap (circa 2016).

Through a mixtape inspired play of redaction and reduction, wordplay, font-play and, yes, cute cues referencing a generational shift in Black consciousness, *JUST LIE TO ME* presents artwork disrupting formulaic representations of Black culture to gently bypass the (algo)rhythms of desire currently running the show. To continue exploring *JUST LIE TO ME* visit variableterms.com.



JUST LIE TO ME, 2021
Scanned newspaper collage
Dimensions variable

Luke Francis Austin

Featuring works by Luke Francis Austin
Curated by Leah Asha Allen

Black Art Sessions is pleased to present *Luke Francis Austin*, the first virtual presentation of work by the artist. This show features two works across painting and web-based digital collage that explore Black, queer, male fetishization and hyper-objectification as re-presented through pornographic imagery. Both works featured were made during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Doll 1 explores the Black, male body as an object on stage. The figure is painted as a collage of disparate parts including found images and an inflatable sex doll. The variance of skin tone suggests the subject may not represent any individual, but rather serve as a confrontation of a collective experience of distortion and commodification. The subject's legs appear flattened reflecting both the projected inhumanity of the figure, as well as the flattening of identity through objectification in both Western art history and contemporary visual culture. The painting's frozen-odalisque begs whether or not the subject is a willing participant in the performance and who, exactly, comprises the audience.

Black Gay Simulator first appears as a spammy, NSFW banner advertisement. An inquisitive click brings us to an animated, user-responsive digital collage featuring the subject of Doll 1. There, we find ourselves in a pornographic playground reminiscent of navigating to an illicit webpage via Internet Explorer in the 1990s. The background image evokes a nightmarish reimagining of Manet's Olympia, as the subjects' gazes appear to follow and beg for recognition at every glance. Direct phrases such as "CONFRONT YOUR FANTASY", "EXAMINE YOUR DESIRE", and "FUCK YOUR IDEA" peek from behind the patchwork design of repetitive ads and pulsating "CLICK HERE" buttons. A masturbating .gif in the left-hand corner unabashedly embodies the extent to which Black, male queerness has been objectified and re-presented for consumption. Ultimately, an "ERROR 404" message greets the viewer who accepts the beguiling invitations to venture deeper, only to find their continued access and gaze rejected in an eternal loop, a final defense against the culture of relentless fetishization.



Doll 1, 2020, Oil on canvas

Mejorar La Raza: Bettering and Belonging

Featuring works by Alexis Ward
Curated by Jordan Barrant

The Black Art Sessions is pleased to present Alexis Ward's first virtual exhibition, *Mejorar La Raza: Bettering and Belonging*. The Black American and Nuyorican female artist provides her personalized commentary on the Black and Latinx experience within her work. Through acrylic, watercolor, and ink-based work, Ward engages her communities by initiating social injustice dialogue and celebrating what makes her identities unique against the background of America. Ward offers her reflections on identity and the intersectionality of her experience through found archival media.

"Mejor la Raza" is a popular phrase in Latinx cultures, translating roughly to "improve the race." Often paired with "Blanqueamiento," the term alludes to whitening practices in post-colonial countries. In choosing this title, Ward leans into the inquisitive, curious core of her artistic practice. What does it mean to "improve the race?" Who participates in this question? Is the question even worth asking, continuing across generations? Through her fascination and adaptation of posters and images from her own life and notable pop culture memorabilia such as JET magazine, Ward questions what allegiance to whiteness necessitates. *Mejorar La Raza: Bettering and Belonging* explores several of the artist's recent works that consider how we're struck with color in Black and Brown spaces. The illustrations offer the artist's personal insight as she utilizes archival images and her own experience to flesh out the past and ignite further questioning on these issues in the present. Inspired by recent uprisings, police brutality, racism, and colorism, Ward highlights real moments in real-time.

Joanne Ransom, 2019
India Ink, Acrylic Paint
18in x 24in



This Side of Paradise

Featuring works by Marley Trigg Stewart
Curated by Brittany Clottey

Black Art Sessions is pleased to present its first exhibition, *Straight Lick*, featuring photographer, Marley Trigg Stewart (b. 1993). Originally from Pasadena, California, Trigg Stewart's work, *This Side of Paradise*, tells the story of his queer identity in connection to his lineage. Right before the pandemic hit, Trigg Stewart flew back to California and spent the next 3 months stuck with his mother and brother, not making any art. Unexpectedly, he received a call from his distant father, where he officially reunited with him and eventually, with his art. *This Side of Paradise*, was inspired by his father's recollections of his late brother, Trigg Stewart's uncle, Greg, a queer Black man whose life was taken due to the AIDS pandemic of the 1980s-90s.

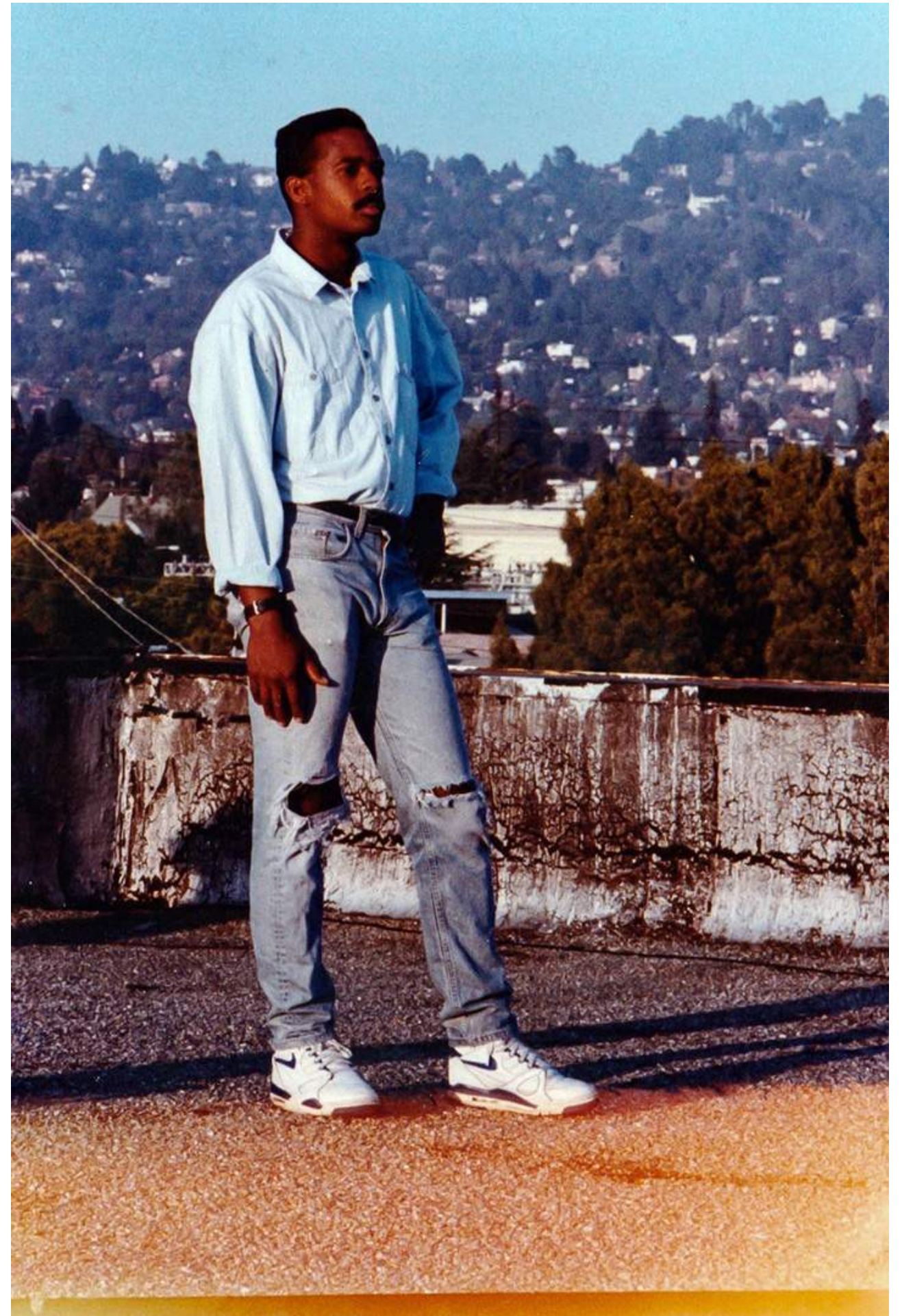
Trigg Stewart's uncle remained a hidden memory until his own queerness was recognized by his father. This discovery sparked the photographer's curiosity to understand who his uncle was, as well as the intersections of Blackness, queerness, and invisibility. His work surveys how his family processed the trauma of losing a queer relative, and having to choose between recognizing his uncle's Blackness over his sexuality.

Trigg Stewart's work looks to the past in the form of archives, as a way of revealing patterns, locating shared histories, and finding answers. The reunion with his father led him to start 'looking with intent', as the spontaneity of the event revealed so much about his lineage. Trigg Stewart sees the archives as a tool to resist the 'act of missing out,' because knowing about Greg's existence could've somehow altered his life, making his reality as a gay Black man so much easier to grapple with.

Trigg Stewart says, "Left curious about tenderness, family, death, desire, pain, and the grey spaces in between, photographing provides a method to acknowledge these ideas and explore the incestuous nature of their relationship." Trigg Stewart draws his attention to how the archives "inform familial legacies," and finds that they "provide a framework through which unspoken conversations across decades are possible." As a result, the portraits he's cultivated through his community in NYC and the snapshots of his parents and their circle of friends during their youth all add to those unspoken conversations.

Trigg Stewart's occupancy within this current COVID-19 pandemic provides a striking parallel with the AIDS pandemic that took the life of his uncle. Sharing a queer identity, growing up in the same town as his uncle, and being born the subsequent year of his death made this experience feel fated. Between the archives, the memories and the interrelations, Trigg Stewart's work is truly an embodiment of alignment.

Untitled (Dad Posing), circa 1980s



Pennsylvania

A[NON] FIGURATION

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

A[NON] FIGURATION

Featuring works by Ashley Ja'nae
Curated by Oluwatobiloba Ajayi

To the unknowing eye, Ashley Ja'nae's drawings could be read as abstract landscapes that flow between denser, kinkier pastures, and finer areas. Her feathered strokes are contained within self-imposed boundaries, but the mass of marks pushes against the edge, taking up as much space as Ja'nae allows. The works' titles hint at the artist's subject matter, firmly situating Ja'nae within legacies of Black abstraction that deny the proposition that what is abstract might not also be self-referential. Ja'nae gently tangles the lines between abstraction and figuration with the legibility of her drawings being dependent on the cultural literacy of the viewer. To some, her drawings are instinctively recognizable as Black women's hair, but to others, they are purely formal explorations. This embodied anonymity directly parallels the societal conditions that plague the Black woman, one of simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility.

The crisp edges suggest the border of a printing matrix, but in actuality, Ja'nae undergoes the ritualistic process of imitating her hair's innumerable conditions with her ink-dipped brush. In making the drawings, Ja'nae replicates the motions of doing one's hair. Both processes show a commitment to the beauty of Black hair, and the drawings affirm the sanctity of each strand and of what it tells of its owner: tracing the coils of her existence. The network of curls are in intimate relation with her own body, but constitute a cipher that speaks to the kinks and coils of her desired audience. There is a striking nonchalance to her work, it does not render itself explicitly, but operates on the confident cool of "if you know, you know." If you don't, then maybe it is not for you. The work's exclusivity prioritizes a demographic that is in most scenarios the subject of mass exclusion. Ja'nae speaks softly to the Black women who see themselves mirrored in her detailing and I trust that she will get me right.



Hair, 2019
Ink on paper
8in x 10in

Virginia

Gone the spring of Adolescence?

Sika Bonsu

Richmond, Virginia

Richmond, Virginia

Gone the spring of Adolescence?

Featuring works by Angelique Scott

Curated by Darciana Reynolds

“I don’t feel colored all the time. I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background”- Ta-Nehisi Coates

In a world where black people are demonized and dehumanized it may be hard to believe that we spend some portion of our lives oblivious to this. These narratives of us seek to hinder our growth as not only an individual, but as a community. However, some of Black adolescence within our community is spent nurturing innocence. That innocence of a black child is under constant threat and supervision, but also helps to lay seeds that blossom into self actualization in later years. The body of work that Angelique Scott presents in a ‘Straight Lick’ speaks on this duality of innocence.

Gone the spring of adolescence? Is a body of work that seeks to spark a conversation about the beauty of black innocence and the underlying policing of it. Each piece created during/ behind pertinent moments in Angeliques life. As a child growing up she would spend time in nature in Richmond, Virginia with her grandmother. Every few months she would try to grow flowers in the yard. This time spent would influence her in later years where she would find herself back in nature. While seeking a more understanding of peace and womanism within her, Angelique created the Flower Children.

She would again have a moment of self- actualization while creating Lady Justice in the same therapeutic nature but for different reasons. This time Angelique, an undergrad in a predominantly white college, would be faced with the tragic murder of Trayvon Martin. Lady Justice is a direct response to the personal and community grief felt by the artist. These experiences of beauty and delicacy of black childhood, both discovered and lost, is one ‘Gone the spring of adolescence?’ aims to shed a light upon. Though this conversation is not new it is still one of importance especially in terms of Black girlhood/womanhood and the lack of innocence that we are permitted.

The viewer is faced with this reality through the placement of the pieces. As the Flower Children arrest the viewers, Lady Justice can be seen lingering in the background. Watching/overseeing the growth and development of the children and their innocence. While the flower children should also be seen as a beacon of joy. For Black people deserve joy!



Lady Justice, 2017
Clay, Metal, Glaze

Sika Bonsu

Featuring works by Sika Bonsu
Curated by Sierra Jelks

Straight Lick is honored to present an exhibition of photographer Sika Bonsu’s work. Sika Bonsu (b. 1997) is a Ghanian-American photographer whose work demonstrates that the everyday doesn’t need to be “elevated” to the status of art, it is inherently artful. Bonsu was born in Ghana, came to the U.S. at the age of 4 and has since been living in Virginia for the majority of her life. She recently graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University, with a degree in both Art History and Gender + Women Studies.

Her photographic subjects are acquaintances, friends, and loved ones. Subsequently, in her work there’s a level of intimacy and vulnerability displayed that draws the viewer in. Bonsu began her photography career mostly shooting digitally, in early 2020 she made the switch to film photography. While with new technologies the aesthetic chasm between digital and film photography has greatly diminished, Bonsu’s work demonstrates the advantages to using film. The photos are imbued with stunningly textured tones, skin in particular is rendered with a grain that makes her subjects feel all the more raw in their beauty.

Photography for the sake of documenting pleasing aesthetics is integral to Bonsu’s practice. Though this may seem shallow it is far from being that; Bonsu’s photography is an anti-elitist, anti-colorist, celebration of everyday blackness. Bonsu notes how she was inspired by Slim Aarons vivid photography and how he helped promote this fantasy to the working class aspiring to wealth. Her work is that of the antithesis of Slim Aarons: a recognition of quotidian beauty.

Oreoluwa, 2020



Senior Gallery Director

Ebony L. Haynes

Artists

Abigail Albano-Payton
Ife Adeyinka
Luke Austin
Precious Braswell
Sika Bonsu
Lola Collins
Ryan Crane
Erzulie
Darnell Henderson
Ashley Ja’nae
Niara Jordan

Kikesa Kimbwala
Janiece Maddox
Shantel Miller
Morgan C. Mitchell
Morgan M. Mitchell
Akhira Montague
Mallory Lowe Mpoka
Alayna Nicholle Pernell
Brianna Perry
Rei Pierre
Sebastian Pierre

Angelique Scott
Karinne Smith
Symphonii Smith-Kennedy
Naomi Soquar
Marley Trigg Stewart
Attandi Tawalley
Alexis Ward
Joe Ward

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Tiva Baloi
Dercilla Bari Balde
Jordan Barrant
Shelton Boyd
Brittany Clottey
Jacarrea Garraway
Sierra Jelks

Cat Jones
David Jones
Mikala Jones
Shameka (Moca) Jones
Bojeung Leung
David Lisbon
Yaira Matos
Darla Migan
Morgan C. Mitchell
Emily Moore
Amandine Nana

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