



PRIMARY EXHIBITION



NATALIE WOOD

PERFORMING CHANGE



JOHN B. AIRD GALLERY

SEPTEMBER 2020





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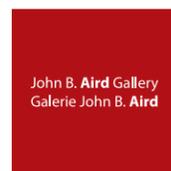
PRESENTED BY:

THE JOHN B. AIRD GALLERY IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH CHARLES STREET VIDEO AND SCOTIABANK
CONTACT PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

EXHIBITION DATES:

SEPTEMBER 10 - OCTOBER 30, 2020

ORIGINALLY PLANNED FOR THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL IN MAY, THIS EXHIBITION HAS BEEN RESCHEDULED DUE TO COVID-19.
THE EXHIBITION WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC WEDNESDAY TO FRIDAY 2 TO 6 PM BY APPOINTMENT.



AIRDGALLERY.ORG
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FOREWORD

BY JOWENNE CARPO HERRERA

I first met Natalie Wood eighteen years ago during a brainstorming meeting about plans to participate in the annual Pride Toronto Parade. Having recently moved into my first apartment in downtown Toronto (from my childhood suburban home in Scarborough), 2002 marked the year when my eyes first began to see the world in a different lens. As a young queer person of colour, I felt a sense of belonging being surrounded by Black queer and other queer people of colour during our first planning meeting to launch *PELAU MasQUEERade* — a self-identified Caribbean queer diasporic group looking to use the practice of Trinidad Carnival to make space in the Pride Toronto Parade.

Natalie, along with other queer artists, people of colour, and like-minded activists and leaders reconceptualized Caribbean queer diasporic space using a queer *jouvay* practice that consists of putting different ingredients and components together to transform and make Trinidad Carnival (AKA “*playing mas*”) queer. After all, Pelau is a Trinidadian dish of meat, rice, peas, and many other ingredients cooked together in one pot. It’s as if we mixed these different ingredients, detangled and re-tangled our lived experiences, and transformed queer space into a queer racialized site of celebration. Between 2002 and 2007, *PELAU MasQUEERade* won seven Pride Toronto awards including the parade’s “*Most Fabulous Float*” Award.

It is without surprise that today in this current socially and politically precarious world, Natalie continues to share her journey and work on resistance and disruption of culturally defined normativity. *Performing Change* reflects Natalie’s lens-based work over the last decade and reinforces the beauty of what is Black, and that queer love is love. Through her experiences, her parents’ experiences and her grandparents’ experiences of colonial and racial injustices, Natalie shares how her identity relates to this society and how it is important to “*perform change*” — and doing so requires self-love. Perhaps what we were doing before back in 2002 was a form of self-love — embracing and accepting our own queerness, blackness, and colonial past. We were *performing change*.

This book accompanies Natalie’s exhibition on view at the *John B. Aird Gallery* and *Charles Street Video* between September 10 to October 30, 2020, curated by *Carla Garnet* as part of the **2020 Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival**. It includes print and video stills of her cinematic work over the last decade, installation photos, as well as the curator’s statement and interviews with the artist carried out by *Pamela Edmonds* and *Yaniya Lee*.

I hope you will enjoy this publication and that it will give you permission to reflect on self-love and how to make space for that love. In the words of *Nina Simone* “*I wish you could know what it means to be me...then you’d see...and agree...that everyone should be free.*”



EXCERPT FROM, *TIME WILL COME*, VIDEO STILL



ABOLITIONIST TABLE (2020) DIGITAL PHOTO, 12 X 18 INCHES

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

CURATED BY CARLA GARNET

P*erforming Change* is a survey of lens-based work, participatory performance, and installations made over the last decade by Trinidadian-born, Toronto-based artist Natalie Wood. Positioned across two venues, Wood's work reflects on the fugitive and the imaginary as forms of resistance to colonialism and slavery's afterlife. It counters heteronormativity by presenting rarely seen imagery showing intimacy and tenderness between Black women. Using a *cinema verité* approach, the artist celebrates Black women's lives and loves.

Wood's interdisciplinary artwork exists at the intersections of popular culture, gender, Black feminism, sexuality, and race. She weaves together queer Afro-Caribbean diasporic women's experiences within aesthetic frameworks, reinforcing the idea that Black is beautiful and that queer love IS love. Performing identity actively and constantly produces and reproduces the self that is presented to the world—because humans absorb the ideals and expectations of the surrounding culture, living queerness necessitates performing identity as a mechanism for survival. When cultures are in opposition to one's natural self, individuals must also *perform change*. This occurs once self-love takes place, which then makes it possible to resist and disrupt culturally defined normativity.

Wood's video *Time Will Come* (2018) exemplifies the ways in which Black women hold each other up and arrive at self-love. It shows a relationship open to interpretation, possibly between mother and daughter, mentor and mentee, friends, or lovers—aspects of each exist in most relations between women. Viewers are given a glimpse into the domestic and

working worlds that Black women inhabit and that are just now beginning to circulate in popular culture. Wood's video is not Hollywood or *The L Word*, however, because her work is not a straightforward narrative. Rather, it presents a window into a secret psychological framework that is non-binary and non-traditional.

In *Touched by a Soucouyant* (2015), Wood explores a Caribbean myth in which, by night, a woman transforms herself into a ball of fire and sucks the blood of her victims. This video (filmed on the artist's and actors' mobile phones) depicts an encounter with a *soucouyant*. In this piece, the taboo of forbidden love is readdressed as a celebratory event.

To create *Bananagram/Bakergram* (2013–20), Wood brings together live performance and a video projection. She presents Josephine Baker's dance sequence in the film *Princess Tam Tam* (1935) unfolding in reverse in order to create alternative narratives and engage with the pain of assimilation and misrepresentation. In the film, Baker stars as a Tunisian woman introduced into Parisian society, but in real life, Baker was an American-born French entertainer, as well as an agent of the resistance and a civil rights activist. For the *Bananagram* performance, Wood occupies a back-lit desk beneath the projection and writes quotes from Baker and Frantz Fanon onto bananas that are handed out to the audience, a metaphor for the "primitive" role in which Baker was cast.

Wood's timely cinematic work theorizes and maps models of imagined and sustained cultural resistance and resilience onto new-media formats, providing viewers new tools with which to engage the social imaginary. Wood's work is positive, offers hope, shows love, is aspirational, and as such one can describe hers as a practice that is bridge-building, or in the artist's words: "*performs change*."

INTERVIEW: NATALIE WOOD

BY PAMELA EDMONDS

Since the 1990's Trinidadian-born, Toronto-based multimedia artist, curator and educator, Natalie Wood has maintained a socially committed pluralistic practice. Engaged with counter-narratives, she employs a critical approach to visual and material culture, staging interpretative responses to hegemonic systems of representation that have traditionally positioned certain subjects, particularly those from the African Caribbean diaspora, in culturally subaltern positions. Through multiple means of expression, Wood interrogates the stereotypes in mass-media and popular culture which interact in the creation and maintenance of systems of domination and dispossession. By using strategies of counter-appropriation and juxtaposition, her art conveys how alternative meanings can be made by playing with visual codes and the rhetorics of language.

Performing Change presents an important survey of Wood's work produced over the past decade. Curator Pamela Edmonds engages here in a conversation with the artist about the genesis and direction of her expansive practice, highlighting key themes and areas of focus. Synthesizing and re-appropriating a diverse range of visual and thematic references drawn from radical political and social resistance movements, including Afrocentrism and Afrofuturism, Wood reveals a common thread throughout her work - namely the use of varied performative elements/strategies that are both constructive and deconstructive. Amongst Wood's objectives are healing the wounds of systemic oppression, while acknowledging a desire to be free from the literal and psychological constraints that have stifled and misrepresented Black female and queer subjects within Westernized contexts of history and art.



PRAY (2020)



EDMONDS : Throughout your career, you have been an artist advocating for systemic change and equity. Besides the current crisis moment of an ongoing global pandemic, we are witnessing a revolutionary moment - institutions are issuing solidarity statements in support of change related to the Black Lives Matters movement and anti-Black violence, spurred by George Floyd's murder and that of countless others at the hands of the police. Organizations are making and renewing commitments to address their lack of cultural diversity and complicit racism. In light of your exhibition, its themes and the notion of "performing change," I want to ask you what you think about the role of activism in art today, particularly as it relates to your extensive practice, of not just making art, but teaching, curating, and advocating for social justice?

WOOD : Looking over the span of my career and given this current moment related to *Performing Change*, if I was to ask myself that question, I would say that I'm someone who has decided that art and activism are essentially inseparable. Considering where I'm located socially, politically, intimately in this world in particular ways, I'm making art based on my experiences, my parents' experience, and their parents' experiences with colonial, racial, economic, and educational injustices. For me, art and activism are like that dance, or like a braid that weaves in and out and through these parameters at different depths through time. The activism comes in because it is relevant to how I relate in this society; it also comes in through family stories which politicized me from early on.

EDMONDS : Was art something you always wanted to do, when did you realize you wanted to pursue the arts?

WOOD : I always knew I wanted to do art and my parents recognized that early enough. But in Trinidad in the 1970's, at least in my family, there wasn't any consciousness about art being a viable career, even though art was everywhere in the culture, with carnival and more. But seeing art as a profession, that was not something anywhere visible. I keep going back to this memory I have when I was little, I was probably around seven or eight and thinking, I want to end up living in a cave somewhere like in New Mexico and making art in the desert (laughs). It's bizarre, considering where I grew up in this tropical environment. Coming to Canada, of course I couldn't do art, I settled on psychology and sociology, but as soon as I finished my first degree and handed it to my mother, I started courses at OCAD! I wanted to do mainly studio classes, and not theory. I felt the theoretical discourse being taught was flawed, from a Eurocentric perspective, read through a white gaze which really didn't hold me. What I latched on to was the queer movement and within this movement there were feminists, and many women of colour, but there were few spaces to present our work, so we, (we meaning, my partner Nila and I), often had to create those spaces. At the time, I took inspiration from artists and organizers like Andrew Harwood and Will Munro, who were very much into DIY, but I didn't see Black artists being represented in shows in Toronto, even though I felt like my work was linked to their experiences, we were coming from different social locations. That's when I decided I also have to curate. I could create opportunities for other Black artists and

also start the conversation or maintain a conversation around Black representation. I joined A Space, (where I curated an exhibition in 2006 with Black Canadian artists called *I Represent*) and got involved in other organizations, like BlackCap, Arts Starts, Buddies in Bad Times, to name a few. But it was far from easy!

EDMONDS : Your work challenges the white heteronormative gaze by centering intimacy, joy and love between Black women, creating a kind of "oppositional gaze" to use the terms referenced by bell hooks in her 1992 text *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Can you speak about how your work responds to, or critiques, ideas of visual representation?

WOOD : What I realize is the impulse to create for me comes from a place of conveyance. There is a gap in terms of my reality and how I see it manifesting in the world. What I produce often gets co-opted and reframed in a way that cuts it out of its cultural relevance - so for me my work is always grounded in conversations with the culture and the community that surrounds me. My art isn't just two-dimensional work or time-based, or solely about injustice or creating opportunities for artists, it's about the understanding of cultural hegemony and about creating opportunities to explore the complexities of Black visibility and invisibility. Like with my *Revolution* series, I made these fantastical portraits of futurist warrior women from cardboard sheets, which I had whitened with paint and peeled away the layers of brown paper to reveal the image, which is part of a type of deconstructive process and of playing with this idea of absence and presence.

EDMONDS : You repeatedly use the same performers in your images and videos, and as an audience, we often are witness to your presentation of Black women's bodies in transformation, shapeshifting and moving, which is akin to the fluidity of Black diasporic life. I'm curious about the role that dance represent in your art and how do you select and direct those who appear in your work?

WOOD : *With the way I produce, I try to move away from this antiseptic type of framing I often see in museums and galleries, I try to make art that is more relatable and accessible. I like working with the same folks, Black women, who are all artists in their own right - dancers, visual artists, performers, filmmakers, and our process is collaborative. What's nice is that I can draw out the story board and tell them this is what I want, and they can add and improvise. What happens with anti-Black racism is that it tries to disempower, to keep us stuck, and the only way to get away is to consistently keep moving. This relates to how I think about Josephine Baker, who appears in my work and who inspired my performances for Banagram/Bakergram. Baker was someone who was consistently re-inventing herself, as a dancer, a singer (who taught herself to sing), an actor and activist, as a French resistance agent, even her sexuality was fluid. She kept the establishment second guessing! In my performances, Baker's 'savage' dance in the film Princess Tam Tam is projected and played forward and in reverse while I write quotes and statements centred on her experiences as an artist fighting racism, and onto bananas which I hand out to the audience. As the work evolved, I paired her statements with quotes*

by Frantz Fanon in an attempt to have the audience read and ingest ancestral statements of healing, hope and solidarity.

EDMONDS : I'm interested in how you are using language through your references to poetry and text and the use of voice over, oral histories story-telling, and African/Caribbean folklore. How do different narratives inspire your work?

WOOD : *A lot of the work that I do is often based in some sort of research, understanding my experiences and history because our stories are rarely told or reproduced, and often used in ways that do not feed us. Poetry is something I've been drawn to, from Pat Parker, Audre Lorde to Derek Walcott. There's also Sylvia Wynter - who also has links to Afro-pessimism, as well as Hortense Gordon. I'm drawn to Fanon, whose writings are like the Black social bible. What I try to do in the narratives is to encapsulate that time is not linear, so the time-based work is often work that can be looped so viewers can come in particular times and still understand or get what they need. I firmly believe that what I produce can impact the past as well as the future. So the narrative structure has no real beginning and no real end, it's constantly evolving. There are things that relate to Caribbean folklore like the soucouyant. The soucouyant is a shapeshifting female vampire who can take off her skin and can fly across the sky as a fireball looking for victims. She is often an older Black woman, and my grandmother used to tell me stories of how her neighbor was a soucouyant. When I told these same stories to a family member here, she couldn't sleep for three weeks! Her parents were so mad at me. But yes, the tales embody something*

- the soucouyant is an archetype also associated with lesbianism. In the video, Touched by a Soucouyant, I wanted to make the connections between the past and present and future and to create that ancestral link - and reference the epistemological framework of our ancestors, which is a knowledge or a knowing that is relevant for us today. This epistemology can be used as a base for us to build tools of empowerment; to inspire performance, dance and play; to nurture the self and help care for the environment. I actually wanted to create a mini-series, and my soucouyant and victim were ready to do that. It required us going to Trinidad and filming in the Caribbean, but ultimately didn't have the resources to complete it.

EDMONDS : What would you say is the role of media in Black women's oppression and liberation, and how do you think this affects the reception and interpretation of Black women's art in Toronto as well as in Canada?

WOOD : *I come from the golden age of television, you know, from the 1970's, and of course I'm a big media fan. Over the years, I was sometimes criticized for presenting negative images, especially from Black audiences, who said they have to deal with oppression already in everyday life. I started to think more about what I want to do with my work is to represent our strengths, to find strategies for healing, and to foster a radical self-care which Angela Davis speaks about, as a way to remain true to our authentic selves.*

E D M O N D S : How do you envision “Performing Change” impacting its viewers?

W O O D : *I’m trying to represent ways of performing change for a Black audience. The idea of “performing” for me has different meanings, that relate to this idea of “play.” When it comes down to it, everything is a construction. It is all a game! The performance pieces are about embodiment, of wearing a mask - which allows one to engage with those energies, connect to ancestral energies, but it also allows one to take the mask off when it gets to be too much. Performing change is a double entendre. There are questions built into it.*

E D M O N D S : Yes, there is criticism around this idea of performative allyship or wokeness because the action, the institutional change, often doesn’t happen to match the words. The calls for systemic change are not new.

W O O D : *This is where the idea for me of Afro-pessimism comes in, can the world even be realized without the subjugation of Black people? How do we manage to survive and thrive? How do we heal? Ultimately, we need to create more of our own institutions. Opportunities are being created through social networks, and with many of us still being remote, this moment could be a turning point. I’m interested in networks and roots. I have been thinking about these ideas more as I’m gardening now. Digging in the soil and pulling out weeds, and these weeds are fully green, growing underground in the darkness, like in this underground world! It occurred to me that this is such a great analogy for the struggles of creating and presenting as a Black artist in Canada.*

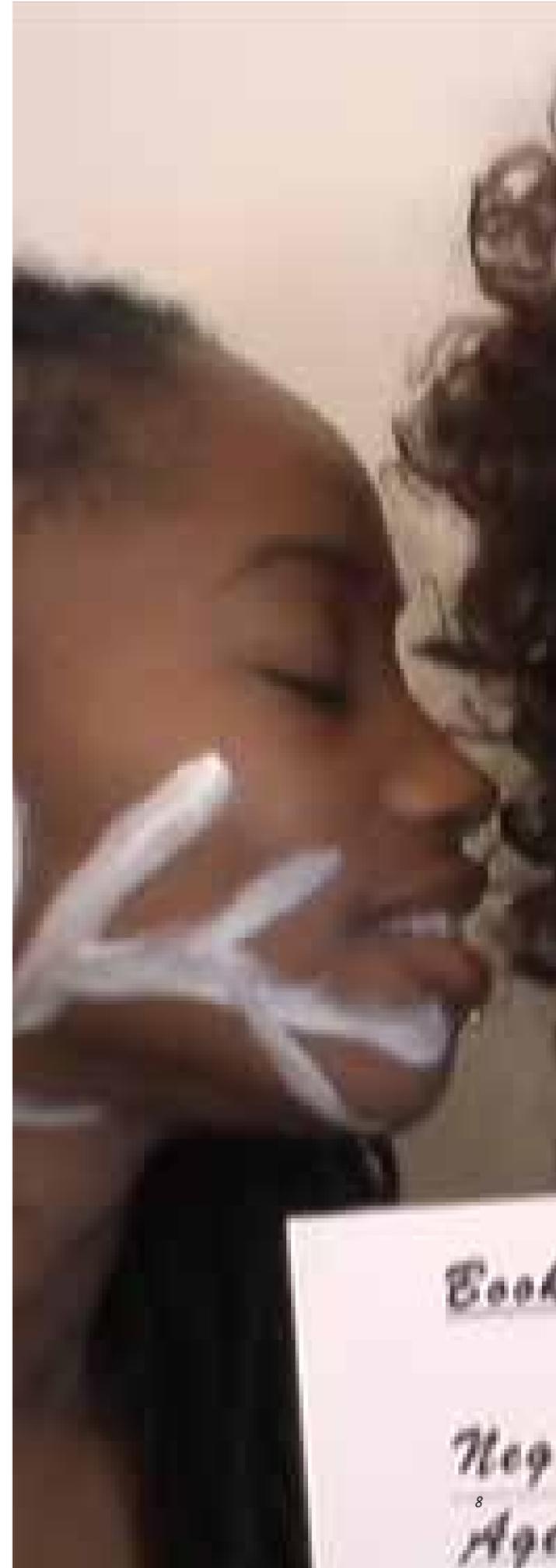
E D M O N D S : That reminds me also of the rhizome, especially how Edouard Glissant spoke about rhizomatic Identity as this multiplicity of cultural identities used to explain the complexity of the “creole” or Caribbean identity. The rhizome is this plant that grows underground and has roots that grow around other roots. It’s also the principle behind his idea of the poetics of relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the other. It’s the strongest kind of connection there is.

W O O D : *Yes, this connection has an analogy also to the idea performing change. The exhibition is a survey show, so it is looking at my overall perspective that I feel really rings true in how Josephine Baker was able to manifest herself creatively by connecting through different identities. It’s almost like she was the rhizome. There were things happening underneath and she would pop out as a singer, pop out as a dancer, pop out as a spy!*

E D M O N D S : Similarly, one could say you have done that with the trajectories in your own career, as a media artist, as an educator, as a curator, as an activist, and now as an academic researcher working on your doctorate.

W O O D : *It also all comes together and wraps itself up around the idea that we are living in the dream of our ancestors. And if we are in the dream-time, we cannot disconnect ourselves completely, and I think that’s the place where white supremacy exerts its pressure. I relate this to an Indigenous perspective and consciousness and to the interconnectivity of life on the planet. There is something about Black people and our transnational nature, the fact that we*

exist in almost every continent. Many of us are landless, and many of us have already made those links across oceans. We’ve found ways to reconnect to places, some of which have been taken away from us. Blackness is an international project and that is our strength. This is the moment for us to pull on our international networks and keep fostering new relationships. I believe in the brilliance and beauty of Black people.



Book
Neg
Age



Book of Negroes

Negro Name	Suky Smith
Age	50
Price	400 00

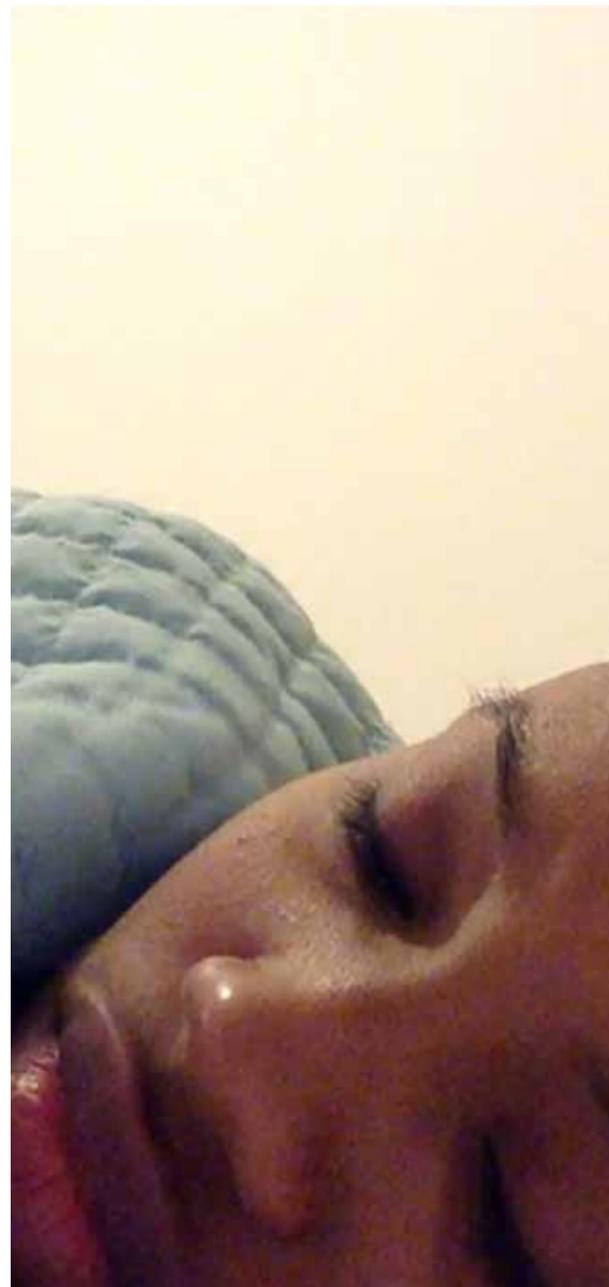
EXCERPT FROM, *WILL: SUKI SMITH*, VIDEO STILL



EXCERPT FROM, *WILL: SUKI SMITH*, VIDEO STILL

INTERVIEW: NATALIE WOOD

BY YANIYA LEE



SLEEP (2020)

LEE : The show included a range of work made over a span of many years, what happens when they are presented all together? And how did you come to the title “Performing Change”?

WOOD : “Performing change” references theories of performativity and agency from Judith Butler. Society wants me to perform/ be a certain way given my social location. I instead choose to try and subvert that process by not performing the status quo and instead performing change.

This is meant to be a survey show and the hope is that the viewer could see similar threads and themes coursing through the works. They all deal with the experience of living while Black and weave in history, Black poets and thinkers, my experiences and hopefully hope...

LEE : Of all the forms and mediums for creative expression, what has video allowed you to express that other mediums didn't?

WOOD : Video allows me to animate my ideas, and narratives to engage within a time based medium. As a mother it has been very difficult to actually find time to regularly produce objects, such as paintings or prints in a manner that works best for me. I find with video that I am able to dream up the story, create the storyboard and then engage the community of artists to act and to be filmed. Once the footage is in the can I can then edit on my own time. It is very project focussed.

LEE : Can you talk about your approach to video more broadly?

WOOD : *My videos tend to be shorts and or videos meant to be part of a performance. And keeping with my need to be focussed on the video production and to keep my budget at a reasonable level it means that I often also use 'low fi' tools such as cell phones, and go pro cameras. I put more emphasis on paying my actors.*

My video practice often has a community feel to it as I often ask the same Black women artists to act in my videos – there is a level of comfort and respect for each other that I believe allows me to translate my ideas to them and allows them to perform the experiences or ideas I wish to share. My set locations are also different areas or rooms in my home. I find that this approach, so far, is sufficient to my needs, which are the transmission of ideas and short narratives.

The videos are then either exhibited as an installation piece that is meant to be looped or as a single channel narrative piece to be played at a video or film Festival. I am in love with the practice of creating shorts – first it is financially more feasible, and secondly it allows me to engage quickly with current issues and concerns.

LEE : Can you talk about Abolitionist table, which is a new piece you made for the exhibition?

WOOD : *My works attempt to engage with subversive and performative elements. The Abolitionist table is a new photographic performative piece that I created out of a need to respond to the global Black uprising and revolution that is occurring in this moment. It incorporates some*

elements of staged photography. The image shows two people sitting in a tent within an abolitionist camp and at an abolitionist table. One person is Frantz Fanon and the other is Josephine Baker – they are in a planning meeting strategizing when to be subversive and indirect and when to be active and revolutionary.

I'm doing my PhD [in Environmental Studies at York University], and I'm looking at how Afro Caribbean cultural workers and artists create sites of change, [how they] create liberatory spaces in the diaspora. So I'm looking at how they perform change.

L E E : Can you say more about the relationship between your recent work and the PhD work?

W O O D : *The PhD work, first of all, is allowing me to breathe. I teach at a College. It's very difficult to breathe in that space, having been there for quite some time and having seen how people operate. I know folks there who say they're anti oppressive but [I can see] by their actions they are not. This truth is now being revealed.*

My PhD allows me to center myself, and to center my blackness. It allows me to breath and to read. What keeps you in a box [unable to breath] is not having access to some of this writing and thinking around blackness and around how we survive. My research is looking at Afro Caribbean artists in the diaspora who are performing change and creating spaces of liberation. I am inspired by the readings from Black Studies researchers, artists and academics—whether they be engaged with Afro-pessimism or the Black Radical Tradition.

The questions that are fueling me are things like, How do we survive in racist institutions? How do we survive intact? How do we as artists engage in imagining or envisioning a different outcome and experience for Black and racialized people? Look at all of the studies that say that we die sooner, we experience more pain, we don't get access to services that can save us because of racism and we experience daily micro-aggressions, all of which shorten our lifespans.

So for me another question is, Do you make change within institutions that is about reforming them, or do you join the revolution and its call to dismantle [these institutions]?

L E E : What's the answer?

W O O D : *Well, that's my dissertation. The answer is all of the above. Dismantle, Abolish, defund and improvise, disguise, resist, creative. In my experience with institutions, change makers get a window of time to do true liberatory work before the Empire Strikes Back.*

L E E : Before those shift and adapt to incorporate your dissent.

W O O D : *Yeah exactly. And then they co-opt you. Or they squash [your dissent]. If it's uncooptable, they find a way to destroy it, and then it's like you never existed. And then 10 years later people go, We've invented it! And, you go, No! This has happened in the past and it was squashed, it was undermined!*

L E E : Cultural resistance and resilience are themes in your work, how does it feel to be presenting this exhibition in a time of such great change?

W O O D : *As we mentioned before, these works were produced over the span of a number of years, yet I am shocked and actually not really shocked by how relevant they are today. Carla Garnet [director and curator at the Aird Gallery] and I, in our discussions, talked about the importance of hope and love. As we make visible our pain and directly take on activating change work [I think it is impotent] that we also have time for radical self care and love. The most recent video that I produced is called Time Will Come and it deals directly and poetically with the experiences of racism and homophobia and sexism that leave us fallen and broken. This video explores the intimate experiences of racism and its impact on the bodies and minds of Black women. In the piece there is an opportunity for grace and salvation as the characters engages in a time loop where the only answer to this suffering is to make sure we take care of ourselves and each other. I wanted to create a narrative that is collapsed into time. Narrative is usually linear, and I wanted a narratives that was not linear. The narrative structure of Time will come takes into consideration my understanding of time, which is [as] looped in on itself: what I do here in the present can actually impact the past and the future.*

L E E : There is a renewed interest in Black Canadian art recently, how have you seen this shift?

W O O D : *Is there? Is there truly an interest? That's just my cynical side. I see that this is a moment where Black artists working with the experiences of being Black are being given opportunities by established arts organizations to exhibit and show their work. This is happening right now because there is a social movement—an uprising, a revolution—going on that is being led by Black artists such as Syrus Ware and Rodney Diverlus, to name a few. It is as if the Canadian art establishment has been shook awake to realize that they have all been working deliberately under an exclusionary and racist model. It is truly disheartening. Change is being driven by outside forces. It would be interesting to see if this does bring about a permanent shift or if this is just a bad performance of change.*



MIRRORED (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 8 X 12 INCHES



FALLEN (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 8 X 12 INCHES



PRAY (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 8 X 12 INCHES



OPEN (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 8 X 12 INCHES



LAUGH (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 8 X 12 INCHES



SLEEP (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 8 X 12 INCHES



EXCERPT FROM, *TOUCHED BY A SOUCOUYANT* - BALL OF FIRE VIDEO STILL



EXCERPT FROM, *TOUCHED BY A SOUCOUYANT*, VIDEO STILL



EXCERPT FROM, *TOUCHED BY A SOUCOUYANT*, VIDEO STILL



EXCERPT FROM, *TOUCHED BY A SOUCOUYANT*, VIDEO STILL



EXCERPT FROM, *TOUCHED BY A SOUCOUYANT*, VIDEO STILL



EXCERPT FROM, *BANANAGRAM BAKERGRAM*, VIDEO STILL

“

TODAY I
BELIEVE IN
THE POSSIBILITY
OF LOVE.”

— FRANTZ FANON



“I WANT TO
BREATHE THE AIR
OF FREEDOM.”

— JOSEPHINE BAKER

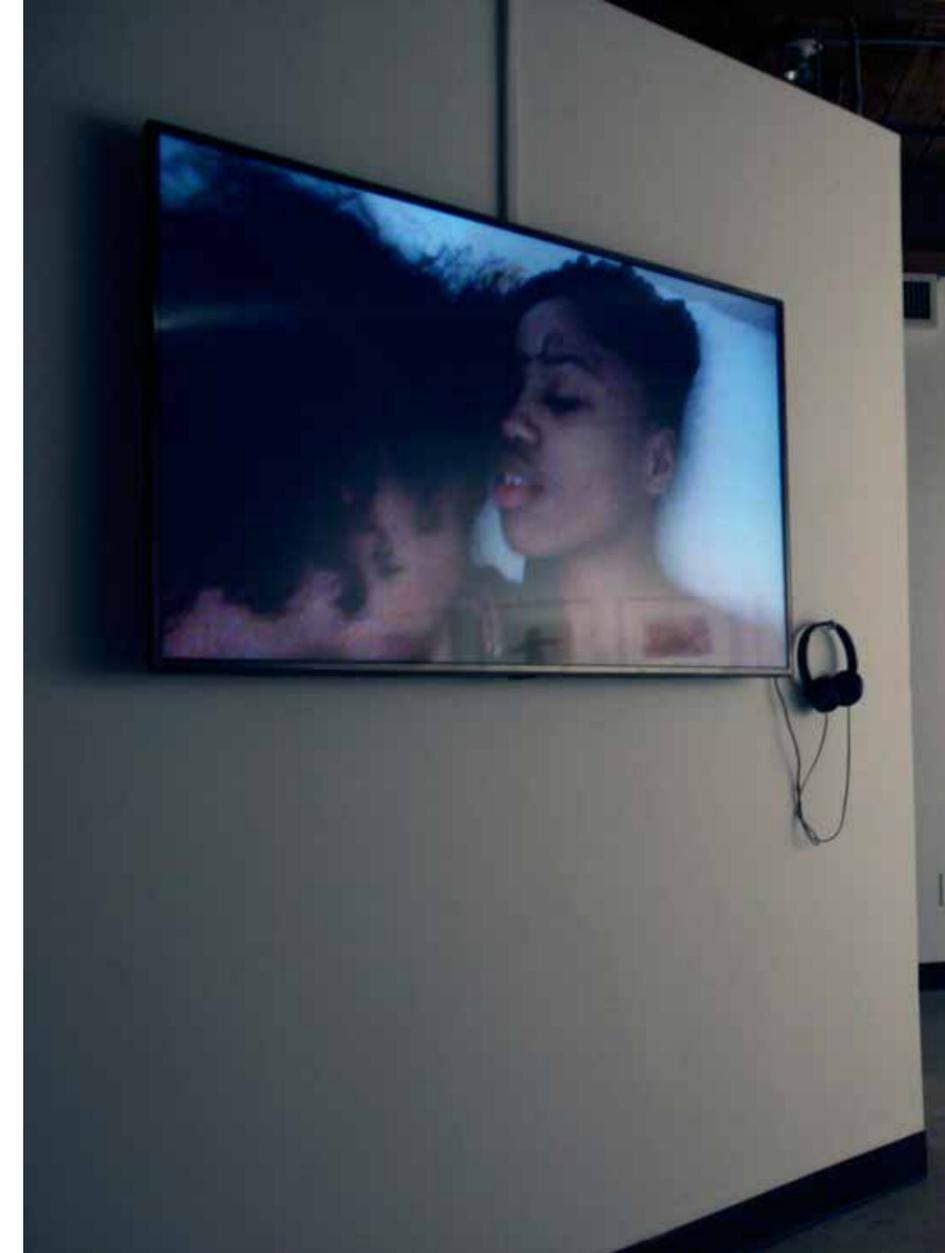
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EXCERPT FROM, *BANANAGRAM BAKERGRAM*, ONE-DAY PERFORMANCE AT TRINITY SQUARE VIDEO (TSV).
PHOTO CREDIT: TSV



COMFORTABLE (2020) COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH, 12 X 18 INCHES



INSTALLATION IMAGES, *PERFORMING CHANGE*, JOHN B. AIRD GALLERY



INSTALLATION IMAGES, *PERFORMING CHANGE*, JOHN B. AIRD GALLERY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by acknowledging that this land is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, the Anishnabe, the Wendat and the Haudenosaunee and that we have been invited onto this land to join in solidarity with the first peoples in caring for the land and each other. As this is also unceded territory I am committed to actively participate and be in solidarity with the justice and decolonization movements of the First Peoples of Tkaronto and Kanata.

This show aims to lead the viewer in a discussion about Performing Change and if it is one thing I felt I have done since embarking on my journey as an artist is change. I have embraced several different forms of artmaking throughout the years - such as a printmaking, watercolor, acrylics and encaustic wax painting and lately deconstructed cardboard drawings. However, it was a conversation I had with Peter Kingstone and Roy Mitchell almost 20 years ago that led me to experimenting with video and media work. I am grateful for their encouragement and the support of the staff at Trinity Square Video – Milada Kovacova and Jason Ebanks who have always been open to helping me problem solve my filming and post production work. I am also grateful to Deidre Logue for generously gifting me with the use of a GoPro.

My art has been and continues to be a journey of passion and play. And along this journey I have been joined by fabulous artists, performers and actors, those who have reserved judgement and consented to act out my imagined narratives and others who have assisted me behind the camera. My friends, Robin Akimbo, Kyisha Williams, and Danielle Smith continue to be enthusiastic performers acting out and sometimes adapting my storylines. I love working with these performers who bring such a palpable dynamic and sometimes sultry energy to the screen. Our film shoots usually erupt in laughter and opportunities for us to catch up. Thank you for your professionalism and openness to performing my narratives.

Behind the camera and sometimes in front is Nadijah Robinson who has made an excellent PA – making our set design, filming and costuming go so smoothly. Your even tempered and creative can-do attitude has been very inspiring to me. Amber Williams-King thank you for taking on extra camera work and gladly using your cell phone to capture the movement of the performers in Time Will Come.

Thank you to the RT collective for the In Your Pocket screenings and inspiring me to continue making videos with my cell phone.

A special thank you to Pamela Edmonds who has seen my artist's journey so far and who communicates so eloquently both verbally and in writing. It has been a pleasure to be around your intelligence and knowledge of the contemporary art scene and to see your impact on the contemporary Black arts scene. Thank you for the interview and the spectacular essay!

Thanks also goes to Yaniya Lee for taking time to get to know me and my work and for writing a very touching essay.

Carla Garnet thank you for sharing your vision of my art and for reaching out to curate my work for this show. I hope the Aird Gallery recognizes how valuable you are and how much you have impacted the local Toronto art scene. I certainly do! Thank you for being open to conversations about art, artists and Black love. I'm so glad that you and John continue to be a part of my artist journey.

And, my family - my lover and partner, Nila Gupta an award-winning artist in her own right has been extremely supportive of me, taking time to challenge me so that I could dig deeper to make work that is more meaningful and beautiful. Thank you for your love, caring and willingness to join with me on our life's journey together. Emily Wood-Gupta my daughter and a force to follow, thank you for your love, sharing Tiggy and insisting that life is also about having fun and laughing. To my mom, Annette Wood, Rest in Power.

NATALIE WOOD

*TO MY ANCESTORS UPON WHOSE SHOULDERS
I STAND, I SHARE WORDS OF WISDOM*

“

MAY YOU BE FREE.

MAY YOU BE HAPPY.

MAY YOU BE AT PEACE.

MAY YOU BE AT REST.

MAY YOU KNOW WE REMEMBER YOU.”

- ALICE WALKER

ARTIST STATEMENT:

As a mid to established contemporary visual and multimedia artist, Wood creates and exhibits art-work that cohabits the areas of popular culture, education and historical research.

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Trinidad, Natalie is a PhD student in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University she has an MA in Art Education from the University of Toronto and has completed a variety of studio courses at OCAD. Her work includes the use of recyclable materials, drawing and painting, encaustic wax, printmaking, video, performance and web-based art. Her videos and performances have been presented in venues such as L Space Humber, OCAD Gallery, Inside Out Film Festival 2015, Nuit Rose, Trinity Square video, The Caribbean Tales film festival 2014, T&T film festival 2013, New York Mix Film and Video Festival, Images Festival 2006 and Mpenzi Film and Video festival (where I won the Audience Choice Award in 2006). Her art works and collaborative art practices have been presented nationally and internationally in solo exhibitions at WARC, Zsa Zsa Gallery, Caribbean Contemporary Art Centre 7; several group exhibitions (Occupy Space 2016 @ Humber Art Gallery, TSG 2016 @ Gladstone Hotel, The Church St Mural Project 2014, Peterborough Art Gallery 2012, Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art 2007), International Art Fairs (Artist Project Toronto 2010, Nuit Blanche 2007, Toronto Alternative Art Fair International). She has received awards from the Toronto, Ontario and Canada Council for the Arts, the 2006 New Pioneers Award for contribution to the Arts in Toronto and was nominated for the 2006 K. M. Hunter Award for Interdisciplinary Arts Award for my web-based project Kinlinks. Natalie Wood is newly represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto.

B I O G R A P H I E S

P A M E L A E D M O N D S

With just over 20 years of curatorial, administrative and educational experience in various arts institutions across the country, Pamela Edmonds' research interests focus on contemporary Canadian art and the politics of representation. Her work is informed by critical dialogues related to cross-cultural curating, encouraging the integration of cultural diversity into the study of Western art history and cultural studies. Her practice also explores the impact of Black and African diasporic cultures on the evolving geography of global contemporary art. She has maintained both an independent curatorial and institutional practice in addition to organizing arts festivals, programming video and film events, teaching, and has served on numerous juries, boards and committees.

Originally from Montreal, Edmonds holds a BFA in Studio Art/Art History and an MA in Art History from Concordia University. She began her curatorial career in Halifax beginning in the late 1990's, holding programming positions at the Anna Leonowens Gallery (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University), the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery and the Centre for Arts Tapes to name a few. She has also held curatorial positions at A Space Gallery, the Art Gallery of Peterborough, and most recently at the Thames Art Gallery in Chatham, where she served as the Curator/Director. Edmonds has been an advocate for inclusive curatorial practices and cultural equity throughout her career, which is evidenced by her work with numerous collectives and grassroots organizations including Third Space Art Projects, a curatorial collective focused on program development from an intercultural perspective, and most recently with the We Curate, We Critique Collective, a mentorship and networking initiative for Black Canadian writers and curators. She was also on the organizing committee for the inaugural Black Curators Forum held in Toronto in 2019 with Dominique Fontaine, Curator and Founding Director of Aposteriori; Gaëtane Verna, Director, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery and Julie Crooks, Associate Curator, Art Gallery of Ontario. This national networking and professional development initiative was aimed at consolidating intergenerational alliances, professional

development and networking and in finding ways to combat the systemic erasure and historical amnesia of Black Canadian cultural producers and their work within the country. Recent exhibitions include: it is from here that the world unfolds, McMaster Museum of Art (Hamilton ON, 2019); What Motivates Her? Madelyne Beckles and Allyson Mitchell (Thames Art Gallery, Chatham ON, 2019); Outside These Walls: Yannick Anton and David Zapparoli (Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa ON, 2017); NEW-FOUNDLANDS: Exploring the links between Newfoundland and the Caribbean (Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John's NL, 2016); Liminal: Jerome Havre and Lucie Chan (Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa ON, 2016). Edmonds is currently based in Hamilton and holds the position of Senior Curator at the McMaster Museum of Art.

C A R L A G A R N E T

Carla Garnet is the Director and Curator of the John B. Aird Gallery and the JOUEZ curator for the annual BIG on Bloor Festival of Arts and Culture in Toronto. She has worked as the curator at the Art Gallery of Peterborough (2010-2013), as a guest curator at Gallery Stratford (2009-2010), as an independent curator (1997-2010), and was the founder and director of Garnet Press Gallery (1984-97). Garnet holds an Associate Diploma from the Ontario College of Art and Design and a Masters Degree in Art History from York University. Garnet is interested in the politics of the art exhibition and its potential to function as a common—a public space for dialogue. Her curatorial area of interest engages with an exploration of work that presents the possibility of existing simultaneously in many tenses or occupying more than one subject position at once, or both as a way to open up space for greater empathy. For Garnet, an artwork's significance is tied up with an ability to say what otherwise might be unsayable.



JOWENNE CARPO HERRERA

Jowenne Carpo Herrera is a visual artist and designer who works with various media integrating painting, drawing, illustration, photography and typography. Many of his works depict subjects drawn from nature and daily urban landscapes – experimenting with the dualities and tensions between identities, societies and idealisms. He thrives in the diversity of thought – inspired by the many things he sees, feels and experiences everyday. He is a Registered Graphic Designer of Ontario (RGD) and Certification Portfolio Evaluator for the association. He owns ABAKADA design + communication, and for over 20 years has been delivering creative design solutions across public, private and not for profit sectors – specializing in brand development, editorial design and graphic illustration. He is a champion of the art and design profession and the value it brings to the broader social and economic sectors. For over 10 years, he served as Chair/President and Director of the John B. Aird Gallery in Toronto, showcasing over 12 exhibitions annually that are free to the public. In his spare time, he abandons the digital world and gardens, cooks and runs a lot.

YANIYA LEE

Yaniya Lee is a Toronto-based writer and editor interested in the ethics of aesthetics. She works as features editor at Canadian Art magazine and teaches Art Criticism at the University of Toronto. She was a founding collective member of MICE Magazine and is a member of the EMILIA-AMALIA feminist working group. Lee is the 2019-2020 Researcher-in-Residence at Vtape, for which she organized the Fractured Horizon video program and wrote the essay “Glitch and Figure: representation and refusal in the videos of Buseje Bailey and ariella tai.” With curator Denise Ryner, Lee guest-edited Chroma, the fall 2020 issue of Canadian Art magazine, focused entirely on Black arts practices in Canada. She teaches Art Criticism at the University of Toronto.

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