

KINETIC LULLABY

NYSS DUMBO Sculpture Studio & Gallery
20 Jay Street, # 307
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Curated by Alison Causer and Darla Migan @VARIABLETERMS

KINETIC LULLABY is a group exhibition of the artists Carmen Amengual, omololu refile babatunde, Lia Kucera, Mercedes Matter, Dana Nguyễn, Fernando Manuel, Olivia McKayla Ross, and Saki Sato.

What does it mean to be reared in a world that demands we violently tear ourselves into bits and bytes, shattering the embodied psyche's longing for memory and rest? How can we endure the ceaseless cutting up of self/soul delineated by categories intended to kill off our capacity for unalienated pleasure and political action? The eight artists in KINETIC LULLABY work in the mediums of sound, printed word, painting, sculpture, and lens-based practices to dare to remember and dream, to code mytho-logical powers, to acknowledge tortuous labors as well as spiritual holism. Briefly this summer, we are holding our fragments together.

In the midst of our ongoing global pandemic we remain captive to genocidal logics evidenced by vaccine apartheid, new wars, and the assault on womxn's reproductive rights. There has also been a noticeable rise in rates of premature death correlated with increased isolation, general anxiety about the future, and the growing awareness of environmental precarity demanding our attention. Vehicular accidents are killing an overwhelming number of Black pedestrians in the U.S.; just as rural farmers worldwide succumb to hopelessness due to economic inflation; and unprecedented rates of suicide (among children ages ten to fourteen) shock the mental health industry.

The queer Black Caribbean analysis of artist and cyberdoula Olivia McKayla Ross searches for a way to make it make sense. Through pop choreographies her desire takes on mythological power inspired by the relationship between electronic video, sanity, and vanity. Deep fantasy means instagram filters, glamour magic, and mirrors, but also anxieties of video transmission: immersion, absorption, surveillance, and control. The poet-programmer's sense-making moves from the underwater/under-seen archipelago, her own marronage from the algorithm's caged reduction.

Fernando Manuel's *Recordando el Alma* allegorically embodies the trace of a spiritual practice by documenting childhood memories that would otherwise be irretrievable without the use of their camera. By unifying the whispering past with bodily abstraction, the artist invokes forms emerging between spiritual ecstasies and a mostly forgotten suburban plaza in Hialeah.

My studio visit in upstate New York with artist Saki Sato overwhelmed me with feelings that surfaced as I gently held the artist's small sculptures. Recalling a certain animated character buried deep in my own subconscious made me feel exposed yet safe. I was transported back to memories of being a latchkey kid at age ten or eleven—still young enough to watch PBS cartoons, but also old enough to look forward to afternoon talk shows like *Oprah* and *Ricki Lake*. Sato's sculptures embrace the spirit of a time just before racing to the dial-up modem became our only after-school activity.

The surround of the ongoing emergency only heightened by the global pandemic is part of the long durée of what Hortense Spillers calls the “steady state” of crisis as opposed to thinking crisis as a state of exception.¹ This means that regimes of (neo)colonialism and (neo)liberalism sliding into new fascisms, have only benefited from pandemic conditions. In 1963 the abstract expressionist painter and New York Studio School founder Mercedes Matter wrote: “Today, it is possible for a student to go through art school and gain an acute perception of “what is going on,” a fairly intelligent grasp of the situation, and yet never have departed a single step from his original naïveté of vision...[B]ut ironically, while handing him the gift of freedom with one hand, the modern school snatches away from him with the other the circumstances in which this exacting labor of self-confronting can take place: the time to work.”² By time to work, I hear Matter (still) calling our attention to practice—specifically, the time needed to develop the skills and patience necessary to discover what is most important about and indistinguishable between art and life.

In *Fingerprint of the Universe*, conceptual artist Dana Nguyễn carves frames from the wood of a tree called by two names on either side an ocean important to her life story. To hold and honor her separated family as a first-gen kid, a ritual encircling of imperial and personal histories occurs—connecting hands and fingers to tree rings and galaxies. Fire has also been an important source of inspiration for the artist. Witnessing life turning to stardust, Nguyen creates an altar-like situation with a rare black beach sand of Norcal freeing themselves to love on their own terms.

Lia Kucera’s mixed media exploration of matrilineal inheritances meditates on one of the most intimate relationships: the formation of her attitude towards her own body. In the artist’s recent practice, inspired by Latoya Ruby Fraizer’s *The Notion of Family* series (2001-14), Kucera went back to her own family home to physically build a symbolic gift of bodily agency. The artist’s former high school campus sets the stage of public address and for recalibrating mother daughter bonds.

Carmen Amengual’s mobile sculpture considers how extractive labor and attention economies exhaust the political capacities of the body and transform it into a subject and object of consumption. The piece is a meditation on the longing for a political capacity for action that would allow the body to recover from exhaustion. Through its textual component “Una fuerza que venga y me una, una voz que articule mis demandas,” the piece invites the viewer to consider what forces must be conjured to transform this passive position of consumption to one of action and intervention.

The artist omololu refilwe babatunde’s *for d.love* arranges song, spoken word, and collaged moving image. Unfolding like a dreamy ode to resting in nature, we witness the tops of tall trees superimposed with streams of flowing river water. Foamy ocean shorelines swirl or are seen running vertically, then horizontally on screen. Paired sunsets appear at different moments and angles, perhaps from different evenings and in multiple locations as the artist embraces the whole sky’s fiery orange and indigos. How often we forget the brilliance of foliage, moon, and water or that there are countless ways to love. A prayerful poem rises from the language of a saved voicemail of a friend, sliding bass strums and the singer’s voice, the most ancient instrument, opens dimensions to let in grace. Across multiple sense registers babatunde’s video practice sounds out an attunement for grounding ourselves right here, right now.

¹ Hortense Spillers, “Time and Crisis: Questions for Psychoanalysis and Race,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* Vol. XXVI, No 2 (2018), 25-31.

² Mercedes Matter, “What’s Wrong with the U.S. Art Schools, ARTNEWS, 1963.