

THE BLACK
LOVE BOOK

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interviews, musings, & visual reflections



SoftSavagePress


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& Karike H.

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*In loving memory of
our grandfathers:
Isaiah Forman-Bey,
Togbe Jackie*

*and our friends:
Kweku,
Maja Griffin,
Sinat & Shace*

THE LOVE

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EDITORS' NOTE

What is love to you?

Jalynn: We met in dance class. It was sophomore year, second semester at the sUNCen* place and loneliness wasn't the half of it. I was desperate. So desperate that I'd wandered into Zankiliwa rehearsals, middle of the semester, knowing no one, trying to connect the harrowing story of my body to another Black body's body. And there she was, Exornam Angela Tettey, at the front of the studio, directing everybody around like a poised and limber traffic guard. I had never taken an African dance class before. But by the looks of it, she had been teaching African dance her whole life. She was confident, prepared, and exact. The thirty or so other Black girls in the class listened to her as if she were the road itself. And, I did too. Only difference was I was clumsy, slow, and incapable of remembering the choreography. Week after week, I failed the routines. I never passed the auditions for stage performances. I could never bring the energy that the music required. Yet, still I called myself a part of Zankiliwa, Exornam's dance troupe; desperately stomping the depression out of my body.

Angela: I knew of Jalynn because she made it clear around campus that she was strong willed and ready to lead the fight in what she believed was necessary for us Blacks to live a life that we divinely deserved. Once I got accepted into the international program to study abroad in Cape Town, South Africa and I saw her name listed, I immediately knew I would have a friend by my side as I entered a new chapter of my life. The next time I saw her in Lenore, I ran up to her with excitement and raised the fact that we were both traveling back to our continent to study at UCT. I recognized at the moment, from the warm way she received me and the news that I shared with her, that I would have someone familial - a sister - as I took a leap of faith to live in a whole new environment. From that moment onwards, Jalynn helped me keep that solace feeling alive as we grew ready to leave to what is now one of our second homes. We constantly talked about what we wanted to experience. We wanted to be friends with SA residents, be immersed in the local culture, pick up some of the Xhosa language to help us navigate around the city, taste the best foods, and more. It was clear from the beginning that we were ready to explore and create memories together in South Africa. From Dunvegan to the top of Table Mountain, Jalynn grew to be a true *sisi* of mine as we continued into

each adventure. Azania rebirthed us as we helped each other understand how to be more self-aware and what it meant to return to our truest selves. Through countless conversations over tea bags of Rooibos and time to understand the powerful synergy she holds as a Gemini, Jalynn remained easy to love.

What is love between us?

Jalynn: Love is the commitment to come back time after time. It is the willingness to study, to listen to the moves, to practice engaging in the routines, with the knowledge that you will fail.

Angela: Love is a revolution that happens within. It is where one realizes that it takes the extension of grace and growth to reach a level of inner peace that welcomes others (and their process of transformation) as individuals to experience and not control in this lifetime. The realization expands into a shared mutually beneficial synergy with others and is decoded through familiar languages that help individuals commune to celebrate and grieve during the ebbs and flows of life.

What is love? Between? us?

Jalynn: I was lucky to find a sister in Exornam. As my dance teacher, she was intense and precise.

Later, as my roommate, she was adventurous and daring. And forever, as my sister, she is a spirit of gratitude shining light onto every season. When she invited me to collaborate on this book with her, I knew there was only the answer at the altar: yes, I do!

Angela: I will never forget when I found out that Jalynn was a wordsmith. She used to write for the Daily Tar Heel and shared some of her articles along with other poems, short stories, etc. with me back when we lived together in Cape Town. She wrote with a certain confidence that easily translated into the way she carried herself. Jalynn was bold, had a lust for life, and showed up as herself unapologetically. She has always inspired me to be intentional about finding my own voice and being true to who I am.

Both: *The Black Love Book* acknowledges that Black life is hard. Black love is life. As a people who are traumatized with the constant state of terrorism on Black bodies, we wanted to collaborate to make something new. Something full of love & life. Something that explores the entire spectrum of Black love-- romantic, gay, queer, platonic, familial, etc..

We hope you are left with a stream of understanding that anchors you to the depths of radical love that sustains Black communities across the world.

*A term created by Binta Ka about the experience of being a Black students at UNC-Chapel Hill

Memoir
by
ociele hawkins

Ummah

i was 23 at a friend's birthday dinner. keeping up with the conversations that ranged from sexuality to religion. at my end of the table, among mostly strangers, i brought up that i was queer and muslim. (but it had been 5 years since i'd called myself that). that was big for me. at that point in my life i never talked about islam. and the one time i decided to, one of the people, at the same end of the table as me, said with excitement they were also queer and muslim. and i'm feeling oh my goodness yes. and stop playing. and how though. because the only queer muslims i knew i didn't know because they only lived on tumblr.

and for the first time out loud to another beating heart, i said, "yea, i was but there was this hadith that said that queer people can't be muslims so i don't practice no more". this person said "nah nah...that hadith is bullshit. look at this one that contradicts it." and pulled out their phone and showed me that hadith. and if jaws could literally drop to a table i would have a bruise to show you. this real-life-not-on-tumblr queer muslim then told me about something called the trans health conference. it was happening the next day and there was going to be a panel about 'queers in islam'

and again if jaws could drop to a table.

my new friend from the dinner party and i are at the trans health conference and sure enough it's real. there was indeed a panel with these queer ass muslims talking about what it means to them to be queer and muslim. all this while i was in a packed room of trans people who were queer and many of whom also muslim. and i couldn't stop thinking the words "queer and trans and muslim". those words now felt closely related. and it had been a while since i'd thought about family.

taylor was one of the panelists. she was making common sense i didn't know existed. after the panel, my new friend and i made our way to taylor. her common sense felt like a finish line because we were out of breath when we finished talking. we must've looked like hands to a baton because she invited us to iftar because it was ramadan and how many times did i cry in 24 hours.

the next weekend we went to taylor's house. and mind you, taylor is Black, her partner is Black, and all her friends at the iftar are also Black. there was mac'n cheese and fried chicken and familiarity at this Black ass iftar. we talked, and ate, and joked, and played games, and an hour into things, someone checked their

phone and let out "no...". it was the night of the verdict, and george zimmerman was just let off for the murder of Trayvon Martin. the mood shifted.

taylor said, "prayer is coming in, and I'm going to pray, you're all welcome to join me." earlier that night, one of the laughs we shared was that we were all heathens, aside from taylor, who was an imam. so when she invited us to pray, we were sheepish and collectively said no. and she was like "ok, let's talk about it". looking back, that was brilliant. inviting us to share our thoughts and feelings about why we didn't want to pray. so we started talking about why and a little into the conversation, i said ok, i'll pray. and then someone else did too. eventually everyone agreed.

the last time i made salat was 5 years prior to this. i hadn't even made dua. we got into ranks to pray. it now felt foreign but 2nd nature and definitely unfamiliar because a Black woman is leading prayer and trans and non-bianry people are beside me and i never experienced a gender integrated salat before. i was terrified we were going to be struck down. but at the same time, i thought this is how it should be. i'm in ranks with cis and trans and non-binary people, and we're being led by a Black woman. this is how it should be.

i was surprised that i forgot al-fatiha and realized the lengths my body went to protect me when i left islam.

soon after prayer, i went home, dropped to my knees and wept. i started to pray again.

[question to the reader: who are your people?]

tired

uncle clide, now dead too, told me my daddy was in the hospital. and that was the most vulnerable i'd ever seen either of them. both my uncle in that moment and my daddy in that hospital bed. i got a ride that time but it was my big cousin ari who taught me how to catch the train from mt. airy all the way downtown to jefferson hospital. i focused on her directions like they would keep my daddy alive. they didn't. and this man ain't die because he got sick and that's the end of the book. he died 'cause of pain. i ain't never get to talk with him about it but that pain showed up in liquor bottles and tiny, skinny cut off straws. pain from things that happened in his childhood in north philly that lead to those bottles and them straws.

i'm still angry at this man. for the hurt he put on my moms with his cheating. from the hurt he put on me from his leaving. from the hurt he put on us getting locked up. how could he leave me? why didn't he want me? this man was my best damn friend. didn't he know that? that he made me feel special 'cause we had the same face and the same name. and then he was gone. took his face. left his name. and how does he think i feel taking a bus and a train to see him everyday after

school? watching him who i love and who left me confused about my worth. him who made me desperate for special. and how does he think i feel watching him die? the light from his eyes dim from yellow coating. fading day by day. from him talking to talking less then talking none. finally ragged breath. his sister, my aunt, the one who took me in when they was trying to kill me in south philly, played death doula. stood over her little brother, held his hand, looked into his eyes and saw all them decades of pain they shared and whispered loud enough for the hospital room full of family to hear, "i know baby. it's ok. you can let go. i know."

15 years old me, watching her namesake draw his last breath. wishing my aunt had also told me it was ok. wishing she told me to let go. wishing she said "i know him leaving wasn't fair. not then. not now".

[question to the reader: what exactly do you need to hear and who needs to say it?]

Artwork
by
Destiny Belgrave

"My Daddy Feels Like The Moon, And
I Am The Tide, Swaying And Soothed"
2021
Papercuts, Colored Pencil





Before The Work Began
2021
Papercuts, paint, glitter,
colored pencil
24 x 30 in



I Feel Like The Moon In My Daddy's Arms
2021
10 inches by 8.06 inches
Papercuts, Colored Pencil



They Speak To Me
2020
Digital

Poems
by
Jalen Eutsey

Portrait

Black and white are your colors.

Not the ones you wear, but the lens
you look through. When you misplace
your glasses you squint, feed Chicken
Fries to the dogs, let your favorite
lick chocolate from the wrapper.

Let them learn English, you say,
in your yellow dress with black dots.
The whole thing a giant ladybug.
You wear it so little these days.
You've outgrown its billowing
sunshine.

Long before the first malignance,
a pack a day and then cold turkey.
Your favorite story told and retold
about a beatdown you neither got
nor gave, but staved off with a bit
of sweet science philosophy—
you got to bring yours to get mine.

Dear [S],

Yesterday someone described the weather as a hiccup. Two days of Baltimore sun radiating beneath the clouds, but there was salt on the ground. All the business women in their business suits seem to frown. It didn't snow today, but the trees wince and turn away from the wind's hacking blow. It's winter. I don't smell anything in the air and I can't remember the last time I cooked. Do you cook much these days, in your pencil skirt and hoodie, blasting Biggie, and Freakonomics Radio? Do you still like inkblots and origami? I'll call when the weather warms. Maybe we can take some pictures in front of the swamp roses at the edge of the road.

Interview with

Simeme Mthembu

Who are you and how do you describe your creative work?

I'm a child of the soil. Divergent. Creativity is etched and carved in the details of my daily life.

What does "Black love" mean to you?

It means a love eternal, accepting, forgiving and conscientious.

How does your work relate to Black love/ how do you incorporate it in your work?

By embodying a peaceful, calm, loving, accepting, forgiving life.

How does softness relate to your work? How does savagery relate to your work?

Softness is all we have. Savagery is how we can ruthlessly love.

How does your work allow you to glorify your Blackness?

By allowing me safety in a world lacking just that.

**Book
Review
by
Imani Spence**

Holding Beloved

There is really only Toni Morrison. Her writing is like velvet that swiftly changes color when you touch it. Her world building blooms, internal then expansive, and she has never once considered any perspective other than her own. As a writer, I envy her so much and I'm reminded that Toni was a READER! She is the reason we have the Angela Davis autobiography in the world! She was writing in "secret" while working at Random House before she even took the time to write these books!

Beloved is that really amazing piece of steak/meat/tpv that where chewing just pulls the good flavor out. I had to go back to my old school 12th grade English skills and make a character map because time is malleable for Toni and it's easy to get confused about the characters and miss plot amid the lush language. Taking the time to really sit and slowly read was the only way I could actually digest this book. I thought of it endlessly. I listened to Toni read it while reading a paper copy and it made me feel the grief of her death more tangibly than ever. I would sit; just meditating on Ms. Toni's use of punctuation especially as her voice transforms it. Her voice takes all of its time reading, paying special attention to meter and punctuation. She also takes license with words that

I find so humane and refreshing because it's her writing dammit! So what if she says "into" when it reads "to" or "tight rein" instead of "right rein." Is the content the same? Then shh, Ms. Toni's reading.

Beloved tells the story of a house, 124 as they call it, and its inhabitants. The house is in Ohio and represents the end of a journey out of enslavement to a new kind of life. The famous "freeing yourself is one thing but taking control of that freed self is a whole nother" is in this book. Hearing that quote time and time again and then seeing it in the text I'm reminded; a lot of y'all are not reading because context always matters. Sethe, Denver and Paul D. are all living in the house together at the beginning of the book and they are joined by a guest. Toni places the gruesome events of Beloved as a near match to the gruesome, disgusting act of enslavement. Many of the characters are able to seamlessly integrate muck of enslavement and abuse into their lives; they're not shocked when things get scary and gory.

Toni understands the truth of enslavement: it's commonplace and still, so clearly and obviously, detrimental. Her use of "good white people" really just includes people who don't actively

try to murder or torture Black people and that bar is considered adequate. The dark unrelenting hand of slavery causes all of the characters to come to grips with options. How does a mother raise and encourage a child to live when someone could enslave them at any time without repercussion? What kind of life is it to hold the scars of torture while running "free?" Toni sits with the disquieting and disturbing emotions that come up when asking these questions. Ms. Toni has always so clearly seen Black people as humans who were treated inhumanely which opens up character development and plot movement in ways I could never fathom.

I will miss Toni Morrison until I join her on the other side.

**An Interview
with
sun Lynn Hunter**



Grounded I, 2019

Who are you and how do you describe your creative work?

I am a wanderer, investigator, and aquarius. I am a Multimedia Endurance Artist that engages in exercises that create environments of empathy and reflection.

What does “Black love” mean to you?

To me Black love means salvation and pure joy. It’s an energy that vibrates and travels outside of time. Sometimes it’s also so powerful that it can be overwhelming, like feeling connected to the emotions and lives of people you’ve never met.

How does your work relate to Black love/ how do you incorporate it in your work?

In my work I reference other Black female artists, like Nina Simone, Bell Hooks, and Solange whose work focuses all around love and joy. I also try to incorporate my journey towards self love in my video collages and sound pieces which are important elements I include in most of my performance work. Suspended Culture, a Black artist collective I’m a member of is currently curating a performance show centered around Black love and Bell Hooks book All About Love.

How does softness relate to your work? How does savagery relate to your work?

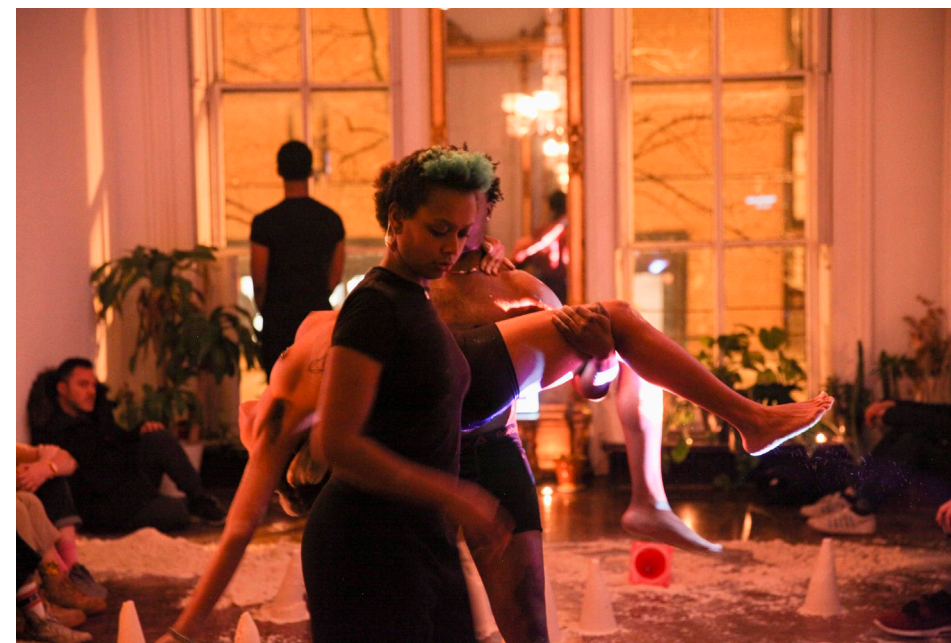
My work can be soft in sound or lighting and in the practice of talking about love and un verbalized emotions. I can think of savagery in terms of the raw materials I use such as soil and sand, and how I like to touch on raw emotions like fear and loss.



Grounded Series, 2021

How does your work allow you to glorify your Blackness?

A lot of my work involves drawing attention to the importance of Black breath and Black presence. I get to emphasize the importance and value of everything my Blackness encompasses. But I am also able to pay homage and honor language makers and storytellers who have come before me. Whether it be including the energy shifting voice of Jessye Norman in a movement piece or the honest words of Assata Shakur in another.



Forget My Fate, 2019



In Plain Sight(Site), 2020

Poems

by

Jamie Grace

Alexander

Waverly

hug touching silk
we slip off each other
too soft to touch
anything but skin
composes the outer layers
we bundle into like
downy birds &
fly north
to Waverly
flying in formation
updraft
community idealization
in homes like ours
curtains drape to kiss
hardwood floors
feed dust bunnies
sunlight pours in
fresh
like morning after coffee

we take a little more
than the moment takes
remain in bed
while I jostle our day awake
her sleeping tongue unbrushed

my hair unkempt
bonnet on & morning breath
girlfriends thirty years ago
wake up the same way we do
together
in Waverly
all we need is
yellow-egg eyes staring
& a grey cloud of weed
I'll rejoin you in bed soon
with breakfast in the afternoon

Pussy Reloaded

come scarred
to the place
our bodies
meet

We both identify/are identify/able

calm lay over her lap
give me red pain
twist me as twine
clothespin me closed
watch me writhe

make me emit
a fluorescent frequency
a bats chirping
lube over my pussy cheeks
my snub nose upturned

I am not a hole but a loop
I double back on myself
my cunt is not imaginary
when she tells me to squeeze down on her fingers
I do. She feels it.

we dip our hands in each other

we cast shadows
through vibrator light
through braids
draw blind-lines on your
lip-bitten face

gaze an inverse panopticon
focused magnifying glass
a powerful lazer
incinerating
abdomen to thorax

somebodys getting fucked

Blood is not a meaningless fluid.
It fills as it moves
I inflate this balloon to give to you
pussy reloaded
Fire!

Boy I was

I miss that nigga
absence always felt
even my tits feel hollow
bones
help me fly higher in
dreams & imagination
queer
away from fathers
& their sons
cursed to either be
or fuck with us.

i
associate masculinity
with pain & negligence
disregard or disapproval.
I feel a victim of men
touch her earnestly
cool water ripples out.

Further into a memory,
between cattails
a boy i was swam,
promised James Ulishney
--I can say his name because
he is dead--

we'd show our sons this same watering hole.

Apparently at my grandfather's funeral,
they all asked for me,
were easily corrected by my brother
"Jamie couldn't make it"
but in their minds it remained
my father had sons.

Boy i was
a punching bag
for metrosexual middle schoolers.

Beaten down to a blank white screen.
To be hollow an object must have dimension.
I don't miss James,

James killed himself.
I killed the boy i was.

Artwork
by
Mark Flueridor

Memory Picking
Quilt
18.5" x 16.5"
2023
Photographed by Pedro Wazzan



Tight Hold
Quilt
16"x 18"
2023



"All of Us"
Quilt
60"x 60"
2020
Photographed by Phillip Karp



Interview

With

Abdu Ali

Who are you and how do you describe your creative work?

I'm a Baltimore based music artist, always. I wasn't claiming it for a long time. And now I'm a multidisciplinary artists whose primarily focus I will probably refer to as focuses on sound and performance and social practice.

What does "black love" mean to you?

Well, for me black love means to wholeheartedly love all black people inclusively. And it means to me as a black person to wholeheartedly love your blackness. So, that's one layer but under that layer is also a message about making sure one is doing the work to disrupt back and dismantle the internalized conditioning, or any internalized oppressive conditioning, that involves anti-blackness and racism - internalized racism - to make people forget that we black and all.

But most black people in this world actually grew up in an environment where the premise of society and culture is rooted in white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. Because we grew up in these environments embedded with violence systems a lot of times we internalize anti-black racism and that creates issues where we have a really, really tough time loving other black people and their blackness. We have a hard time loving ourselves. So for me, that's what black love is.

Love really loud. For me it's like a one size fits all. It's a whole situation. It's definitely layered, because our existences are so layered.

How does your work relate to Black love/ how do you incorporate it in your work?

Well, I make work for my people. Everything I produce. Also, I'm ensuring or I'm doing my best to make sure that I am decolonizing the gays or the white gays, I'll center black eyes. And, any other

work that I do— from music to my art practice to writing — I do it to promote self empowerment, healing, self determination, and autonomy. I enjoy making the work and intuitively for the audience that I want to speak to which is black folk. It starts with intent. Like I'm making work, making sure that for one, not only that, with the mindset that people can access it. You know, whereve you are physically, spiritually, intellectually, etc., but also making sure the word speaks to me. And feels whole and natural - an essence of myself. Because I'm black, so automatically it's like I'm saying, cuz I'm black, and I'm making work to further black people.

How does softness relate to your work? How does savagery relate to your work?

You know, being a butch queen, my work is embedded in some sort of softness within. In my performance work, specifically in my music, I kind of want to ensure that it is weird, it has some type of softness, because I know growing up, being raised as a black boy, my mother allowed me to be. She empowered me in a lot of ways that a lot of people's parent's didn't. And I realize the freedom this granted me. I realized how important it is to dwell in softness and feminine energy for creativity and imagination as well. So for me in my work, I hope to investigate not only the ways that I'm soft, but also the ways that I'm not, and how to do that and be better with - do better with radicalizing my softness and making sure that it matters in reaching for a space where I am wildly in the full spectrum. I think maybe the toughest one for a lot of people is the emotional softness because the world we grew up in is very, very much so rooted in masculine patriarchal image. From how we were raised and taught to get money to survive while hustling to defend yourself against the evils of the world is always rooted in a super toxic masculine patriarchal energy.

I feel like savagery definitely shows up somehow again in my music and performance. And I think it shows up a lot in the way I vocalize. I would like to say that it is a form of self-service. I have definitely sat like a savage on stage for sure, but it's not in a way that's violent. I think that soft savagery is definitely something that shows up pretty well in the ballroom scene. Especially with vougers and also commentators - they're good examples of what it means to be soft and savage.

They definitely show that that's what the essence is. It's a swag, it's a cadence. It is not necessarily an aesthetic, per se. It's a spirit. And, I think in spirit, I show up very savage, very much so like a warrior, very much so like African kings, like God. And just being unapologetic - by any means necessary.

How does your work allow you to glorify your Blackness?

I think the words are probably the best way that I do that because I honor those who came before me with my words. I make sure that I'm always honoring the OGs and women in my work and glorifying blackness. And, understanding the legacy that paved the way for me to be able to do the things that I do today. I make this space for the ancestral energy in my work, whether it's just a thought or whether I honor them in a song or performance or in an interview. I respect black legacy - the black queer legacy- and just making space for the ancestors is how I glorify blackness.

Collages
by
Markele Cullins

My untitled collages' primary elements are stills from some of the most iconic R&B music videos. Heather Headley - "I Wish I Wasn't," Mary J. Blige - "No more Drama," and Deborah Cox - "Nobody's Supposed To Be Here". The collages are simply odes to this era and these collages explore the complexity of love. Love is kind and considerate, but also has the potential to be complex, hurtful, and damaging.

I've spent all my life
On a search to find
The love who'll stay for eternity
The heaven sent to fulfill my needs
But when I turned around
Again love has knocked me down
My heart got broken
Oh, it hurt so bad
I'm sad to say love wins again
So I place my heart under lock and key (ooh, yeah)
To take some time and take care of me
But I turn around and you're standing here

~ Deborah Cox - "Nobody's Supposed To Be Here"





Poem
by
Sharéa Harris

How to Get to Know Him: Chicken Boxes the Baltimore Primer

1. Ask him to take you to get a chicken box.

He will pause; he will then swell with pride. See his gears turning as he unpacks all the nuances and ways to calculate the best box. He is likely replaying barbershop debates, squabbles with the boys, his cousin, sister, momma's opinions. He is rebuilding the rubric for which chicken box is best.

Note: Sis, this is where things get hot. If he's from East Baltimore he's gonna say one thing, if he's from West Baltimore don't bring up Stokos. Do NOT. Don't.

East and West Baltimore are different fucking worlds. Period. I know, you may look differently at this but girl, trust me. It's such a lively debate, that for a long time I thought the chicken boxes were different; they are essentially the same. Basic ingredients: chicken, potato, bread, salpepperkehcup. I replace the ketchup with hot sauce because I'm from the deep south.

2. Let him drive or take you along public transit.

Watch the way his body unfurls in the familiar of his knowing. Watch him lost in memory as he is tour guide; watch his throat swell with sound and release:

in the way of shouting to those he knows; in the way of calling back the innocent to him, if it was ever allowed to exist. Ignore the abandoned and empty around you. Instead, notice his fulness, let the living of the city take you over. It will take you over regardless of if you are east or west.

You will smell it. The scent heavy in the air. The way we all know comfort, fried and greasy.

Yes, your mouth will water.

3. Let it.

If this is your first time,

4. Allow him to introduce you; allow him to order for you: Do this so you can listen to the way this tongue dips and genuflects:

"chicken box: three wings and western fries, salpepperkehcup."

watch him, the way his body moves; the way he talks to the people behind the glass; the baby unsure in her shoes; the mommas, and d boys and leaners and city gurls. let them talk to him.

let him be. watch him and learn sis.

Like all comfort, patience is part of the process.

5. As you wait, let the space be quiet,

or let him fill it with the ways he used to eat it; or memories from when he used to get this; or why he decided that this is the best. he might fill the space with stories of other chicken boxes the condition of potatoes in this box versus that; the way the ketchup here is sweeter than the ketchup else where. let it.

There will always be asian folks and bulletproof glass.

Even though he told them when he ordered, they will ask again.

6. Hear the way he breathes and inflects;

mouth the words with him as he speaks to those behind the glass; imagine how your tongue must dance to create the sound: salpepperkehcup.

Note: some places will do this for you; last time I stepped foot in Stokos you had to do this yourself. If he doesn't have to apply the salt then proceed this way:

7. Let your eyes relax
on the fingers of his hand, bending back the box or untucking the styrofoam lip to expose the hot fried chicken; the wedges; the translucent wax paper that lines the throne of the box. watch the salt and pepper sit in the folds of crisp skin; watch that tongue of his come forth to lick the sloppy pour of ketchup.

Note: I'm happy to say there isn't much room for the waste of time debate of drums vs. flats. they will serve you the whole shoulder. Now I'm not gonna tell you how to eat a wing, but it's been called to my attention that there is a need for the collection of basic wing maneuvering:

1. rip the chicken shoulder at the joints.
2. You should then have a drum, the flat, and the tip.
3. Baltimore eats the tip
 - 3a. I ain't really eat the tip before I moved here, but now I recognize that to leave that bit of fried skin, however tiny is actually a waste.
 - 3b. eat the tip.

Now from here I'm going to assume you know what to do with the drum and the flat. but here are a few tips for my sistahs:

4. Acrylics are tools:
 - 4a. hot skin removal
 - 4b. pull that gristle off sis,
 - 4c. pick up that fry and dip
 - 4d. unwedge from between the teeth

8. Watch him pick the bones.
What attention does he pay the tip, the drum, the flat. How does his mouth glisten with the grease of chicken? Does he pile his bones in the corner of the box; does he fling them in the street like offering. does he ask you questions with meat still between his teeth?
Now, sis, this is where you are also on test. I recommend, don't leave no meat behind.
Now, you've got more than enough to chew on.

9. eat, gal. eat.

Interview with Joy Liburd

Who are you and how do you describe your creative work?

I am a Black woman of faith from the South, who is enamored with storytelling. I love learning about how things came to be-- about what makes people tick. I embody my name, even when I don't feel like I have the energy to do so. I would describe my creative work as the work of passion, community, and vulnerability.

What does "black love" mean to you?

Black love is beauty. It's resolute and bold. Black love is resilient in the most beautiful of ways. In a world that consistently seeks to strip us of our joy and worth, Black love is our gentle reminder of that impossibility.

How does your work relate to Black love/ how do you incorporate it in your work?

Kids are my favorite type of human; Black kids, especially. I am incredibly intentional about the music I play during my classes, and the images I show them. Though they may not understand the "why" just yet, it is important to me to plant seeds of self-love and cultural appreciation-- just as they were planted for me.

How does softness relate to your work? How does savagery relate to your work?

When I hear softness, I think of vulnerability. As a dancer, I have to be willing to look and feel awkward in service of the piece as a whole. It is less about me and more about the story that I'm trying to tell. Savagery, however, is about me. It is the conversation I have to have with myself before I perform- in dance or in life- that reminds me to take up space. To speak up. To stand on what I said.



How does your work allow you to glorify your Blackness?

My work is a reflection of me. Its sheer existence is glorifying Blackness. I once heard someone say that "dance is what music looks like." What a blessing it is to be able to add to the existing beauty of music. Through my work, I feel like I partner with the Black musicians who composed the songs to which I create. I am honored to add my "show" to their "tell."





Memoir
by

Malcolm Peacock

Originally conceived for a performance at the ICA at Virginia Commonwealth University December 2021. Performed alongside Dennis Williams. Separately, Williams and I wandered through a crowd of strangers, friends, and acquaintances at the Institute of Contemporary art at our Alma mater. With the thought of enslaved rebellions of Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner (both of Virginia), we spoke to people one on one throughout the evening and amongst the crowd attending the opening of the larger project curated by Egbert Vongmalaithong and Nontsikelelo Mutiti.

During casual conversation and without breaking any eye contact, we would recite the following text from start to finish without regard for the viewer's willingness to hold our gaze. If a viewer were to move, our directive for ourselves was to stay visually fixated on the space they occupied when we first encountered them.

Part 1

Is it perhaps impossible? In what land can two negroes move swiftly down the street? Through a tunnel. Over a bridge. In what land? can two negroes fly as their elbows graze each others' accidentally. Enjoying the wetness of that touch. In what land would such an encounter with self--be,

not allowed, but embraced.

I used to live down a road. Neglected by the city. Two gigantic potholes. Uneven footing. The ground slipping away. Caving in on itself. Swallowing the tires. The pavement surrendering. Bodies sinking into the worst of summer heat. After the storm we laid out, under the sun. For the first time it was too hot to be at home. The thermostat read 100 degrees. The heat index 107. Upstairs we fought about how we would preserve food. screamed and our naked bodies drenched hardwood floors. We ran out of ice and started picking up whatever droplets of water we could with dirty hands from the cooler. Just managed to not kill each other within that one hour of sleep every night. It was alienating. Our minds began to melt. After the 3rd day, I didn't know if we would make it. And so I left and went to Jackson. It was hot, of course, but it was different.

When I got home, it was time to start prepping. It's a long haul. 16 weeks. It was

endless. There was one morning, well, three, where I watched the sunrise along the golf course. 6:57 am mid September.

To be alone. To be the only. No cars. Not a whisper. Just that tapping. It was still. Kind of midnight blue in certain patches. A few rays cut crisply through a piece of fog. I departed from two white men and deeply, for an hour, I imagined us creating that horizon. I started singing Whitney Houston. I was not meant to break. A negro. Another one. Another one. Another ten. Another 20. Another 70. Dr James said, "what's the exit plan?" And she knows there is not one. Michelle Alexander left teaching law after the New Jim Crow was written because she said the law can't be reformed.

I'm not trying to get out. It's not possible. But in Jackson, I had some space and I found something internally. Something hopeful to bring home. But I know, I know, everyone knows, when they encounter an untouchable negro. It's spiritualizing. It's outside of time. It

can't be described. I want to feel that breaking again. With kin. With my kin. That shattering. And that moment where everyone gathers around the fainted body. Picks it up and then that song, "I've got a mind to live right". "I've got a mind to live right. My lord. I've got a mind to live right, my lord, everyday". James says, "The exit plan...it's an impossible task. But it's one completely worthy of you". All that sweat; all that black against sunny green hills. An eyelash of one moves against the collar bone of another. He holds him in place. The sun watches with pleasure. It's undeniably one of the most beautiful scenes. The reality is that the moment isn't real. it is imagined. Because even outside, even the place that we made, that we paved, crafted and sculpted in every way-- architecturally, socially, physically--our relationship with the weather. The rain. It has yet to fully become ours.

Where and when, can two negroes in this land, choose to labor in breath, side by side, singing from their guts, collapse in exhaustion and be lifted away by the hollers of elders?

What would that day bring? That would it say about them and the land from which they sprung?

An elder looks on. Watches them with wet eyes of disbelief.

The only question remaining: in what pitch will we sing the elder's song?

Originally conceived for a performative lecture at Yale School of Art's photography department.

Part 2

I've been going to the extension alone lately. I've been thinking of our years there together. How different it feels now without you. Yesterday, I fell asleep there under the sun. My left foot barely touching my front tire. I kept waking from a little slumber and thinking, "I gotta get up or I'll have to chase someone down for my bike." But the pleasure of being out there, undisturbed, and feeling like it's all ours--exists right at the edge. Right at the edge of all precarity. Everytime, all those feelings and memories run right up against that thrill of potential danger. And everytime it feels worth the risk. Feels worth the possibility of an escalating heart rate from a high speed chase that might make you collapse in the middle of the trail.

Lately, the white guys aren't really around. The heat index is high again so people are trying to be in the AC. I do miss you dearly. Sometimes, I--I'll hold my own hand, rub my own cheeks--imagine

your fingers. Oh, how carried away I have let myself become.

There are some mornings where I still leave the house around 5am. I get out there to the farm, take the right hand side down to the road and watch the sun ascend. I still take up the best seats in the house. I save one for you. I still take photos for you. Remembering the way you would gasp as soon as the first birds broke through the morning. The way you opened your arms and ran across the dog park and asked why are we ever inside?

There were other things I wanted to do with you. That last December it felt like we were making a small home. That swamp that borders the garden is still standing. I'll crouch over there in hopes of seeing a red fish. There are plenty of days at the extension when I feel so very present. And it's not a relationship to a dream or a vision. It feels more immediate. To the point where I take off my clothes and at the height of the day I'm caressing the grass with my toes. Rubbing my left nipple with my middle finger. Standing in one spot, being lathered by light and rotating slowly every part of my being until it's all been grazed. I lose track of time. I hold my hips

and consider the feeling of your chin upon my shoulder. All my clothes are soaked in dew by 7am.

I am trying to carry this land home. I am moving slowly. But I am moving. I surrender my time to learning with our family of all that the extension could become. So often some folks see these things as everyday happenings. But we know them to be miracles. Especially for negroes. For you and I cannot afford to ignore the presence of the sunrise. I now am exposed. I step forward into complete darkness. The sun--its touch descending upon me as armor. That patch of grass where we did Christmas last year is still there. I go there to look for you. And if I can handle it, sometimes I'll gather three strands. Keep them in the ground. One over the other. Tightly. Thin. Rooted. Mighty. You, me, the land. I tie a translucent rubber band at its end. I feel around.

We're here together. Below the line of the sea. I'm going to drown here one day. For what the levee cannot sustain, I will bear the rest. My throat will swallow the weight of the river. My stomach will sink and slowly drag me with it.

Not one of those braided blades will survive. But perhaps that is not the point. Perhaps the measure of me, the meaning of you, is found in trying to suck something out of what has been left for us.

A dog barks in the distance. I look down for a moment. I have to hold my chest.

Poem
by
Darra Shelton

My Blackness is a Mystery

mother moonshine drips anointing
as the sounds of love ripple to life

i am but a constellation reflected
in an endless succession of stars

and to see in my eyes the most high
is to see us from every angle

i embrace my life like a lover not lost
but gifted, no returns no exchanges

and I accept the things that come anew
as a sacred form of ancient unity

hands open and unshackled still hold
dark matter of sacrifice and surrender

it turns like the sage smoke to poetry
a flow resonating through the ages.

Interview
with
Godfrey De Sylva



Who are you and how do you describe your creative work?

I wear many hats as an artist. I'm a creator, a teacher and a performer.

What does "black love" mean to you?

To me, black love stems from a place deeper than physical or romantic chemistry. It's celebrating the divine perfection in each other that others may not see or understand. Embracing the complexities that are unique to us and constantly pulling each other up with grace and compassion because we share a common history and desire to be better people. It's loving past the pain, past the trauma and frustration of simply being black, and existing in a world that doesn't value us for who we are but rather what we have.

How does your work relate to Black love/ how do you incorporate it in your work?

It's always been a goal of mine to destigmatize black beauty. As a hairstylist in the film industry I centered my whole business around black and brown people before it was cool and trendy. Merely being present as a P.O.C in an industry run and owned by white people is a source of ease and comfort knowing that they have an artist that will know what "edges" are or why shea butter is a must-have on set.

How does softness relate to your work? How does savagery relate to your work?

The softness element of my work is being able to share that moment with whoever is sitting in my chair when they see themselves through my eyes just for a moment. They get to fall in love with themselves all over again or sometimes for the first time. People trust me with their crowns and I am obligated to apply some softness and grace with every client. Savagery for me is when I am in my

element. It's being able to unapologetically paint outside of the lines and still deliver a masterpiece. I don't know anyone else that looks like me or has the same background as me that does what I do. I've had to be fearless in my career and carve my own way even when the odds were mounted against me, that to me is savage!

How does your work allow you to glorify your Blackness?

Our hair as people of color carries a lot of meaning and symbolism. It goes beyond vanity and aesthetics. I made it my mission to elevate ethnic hair care in an industry that has always misunderstood us and is constantly trying to box us into a narrow and often very whitewashed narrative. My mission is to restore our relationship with our crowns and shine a light on the unwavering beauty in our coils. To me, it's when we rejoice in this beauty that's in each of us that we truly glorify blackness.



Poem
by
Wakithi Mabaso

glowup

I've come to discover the fountain of youth. Its slick waters composed of the natural silk that is melanin. The more you're gifted with - the greater its potency.

What does it mean to be beautiful you ask yourself?

The eavesdropping world interferes with its trite response,

"It is to be yellow."

But your soul. From within, your soul whispers its answer.

The same answer it whispered yesterday,

the day before

and 5000 days before that.

"It is to be you.", it says.

People think yellow beauty opens doors but it opens doors to cliff edges and I shall not follow.

Unlock your worth dark skinned child.

On your terms

Interview

With

Jalen Boston

Who are you and how do you describe your creative work?

I am mydreamsisvivid. I would describe my creative work as music production.

What does “black love” mean to you?

Black love means soul, freedom, trust, and divine. Black love means soul because black people are soulful people. So when engaging in love, it’s soulful. Black people are going to always do our own thing and move to the beat of our own drum; and to me, that is freedom. Trust is imperative for love to even be present and thrive and when black people love one another it impacts every realm.

How does your work relate to Black love/ how do you incorporate it in your work?

I incorporate black love into my work because I try to put all of the things I realize and learn about and from black love into my work so when you listen to my work it feels and reminds you of black love in a way. Creating music for me is like my journal. So day to day when I experience something that relates to the love of self, work, a friend, family member, a partner, something spiritually related, or the lack of love regarding any of those things, I release those feelings into my music. I put the uniqueness and divinity and soulfulness and freedom of black love into my work because it is so necessary today to let it be known that true black love is alive and possible and real! My work relates to black love because I am black and I am love so the connection is always present and as I navigate life and shed the parts of me that aren’t love, true black love will shine clearer and clearer through my work.

How does softness relate to your work? How does savagery relate to your work?

Softness and savagery relate to my work because I believe that both are necessary when necessary



so whenever I want to express softness I make sure to create something dreamy and calming and when I want to create something savage I create something very intense and loud.

How does your work allow you to glorify your Blackness?

My work is mostly hip-hop oriented and so I feel like in a lot of ways the true essence of hip-hop is the glorification of blackness.



Photo credit:
Sydney J. Allen

why do i still feel like
baby no diaper, kool-aid no sugar?

why must i choose between
spacious cage or a cage at all?

everything i need i found
in loving everywhere but you

and if that love isn't right,
i don't want right ever

what scares me to ask is:

what if it isn't right?

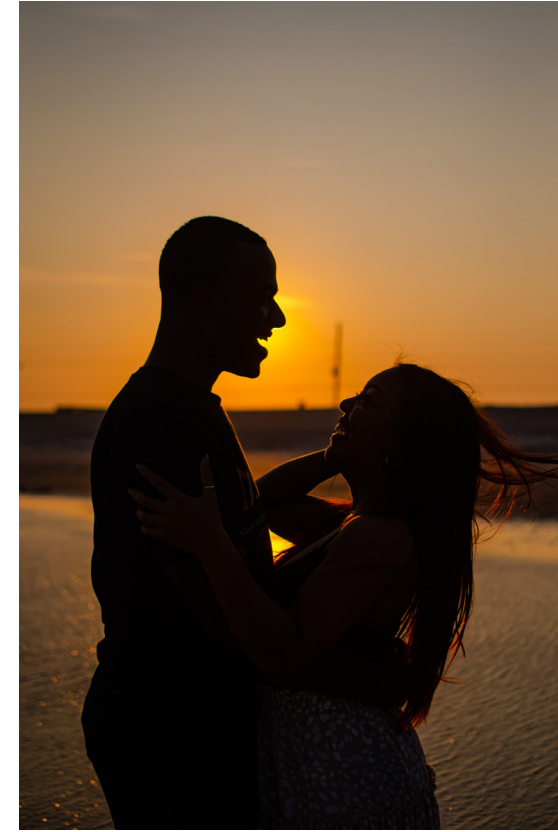
you would know but you are a whisper
so i tell myself to lick this bone clean

when desired,
before getting seconds.

Photography

by

Moriah Lynn





Memoir

by

Exornam Angela Tettey

Fees Must Fall | End Outsourcing | October 19 2015

There was a peaceful protest led by Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) and other allied organizations the whole day. Right before nightfall, some of the protestors got into Bremner to occupy the building. The University got a court interdict for the hashtags that surrounded the movement (i.e., #FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing) and specific individuals: Zaire, Abdul, and Soweto. This enabled the police in their use of force to un-occupy Bremner.

There were police cars surrounding the building with officers getting ready for something - they were itching. There were protestors talking to the officers to get word of why the police were here and how they planned to clear out the building.

But, still we stood our ground at Bremner singing songs of resistance and dancing in solidarity.

There were rumors that the police planned to use rubber bullets, tear gas, and more. Comrades spread the word and kept each other updated. At first, we moved towards the parking lot because there was one beautiful individual that worked in support of the Trans Collective that told us that if we weren't exactly on the property of Bremner -

steps, lawn, etc. - we would not run into any issues with the law.

At this moment, we had to make a decision - whether we wanted to play it safe. Our study abroad program did not allow students to be a part of protests as the possibility of facing legal issues as international students was quite high. Or did we lend our bodies to the Black revolution. We found ourselves drawn to the movement. We stayed. It was a good decision because we recognized that the chimurenga was coming. We stood in solidarity and were alert not to get caught in the crossfire for safety and security reasons.

Now we made our way to the front of Bremner. In preparation for tear gas, the synergy of Black consciousness led us to help each other pour water into our shirts - this would allow us to breathe and cover our eyes. As we passed the jugs of water around, multiple police cars disappeared. This did not phase us; the singing grew louder - a certain fire expanded within us all. We realized that this protest at Bremner was only the beginning. It disrupted the violent status quo in Cape Town and, more widely, South Africa: the constant exploitation of non-white workers and the systemic devaluation of Black bodies. Our resistance highlighted and forced many to problematize

the issues behind outsourcing and tuition fees increasing, specifically at the University of Cape Town (UCT). As we belted from our stomachs and clapped over our heads, Busiswa turned to us and said, "Do you understand now? Do you feel it?" This moment was intense; reality set in for me. I became more aware that a lot of the protestors came alive through being a part of this movement - they had nothing to lose because in a way they had died a social death for simply being Black. Through the interruption of suffocating spaces, such as Bremner, the UCT Administration building where non-white bodies were not wholly welcomed, these mostly Black protestors demanded recognition of their humanity. The UCT Administration, which was mostly made up of white individuals, continuously treated and dealt with Black students as if they were animals. Earlier that same day at Bremner, Administration had asked the gathering of mostly Black students to stand in the parking lot and not inside the building because they feared that they would cause chaos. As we took up space, our voices amplified that we were tired of being thought of as subhumans. The tones, inflections, stomping, hand claps, and all helped us vocalize this: Recognize that we are not dogs that are to be left outside in the backyard.

The police cars returned with backup. Before we realized, a hippo ravaged past us. The officers had returned with a ruthless essence and persisted to instill fear in us. The engine of the hippo raged as it crossed in front of us. Lolo pushed out a sigh, "This is 1976 all over again."

It was clear that UCT management had sanctioned the police officers to utilize strategies to divide, surround, and brutalize us students. The officers made use of the very same apartheid measures, such as the use of the hippo tanks, from the apartheid era in South Africa. This was done to remind Black children that the legacy of apartheid is alive in modern day. It articulated a message that our Black lives don't matter as the police, UCT, and further institutions would do anything to silence our voices. In this same breath, the officers would bolster the claim that we threw the first stone that allowed them to retaliate with violence.

We held our damp shirts to our faces in anticipation of the tear gas as we continued singing and dancing. I am unsure if the tank released small doses of tear gas as the hippo hummed loudly staring at us standing in front of Bremner. But, I felt sedated as my head pounded. I could

not process that revolution had begun. I looked to my sis in this moment searching for some sort of message in their eyes. I wanted to gain a sense of how they felt at this moment. I found: fearlessness, strength, solidarity, and shock. There was also awe about the repetition of history - it was a time of post-apartheid apartheid. We communed closer together outside the left forefront of Bremner to check if our comrades on the balcony were prepared to take on the divisive measures of the police. Looking into our eyes with their fists waving, the protestors upstairs assured us that they would fight to protect the human rights of our Black brothers and sisters.

As the hippo grumbled, word had reached us that protestors would get arrested on the court order that was issued because of the hashtags. My sis and I convened as we realized the threat of deportation and being imprisoned as international students had increased. We talked it through and decided to not be in the forefront of the protest at Bremner.

My sis and I took off to Woolsack - a dorm not too far from the Administration Building - to be safe. We still wanted to support and witness the resistance of our comrades, so we found a hideout spot. We found space behind trees near the track field on Middle Campus that allowed us to

view the strength of the protestors as they sang, danced, and stood together.

We saw a police squad enter the building with masks and militarized armor. I recall it was around 12 AM; this was the particular time that the warrant allowed officers to arrest individuals that were occupying Bremner. Protestors from the balcony were arrested, they were escorted into the hippo one by one by officers. It got to a certain point where all the protestors inside of Bremner had been cleared out. Those outside still held their ground - singing: "Azania, Azania - From Cape to Cairo, Morocco to Madagascar." The "#FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing" banner, which was being waved on top of the balcony, had been handed off from the prominent figures of RMF to the protestors standing in front of the building. The revolution was kept alive.

The hippo was ready to take off, but the movement did not die there. Protestors gathered and held hands to create a barricade around the hippo. They refused to allow those arrested to be taken away by the police officers. The hippo roared threatening to run over these Black bodies, but the majority of these protestors stood resolute.

By this time, we made our way down from the hideout spot and drew closer to the circle

of protestors that risked their lives to save the soon to be imprisoned revolutionaries. Protestors banged on the hippo and reached out to hold onto hands that had dangled outside the caged windows of the hippo. The small holes in windows, which spewed tear gas into the eyes of “offenders”, now had hands reaching outside the hippo for help. Before everyone realized, Kose and Mamela had escaped from the hippo as the door swung open. The hippo was in motion, but they managed to get out; one onto the front windshield and the other on top of the vehicle. The tank swerved around in an attempt to intimidate the protestors to move out of its way. We jumped in amazement, these were some of the leaders of the movement that would spearhead us into a future null of colonialism, systemic racism, and anti-Black violence.

Then there were stun grenades. A big explosion went off; I saw the first two. We were dazed. Another explosion went off, the hippo turned around to recollect both fugitives and swiftly left with our comrades who previously occupied the balcony - Mamela, Ruth, Mandla, Kose, Amara, and more. We took flight because we did not recognize what caused the explosions. As we ran about from the heartless police officers, we thought to ourselves - was it a deadly grenade or not? The ironic thing

was most of the officers were Black and it was for their future or current (grand)children that we toiled. We fought so that the upcoming generations would not be excluded from their right to what is supposed to be free education.

A good amount of Black officers had been co-opted by the system to uphold the continuation of colonialism/apartheid/capitalism/white supremacy.

There were four more explosions that vibrated the ground. Murmurs of yelling went in and out around me as I ran upstairs toward Woolsack. We saw the hippo again, and someone said: “Get on the ground! It’s coming this way.” Everyone fell to the floor; I crushed myself against the shed at the corner of the track field near our hideout. I stood frozen. We thought that if the police officers saw us hiding they would have arrested us too. Police vehicles reappeared with officers holding guns outside of their windows - another a fear tactic. Everyone was stunned; this was the apartheid all over again. They treated us like animals.

UCT management gave police permission to arrest and use stun grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets to remove students protesting in Bremner.

The government is scared of Black academics because of our radicalism. We have the capacity to burn it all down, if necessary.

The truth about our family, love, and wealth has been distorted.

All our land, bodies, and souls have been stolen, owned through enslavement, and dispossessed.

We experienced the revolution firsthand - we dared to resist the status quo and make space to be recognized for who we are truly.

**Pseudonyms were used to protect the original identities of individuals.

BIOS

Abdu Ali is an independent music artist, writer, and multimedia arts curator from Baltimore.

Darra Shelton is a New Jersey born, Baltimore raised poet and storyteller currently residing in Louisiana. Darra hopes to continue to spread love through her words and endeavors.

Destiny Belgrave was born and raised in Brooklyn NY and nurtured, with a multi cultural upbringing. Belgrave graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in 2018 with a BFA in General Fine Arts, and a concentration in Painting. Belgrave is a mixed media whirlwind, almost always using papercuts as her primary medium and her loved ones as a source of inspiration.

Godfrey DeSylva is a celebrity hairstylist and wig designer who has made wigs for H&M, Top Shop, and Mark & Spencer, just to name a few. Desylva's work has been featured on the Netflix movie, Resort to Love. Runner up on South Africa's premiere hair designer competition show, Hair to the Throne, Desylva believes hair is his calling and primary way of serving his community.

Imani Spence is a librarian at the University of Houston. Before her library career she was a journalist who focused on arts and culture in both writing and radio. She writes book reviews for every book she's read in an attempt to capture the joy of reading and transformation.

Jalen Boston is a producer with over five years of experience in the dynamic realms of hip-hop and R&B. MyDreamsIsVivid has established themselves as a captivating music producer, infusing their compositions with a unique blend of soulfulness and vibrancy.

Jalen Eutsey is a 2022-2024 Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University. He received his MFA from The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University. He has been the recipient of a Rubys Artist Grant and a Hatty Fitts Walker Scholarship from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center. His poems have appeared in Best New Poets (2022), Nashville Review, Poetry Northwest, Harpur Palate, and The Hopkins Review. He was born and raised in Miami.

James Daniels (he/him) is a poet, writer, educator and music artist. He uses word and sound to

craft experiences, stories, and characters that center the beauty of people—especially those in the healing process.

Jamie Grace Alexander holds sand in her mouth & turns it into pearls. You may know her as the bassist in BLKVAPOR, Baltimore's queer weird-rock band or from her involvement in changing policy for her trans & nonbinary community. Queer love is her foundation & she hopes you feel hugged by her words.

Joy Liburd is a passionate soul with a heart for people, chocolate, and creativity—in no particular order. Joy is a daughter, sister, auntie, and friend from Decatur, GA. She is an artist, mentor, and dance instructor with a fervent belief in the healing and liberating power of movement.

Malcolm Peacock earned an MFA from The Mason Gross School of Arts at Rutgers University in 2019. Peacock has exhibited at Artists Space in New York, Terrault Gallery in Baltimore, The Institute of Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, The Prospect Triennial in New Orleans, Louisiana, and The Carnegie Museum of Art. Peacock is the recipient of the 58th Carnegie International Fine Prize.

Mark Fleuridor was born and raised in Miami, Florida. Fleuridor explores his personal history and lived experiences through painting, quilting, collage and patternmaking. It is important for Fleuridor to understand his past by dissecting his own memories and family narratives through his art process.

Markele Cullins is an interdisciplinary artist born in Baltimore, MD and based in Los Angeles, CA. Cullins received their BFA from The University of Maryland Baltimore County with a focus in Intermedia and obtained additional education from Maryland Institute College of Art, Haystack School of Crafts, Penland School of Crafts, and Art Coop. Their most recent exhibition is Soul of The Butterfly: Chicory Magazine and Baltimore Black Arts Activism (2022), an educational collaboration at the Enoch Pratt Library (Baltimore, MD).

My name is **Moriah Lynn**, I am a storyteller! I use various mediums to tell stories, but photography has been a primary way for me to share the stories of Black people and our communities over the years. Through my lens, I hope to celebrate the humanity of everyday

moments of Black folx living their Black lives. I am glad to share this story of Black love with you.

ociele hawkins is a raised poor/underground economy, Black queer, non-binary Muslim butch queen organizer and poet, from Philadelphia, who holds as much hope as she does contradiction. ociele is an unapologetic college dropout who loves when the letter “B” is capitalized when referring to Black people. she is the product of the fierce protection and sacrifices made by the women in her family. ociele is on a lifelong journey to be her own best friend.

Sharéa Harris, MFA, is a black woman from deep in the American south. A writer and educator, Sharéa continuously observes the song and dance of identity and environment, how these birth experiences, and their weight on us all. A multi-genre writer, Sharéa’s poetry (Dictionary: See Poems) and plays (Black Maggies I, II, & III, and Fire Runners) focus on how black women build systems to navigate their internal and external worlds. Her work has appeared in magazines, literary journals, and local and international stages. Sharéa has joined judge panels for grants, read for literary magazines, moderated artist panels, facilitated writing workshops, and consulted creative projects. Recently, Sharéa completed the Horticulture Playwriting Fellowship at SistersFreehold Theatre. Currently, Sharéa is focusing her energy on her creative practice, and enjoying her new home on the Virginia Peninsula.

Simeme Mthembu is deviant.

Sun Lynn Hunter Hi, my name is sun Lynn Hunter and I am an interdisciplinary performance artist born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland currently based in Chicago, Illinois. I make work to inspire empathy and engage audiences in deconstructing their preconceptions of amerikan identity and Black culture, while exploring new boundaries of imagination and Black presence.

Waikithi Mabaso graduated from the University of Cape Town in South Africa, with an MD degree cum laude. As an aspiring clinician-scientist passionate about mental health he is reading for a MSc in Epidemiology at the University of Oxford on the Rhodes Scholarship. He will read for a second MSc in Clinical & Therapeutic Neuroscience after which he hopes to expand on his skill set before specialising in Psychiatry.

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And thank you, Black person, for being every shining light on the surface of being. Big ups to you! You are enough as you are. You are loved, deeply. You are deep love. Izwe lethu.