

Artist texts, proposals, and reflections

## ***WHILE BLACK:***

*A FORUM FOR SPECULATION ON WHAT THE GALLERY CAN'T HOLD*

Confederation Centre Art Gallery, November 19 – March 5

Organized by Charles Campbell, Michelle Jacques and Denise Ryner  
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Lead curator for Charlottetown: Charles Campbell

A co-presentation with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Confederation Centre Art Gallery,  
Charlottetown in collaboration with the Black Cultural Society of Prince Edward Island.

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## ***WHILE BLACK:***

### ***A FORUM FOR SPECULATION ON WHAT THE GALLERY CAN'T HOLD***

This is the third event in a multi-year series of planned forums, talks and public presentations developed and organized by Black curators from across Canada in conversation with artists to consider both the limits and possibilities of the relationship between contemporary art spaces in Canada and Black art, artists, arts workers and audiences.

Artists in the first iteration presented questions, imperatives, narratives and proposals to initiate exchange on the space for Black art in public culture with local respondents, collaborating curators and gallery visitors (Or Gallery, Vancouver, 2021). Their responses are presented here. The second iteration reflected on the current situation of Black artists in Montreal and elsewhere in Quebec, considering the new visibility of Black art in Quebec and its attendant opportunities and challenges. This third iteration considers the space of production for Black artists operating outside metropolitan art centres and highlights the work of young Black artists from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (PEI).

## ***Reflecting While Black***

While increasingly, the summer of 2020 is being remembered as a time of global consciousness-raising, as voices rose in solidarity with the Black community—for many of us within the community, this was also a time of pain and anger, as old wounds were reopened, and a bright light was shone on the abject state of Blackness.

The “voices raised in solidarity” often sounded hollow, as the very institutions which had historically minimized us, excluded us, divided us, tokenized us, exploited and stole from us were quick to come forward to declare their support for Black Lives Matter. This phenomenon was evident within the Canadian art scene, which burnished its progressive credentials with statements of support, yet showed little awareness of its own historical and systemic devaluing of Black art and artists.

*While Black*'s initial impetus was to take on the performative allyship apparent in our art institutions. Michelle Jacques initiated a series of conversations with Denise Ryner and myself about the ways in which Canadian art institutions have failed us. We spoke about the lack of representation of Black artists in Canadian exhibitions and collections; the invisibility of Black artists of previous generations; challenges with institutional leadership; and a general climate which views Black art as somehow apart from what is contemporary and Canadian. To expand this conversation, we gathered ten Black curators from across Canada. Each had their own stories of institutional challenges, forgotten artists and work that didn't quite fit the mold.

However, the discussion that really took hold was about how Black art and culture exist in excess of our institutional frameworks—both because of the colonial foundations of our art institutions, as well as the multidisciplinary nature of Black art and its relationship to our histories, our food and music, our spirituality, our families and communities. Collectively, we selected ten artists to respond to the question *What can't the gallery hold?* in effect soliciting a set of proposals that would speak to what's left out of the gallery, and how Black artists are larger than our institutions.

In response, we received everything—from family photographs to proposals for a utopian park, from written text to videos, scenes from Lagos to futuristic virtual spaces. These works were curated by Denise Ryner into our first exhibition in Vancouver's Or gallery. The exhibition and its accompanying presentation, workshop and gathering operated as a forum for the Black arts community to come together, to reflect on where we currently find ourselves, and to discuss where we want to go and how to get there.

*While Black* in Charlottetown continues in this spirit, presenting the work of these initial ten artists alongside a set of works from young Black artists from PEI. The exhibition attempts to consider the particular space of Black art production on the Island, where local creative entrepreneurship often replaces well-trodden pathways that exist in larger centres. Many of the artists we approached rarely show their work in an art gallery. They are dancers, designers, DJs and digital artists, as well as painters and photographers. The 'apartment' in the centre of the gallery holds

their work, and in turn situates the very space where we cook meals, gather with family and friends, sleep, dream and stream videos as a primary site of cultural production.

How does this space and how do these works fit into the gallery? What has been left out? What limitations and opportunities does this allow?

These questions, along with our original inquiry, *What can't the gallery hold?* are a challenge to our art institutions as they attempt to play catch-up after decades of disregard for Black art and artists. They are an invitation to move beyond performative allyship and tokenization and to address systemic racism. They are an opportunity to see art differently, to celebrate its many forms and relish the unstoppable, joyful and complicated nature of Black cultural production here, there and everywhere.

Thanks to all the artists and curators who put their time and creative energies into While Black, the Black Cultural Society of Prince Edward Island, whose support made this possible and the staff and management of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery, The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and Or Gallery whose support has been invaluable.

-Charles Campbell, Lead Curator, Charlottetown

## **Artists:**

- Anna Jane McIntyre
- Baha Royalty
- Chukwudubem Ukaigwe
- Jan Wade
- Judah Iyunade
- Karma Clarke-Davis
- Kemi Craig
- King Kxndi
- Lucie Chan
- Niyi Adeogun
- Reequal Smith
- Robin Gislain
- Sammo Mossa
- Selecta Chevron
- SPATIAL-ESK
- Stanley Février
- Valérie d. Walker

## ***While Black Brainstorms***

Anna Jane McIntyre

“What can’t the gallery hold?” Your response may envision work that can’t currently be realized due to the restrictions that limited resources, exclusion from art networks, institutional frameworks, art history and society impose upon Black creative expression, or it may consider ways our lives and culture exceed those limitations.

### **Proposal One: An online BIPOC, Others & Allies database/app & for patronage, collaboration, etc.**

I am imagining an elegant, beautifully organised and highly visual online searchable database for Canada that would list artists, creators, galleries, lawyers, journalists & allies that are working to be the agents of change for inclusion.

I would start creating the site for Canada but imagine ultimately that the database would include international artists. Members would add themselves and traffic would be monitored.

The site would support finding artists & allies in the flow of information for projects, collaboration, international market building, inclusion practices.

The site would also provide micro-funding supports in the form of patronage memberships, mentorships, workshops.

### **Proposal Two: BIPOC & Others prioritising Community centre**

A physical art school/community centre/university that is built to support students and practising crafts people/artists. The centre would prioritise the safety of those facing discrimination. The centre would have studios and be much like a university except that there would be much crossover and collaboration between all disciplines and mediums. Curiosity and experimentation would guide the student’s curriculum. A student could take both biology and woodworking, for example. The centre would also welcome professionals in the community to rent studios and practice on the premises. Mentorship and healthy long term relationship building would be fostered. The centre would be located on a massive farmland with a forest and freshwater source and would be powered with clean energy sources. Forest school teaching, bush skills and building with snow would be some of the many courses taught. Intergenerational participation and many different learning styles would be practiced and normalised without hierarchy. The centre would be a bit like Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, a community think tank. Non-violent communication would be taught and mentored.

The centre would feature a massive greenhouse/indoor park with a playground & mall/market centre so that the community could gather in the colder months.

### **Proposal Three: Online BIPOC prioritising gathering space**

I am imagining an online platform that is BIPOC & Others safe. An online community that is explored and accessed visually and has Zoom rooms. Perhaps a drawn map of my community centre dream with library or treehouses that has Zoom meeting rooms in them. Places that people can visually choose to visit, but then when you enter there are Zoom rooms so there would be a visual interface that you clicked on instead of the Zoom link.

The online site would not be a game but would be a digital drawing with hot spots that, once clicked on, would lead to Zoom rooms. There would also be the option for virtual hologram meet-ups. This project was inspired directly by the societal lacks experienced and observed during this time of Covid.

The online gathering space would also set up intentional systems of care inspired by Cassie Thornton’s Feminist Economics Hologram Project (<http://feministeconomicsdepartment.com/hologram/>).

#### **Proposal Four: BIPOC & Others Scouts/Forest School**

Basically, a Canada-wide BIPOC & Others safe forest school and Scouts program that would encourage these populations to develop a strong relationship and stewardship with the land to help cultivate a sense of belonging and naturally incorporated environmental practices.

#### **Proposal Five: BIPOC & Others Playground company**

Create a playground company inspired by Monstrum that creates playgrounds as intergenerational community gathering spots and Speakers' Corners. The playgrounds would be inclusively accessible and would also feature outdoor school rooms.

#### **Proposal Six: Global Google map public virtual memorial**

Linked with Google maps, create an open access virtual memorial/virtual graveyard-building platform. People can add memories, pictures & stories of loved ones lost, and you can zoom into locations and provide a memorial site for loved ones. (I am currently working on developing this idea). There would be the option for holograms of the dead to be communicated with.

## ***Can't Hold This Space***

SPATIAL-ESK

The following proposal is the response to the historically colonised presentation of African artworks and artifacts. In response to the question: 'What can't the gallery hold?', I seek to explore how the essence and identity of the African continent can transcend the world of the gallery and become expressed as a world in itself.

The proposal seeks to spatialise the African continent as its own self-exhibiting entity. The following series titled 'Afro Space' explores how the continent breaks beyond the limitations of Western perception through vibrant and utopian visions. The large digital canvases are intended to capture and re-interpret the perceptions of the continent through layering relevant and provoking concepts such as technology, identity and society.

The ambition of the project is to exist digitally within a virtually created world, where the artworks themselves become the exhibited space, and in which the spectator becomes the subject.

References:

The Persistence of Western Negative Perceptions About Africa: Factoring in the Role of Africans, *Journal of African Studies and Development*, Vol. 7 (3): 72-80, 2015, DOI: 10.5897/JASD2014.0317.

DeLahunta, Scott. "Virtual reality and performance." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 24.1 (2002): 105-114.

Yaszek, Lisa. "Afrofuturism, science fiction, and the history of the future." *Socialism and Democracy* 20.3 (2006): 41-60.  
[www.spatialesk.com](http://www.spatialesk.com)

**(KARMA CLARKE-DAVIS): ESSAY**



**(KARMA CLARKE-DAVIS): PLAYLIST**





## *WHILE BLACK: MEMORIAL ILLUSTRATION & VIDEO MAQUETTE “WE ARE MONARCHS”*

## *WHILE BLACK: ESSAY “FULL CIRCLE”*

## *WHILE BLACK: THE PLAYLIST: “REVOLUTION IS NOT A ONE TIME EVENT!”*

Karma Clarke-Davis

For this expansive, challenging, personally triggering and inspiring proposal the artist tackles various aspects of the complex topic by producing a few interconnected works that play between the imaginary and reality - but echo each other in terms of their concern with Black creativity, exploring how it addresses history, remembrance, transformation and transcendence.

The main work, the **UTOPIA PARK** is a “**SPECULATIVE ENDEAVOUR**”, as is the piece that would be a part of this futuristic vision of a park: **MEMORIAL MONUMENT: WHILE BLACK “WE ARE MONARCHS”**. The other two pieces, **THE ESSAY** and **THE PLAYLIST**, while rooted in reality, are also inspired by the challenge of “**WHAT THE GALLERY CANNOT HOLD**”.

The **UTOPIA PARK**, as a “**SPECULATIVE ENDEAVOUR**,” is fueled by one of the hypothetical premises from the Curators original proposal for **WHILE BLACK: WHAT MIGHT I PRODUCE?**: “If I were not subject “to restrictions that limited resources, exclusion from art networks, institutional frameworks impose upon Black creative expression...” and again: “**WHAT CAN THE GALLERY NOT HOLD?**”

This dreamlike vision is presented as a written proposal. In allowing herself to conjecture about ways to better the state and fate of our community the artist used the “no holds barred”-FREEDOM of this project to propose a **UTOPIA PARK**, called **WHILE BLACK: TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE**. This Park would sit on acres of beautiful, arable land. Upon the land would be a **PATH** that would lead visitors to different Structures modelled after the Pyramids of Giza. Each **PYRAMID** would house representations of societal tools that would help Black People to better their lives. One **PYRAMID** would house Education, the others, Therapy / Healing / Psychology, Nutrition / Farming, Philosophy / Think Tank, Architecture / Housing, Science / Medicine, Film / Social Media, Politics / Economics / Strategies of Change and of course The Arts. This **UTOPIA PARK** would distil the collective theories of Utopic Cultures and Afro Futurism to build a literal place that is focused on finding both practical and fantastic solutions to the issues that we as a community face today.

By engaging all aspects of society, encouraging the exchange of ideas, and information, the artist introduces a new platform for expanded growth, development and success - a place to create a better and brighter Future for Black Communities.

## **PUBLIC ART WITHIN UTOPIA PARK:**

### ***THE MEMORIAL MONUMENT***

Within the Gallery space itself is an actual representation of the **MEMORIAL MONUMENT**. A large Digital illustration shows how the Monument would integrate within the **UTOPIA PARK**. While this image illustrates the outside of the monument, the accompanying Video Animation-**WHILE BLACK: WE ARE MONARCHS** is a “real” maquette, a raw visualization of the Virtual Reality piece that the artist would produce if there would be no limitations.

### **THE VIDEO ANIMATION:**

#### **WHILE BLACK “WE ARE MONARCHS”**

This piece was conceptualized as a monument and memorial to those people, who have lost their lives to lynchings of the past, as well as to those who were murdered by White Supremacists or Police and other state institutions: **While Black**.

The tree in the piece is a literal reminder of the White Supremacists use of a powerful and for many Black peoples spiritual part of nature as a weapon against the Black Community. For the artist the tree - its annual death, loss and re-birth of leaves - is symbolic of Black peoples continued survival and growth even in the face of death.

The Monarch butterfly was chosen by the artist to symbolize Black lost Lives and reincarnated Souls because they are “under fire” as an endangered species. This is a metaphor for the way that Black Lives are currently threatened. The Monarch is also known for its death-defying migration across the Americas that can be seen as a reflection of Black people’s migration due to forced slavery, political oppression and poverty. Playing on the Spiritual beliefs of diverse cultures, each butterfly manifested in the piece would be representative of the soul of a Black person who had been killed due to hate.

In order to produce this Video maquette, the artist used basic technologies to digitally create and paint over a thousand frames individually.

If UTOPIA PARK were to become reality, the piece would be produced using newly developed Virtual Reality technologies. The technology would enable visitors to be encompassed, to participate with and be engaged in the piece as an experiential event, as opposed to simply being passive viewers. Viewers would be able to brush each butterfly that flies within range and see the name of a murdered Black person appear. Those with lost loved ones, who died under these horrible circumstances and whose names are not yet recorded, could dedicate a butterfly to them.

While the **UTOPIA PARK** exists only in the imagination of the artist, two of the other pieces, **THE ESSAY** and **THE PLAYLIST** (accessible only through QR codes) offer the visitors the opportunity to engage with them either within or outside the gallery walls.

**THE ESSAY: “FULL CIRCLE“ & THE PLAYLIST: “REVOLUTION IS NOT A ONE TIME EVENT!”** reflect on socio-political inequalities through the lenses of racism, sexism, and classism. The **ESSAY** makes use of poetry and remembrance to do so. The **PLAYLIST** is a compilation of historical and contemporary songs that have texts that underline the personal and universal themes expressed in the essay: **WHILE BLACK**.

**THE ESSAY:** is a Historical record of personal experiences as a young Black Female Artist almost 20 years ago and the experiences as a young artist in Toronto fighting to forge a path outside of Canada’s prestigious Galleries and Museums. This combined Poetic Diatribe and Personal Document is brought to life through the use of philosophical, poetic and politicized statements from Black poet and activist Audre Lorde, as well the artist herself.

**The PLAYLIST:** explores various aspects of the Black experience.

These songs are examples of creative responses and reactions to the horrific history of Black People in North America. The themes that they explore range from the fear, pain and trauma endangered by slavery, lynching, and segregation to the speaking of truths that led to acts of revolt, revolution and to the forming of the socio-political movements Black Panthers, powerful transformative Marches / Riots, and to the new Black Social Media movements and BLM today. **THE PLAYLIST** is a celebration of Black creativity and inspiration in the face of hatred, enslavement, oppression, and murder.

In the end, **THE MEMORIAL/ANIMATION, THE ESSAY, the PLAYLIST** are all echoes of each other. They use remembrance, transformation, and transcendence to find solutions against the oppression, racism, sexism and classism that Black People continue to face. The artist states:

**“Like an echo we should reverberate in support of each other’s words and actions that are raised against systems that seek to oppress us. Raise voices of protest and anger, ring forth with your truth, cry out in revolt, hum with hope.”**

## ***An Invisible Minority***

Stanley Février

The invisibility at issue here stems from a critical assessment of museum institutions and reflects on the system of recognition within the Quebecer contemporary art milieu. The notion of identity develops as an ensemble of data which makes it possible for an individual, for a group, to form themselves, and also to differentiate themselves from others (Norbert, 1991).

Through my background, I am obliged to produce art which is not quite Quebecer: it is so-called ethnic art. To call into question the gaze of others upon me is to analyze my position within my artistic practice as well as within the art world. This gaze underlines issues related to diversity, to various forms of institutional instrumentalisation and to the contemporary devices of art related to the exclusion of the practices of Black visible minority artists. My work calls into question the absence of artists from visible minorities within museum collections, namely at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal.

Offering a new perspective by revealing the “other” history of the museum institution, through *Analyse de la collection du Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal à partir du critère de la diversité ethnoculturelle transposée dans une installation* (Analysis of the collection of Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal based on the criterion of ethnocultural diversity transposed into an installation), I question and demonstrate the existence of inequalities in terms of national and international identities within museum collections, in particular at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal. Thus, I interrogate the issue of cultural identity within the permanent collection of the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal. Do issues of homogeneity and monoculture exist within cultural institutions? How do we navigate this dialogue and bridge the gap between cultural institutions and so-called artists of “diversity?”

## ***Untitled***

Judah Iyunade

What can't the gallery hold?

I don't think the gallery should  
hold any art because of the history  
of galleries and museums.

My work is inspired by my curiosity to discover African history and art. I found out that there's almost no identity for me and a lot of people like me. I make use of imaginary narratives such as reincarnation in my practice to convey a message which might be on sexuality, history, identity or love. I infuse fabric as a backdrop to appreciate African prints and patterns which has become a personal style.

References to Black and African material and visual cultures have long been excised from their makers and communities in European and North American museums and galleries. Outside of the gallery's walls, Black life is forced to shift between belonging, isolation, hypervisibility and invisibility. Members of Black and African diasporas have therefore needed to seek community, articulate their identities and establish Black space through reproductions of Afrocentric visual aesthetics and its histories.

## ***The Future Road to Space, Non-Space***

Jan Wade

I almost passed up saying anything about this whole set of circumstances, the history of anti-racist systems set up historically to do the jobs they were constructed for as it all seems too vast a subject.

But really at the end of the day I feel it is all about one thing, erasure and the historical purpose of erasure.

We must make sweeping changes to the Education Systems, in some cases unchanged for centuries, because they are performing and maintaining the anti-racism status quo.

If we do not exist in the histories taught in the education system, if our stories are not known within the greater holistic histories of our own nations, we will always be considered outsiders. As a country we are populated by many varied stories and histories, and we belong everywhere and anywhere: the white cube, the forest, the places of worship, the disco, the town hall. It is only our historic erasure that makes us feel that we do not belong and keeps the whole of our society feeling like there are places that we do not belong. Nonsense, we belong everywhere.

This is why I like to include historic family photos with my work. You cannot erase what is in plain sight for all to see. We were there, we have been there, we are there, we are not going away.

To include the complicated stories and histories of all the people that make the history of any given place is of epic importance. I Am....

## ***What the gallery can't hold... who and what came before***

Kemi Craig

What if in this conversation, I began in the middle. What if I left out significant words and the context of what I was speaking about? What if along the way I omitted and erased parts of the narrative? What if I bypassed the beginning and started in the midst of the story?

The feeling that I have in response to the question, "What can't the gallery hold?" is that it cannot hold relationality with Black creative expressions through its art, artists, nor audiences. The gallery can't hold who and what came before.

When I was younger, growing up in North Carolina, and I met an elderly person who was also Black, one of the first questions an elder would ask me was, "who are your kinfolk?". It's because in reaching a knowing and understanding who I am, it is important to understand my context/my origin/who precedes and surrounds me. How can the gallery make and hold space for kinfolk?

Like many creatives of the African diaspora, I am interested and invested in an idea, in a realization of an Afrofuture. A future that recognizes the value and continuation of Black presence. But how do we embody Blackness and futurity? In my exploration of Afrofuturism, another concept that I came across was hauntology. It operates well alongside Afrofuturism in that both recognize time as collapsed or a simultaneity of past, present, and future, rather than a linear unfolding.

My proposal is to hold space for two activities concurrently. Alongside a trajectory for current and future presence of Black creative expression/art and Afrofuturism, can the gallery also hold space for reckoning/being in relationship with the past; because whether we want to be or not, the past is very much central to the way that Black creative expressions are read and configured.

Currently, my feeling within many gallery contexts is a 'one-at-a-time' relationship to Black presence. In this what happens is a loss of understanding the nuances, complexities and relationships between Black creative expressions in connection to each other but also in relationship to non-Black creative expressions.

My desire is for there to be many Black creative expressions in the gallery at any given time and over time, so that there are bridges of understanding of the waves, branches, influences and breadth of Black makers.

In order to have contemporary conversations, grounded in the present with depth, we need a reckoning, an acknowledgment of the past. In their essay, *Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity*, Avery Gordon writes, "...haunting, unlike trauma by contrast, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done." We are living in this moment of something-to-be-done and in this, it is important to not skip over the part where we acknowledge the past. The fact that the gallery, the museum, cultural institutions were founded upon white supremacy/anti-Indigeneity/colonialism and anti-Blackness.

How does holding space for our kinfolk support discourse of Black creative expressions to be able to have historical understandings of contemporary articulations?

Coined by Derrida, hauntology has been appropriated and applied in two ways that bear relevance for my work:

1) As a way of looking at the past for ideas about the future

2) An acknowledgement that in the present, we are haunted by the past—or as stated by Avery Gordon, "the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a figure...and to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects."

1. Avery F. Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," *Borderlands* 10 no. 2 (2011).

## **Indigo Griot... Memory in the re-Making**

Valérie d. Walker

My initial *While Black* imaginings: Dynamic Indigo based art work creation, community workshops, a mix of these *and more* centered around an Indigo labyrinth or if space is limited sculptural indigo immersive sensoriums. The works created & presented: tactile story-panels with conversations illuminating Indigo's magic, history and future eco-social possibilities... redeeming Indigo from past **mis-uses** as a colonizer weapon. All is possible, sensorial immersions, deep *re-un-learning*, community engagements with Indigo within this liberated Black Space,... *While Black*, a serendipitous, Indigo illuminated awakening. Abundance...

Now my Co-Vid-19 long-hauler damages are unfolding, *While Black* like all of us, is morphing through OmyGawdiCrons, Climate Change-Hurricanes, all the **things!** I am even more excited to create at each site, sharing Afro-Futuristic possibilities across Canada. Working towards conciliation, *we must* journey through time *together*.

This Northumberland Strait embodiment of Valérie's Indigo Griot is witness to and memory-scape for Ancestors, traded for *lucre*, freed by Mami Wata's deep blue embrace. Suspended upon a *Cotton Ocean* of Indigo waves, a body-sized fragment of Sun-Distressed Silk, Indigo-dyed, is impressed with a floor plan, orders from the Brooke company's management, illustrating how to tightly pack **BLACK HUMANS** into a stinking hold in the dark; to **SELL THOSE Black Lives to white capitalists**.

## **While Black: What can't the gallery hold?**

Lucie Chan

Giving thought to the question what can't the gallery hold? I am only able to respond with observations and more questions that stem from my own art-related experiences, viewing art that is made by the Black diaspora, along with thoughts that emerge from teaching, learning, and resistance within post-secondary spaces. It has always been and continues to be a painfully complex process. Thinking through the question, what can't the gallery hold? as a stepping stone to the unimagined or unwelcomed, I made time to reflect on the works from artists who belong to the Black diaspora, (Georgina Maxim, a textile artist Zimbabwe b., Qudus Onikeku, performance artist, Nigera b. Berni Searle, video artist, South Africa b. to name a few). These Black artists (along with others) seem to pay less attention to the word "can't" and instead embrace the freedom to search and redefine something for themselves, even if what they create is challenging to pinpoint. Alongside this, I've noted that although the art of several Black artists may exist within gallery spaces, it is with necessity, many create without a hypercritical audience or particular viewer in mind.

With "can and can't" in mind, my arriving default intuitively feels familiar and presuming it is no different from what any other Black artist has articulated before me. What can't the gallery hold? Unimagined freedom. Already feeling under surveillance and like spectacles, is it that art made by Black artists whose processes reflect unimagined freedoms and who enter into gallery spaces with answers not yet found, may not transition into or and feel 'in place' in galleries at all? I can only reflect from my personal experience of just over two decades of showing in artist-run centres and galleries, each ranging in variation yet at the same time, often limiting from a Black perspective. By default, galleries receive funding to support artists that fall into the dominant intersecting methodologies (race/class/familiar schooled). Already under capitalist pressure, despite any visions for experimental spaces, government demands often mirror the systemically intersecting racist policies which start in post-secondary contexts, (only in the last few years have we seen grander gestures and shifts to re-examining racist practices), which the general public simultaneously adapts to. Even Black artists who study within these spaces move ahead to pursue exhibition careers or art-related administrative roles, where a

continuation of top-down challenges, often limiting a wide range of knowledge and visions in having to convince of the validity of their practices or funding requests.

Through frequent conversations with Black artists, it is recognized that our shared visions are often removed, not supported, eventually oppressed, resulting in labour that seeks to unconsciously or not, mirror the similar ideologies that are celebrated within artist-run centres, galleries, and museums. Reflecting on the wide range of shared dreams that Black artists have, is it possible to bridge creators, curators, and also the public without compromising and limiting ideas around Black artistic practices?

Being in the ongoing position of learning and in no ways an expert of Blackness, my questions are plentiful, repetitive but hopefully useful to consider again:

- 1. Are Black artists more often than not trying to free themselves from the funding-focused responsibilities that galleries hold?*
- 2. What is currently the relationship between Black artists and Black curators?*
- 3. What needs do we currently have of one another and in what ways are our practices or vision connected, or completely separate?*
- 4. The question of power, documentation, and writing versus visual-thinking comes to mind. For example, if a Black artist, who may be seeking but is unable to define what is yet to be imagined, able to correspond with, or collaborate with a curator's vision?*
- 5. In Black curatorial practices that are positioned within the art gallery, is there room for a 'Blackness' which does not reflect historical trauma, ongoing oppression, or define identity through celebration?*
- 6. What would this look like if Black artists were to demand the latitude to make art that could not be narrowly pinpointed, defined, boxed-in or written about?*
- 7. Is there room for Black artists to not know, not commit, not envision and answer in advance what it is they are about to discover when applying for funding, exhibitions, and any other opportunities to present their art in public realms?*
- 8. Is there room for Black artists within the systems where most galleries fall, such that the creation and undertaking of ideas without official endorsement (public funding) is not possible?*
- 9. ...in direct relation to this, there is an oppressive nature to all galleries no matter how broad, diverse, all-inclusive many strive to be. Is there room for Black artists to explore self-discovery?*
- 10. How can Black artists present work which is often still in the midst of its making, while continuing to be under the light of having to perform, to be under surveillance, to be always already defined, under expectations that follow specific narratives, be it identity, cultural, or those defined through Western, European, North American tropes of Whiteness?*

*11. Is it a repeated history that artists of the Black diaspora will always be seeking the freedom to create room for unpacking, re-imagining, discovery without being documented, written about in ways that are surface and marginal?*

*12. How can room be made for Black artists to discover answers for themselves which need not correspond with questions coming from outside of themselves?*

*13. How are Black artists in 2021 to position themselves within gallery spaces, post-secondary spaces as well as other public exhibition realms without submitting to embodied experiences of spectacle?*

## ***Tracing Currents***

Chukwudubem Ukaigwe

Tracing Currents is a multi-channel installation that cites multiple degrees of casual and fleeting happenings. This work colligates both extensive and distinct records of Afro-diasporic mappings by means of juxtaposing ambient and evanescent videos of African life with documentations of Black families dining together in Canada. This intermingling of specifically disparate moments, places, and time zones provokes a non-linear take on being. Moreover, the immersive installation presents permutations of expanding sensory codes.

This installation: Tracing Currents echoes literal presence; far from hyper-metaphoric or hyper-symbolic representation. It speaks to Black existence as present-continuous as opposed to anthropological.



## Bios

**Anna Jane McIntyre** // is an artist with a playful practice that combines storytelling, drawing, sculpture, printmaking, performance and micro activism. Her work investigates how people perceive, create and maintain their notions of self through behavior and visual cues, and is an ever-shifting visual mashup of British, Trinidadian and Canadian cultural traditions. Her work has been presented in Canada, the United States, England, Europe, Brazil, South Africa and the Caribbean. She lives and works in Montreal.

**Baha Royalty** // Shawna Gibson was born in Nassau Bahamas in 2000. She grew up in a multicultural environment, that included her roots from Jamaica and Haiti. Visual arts were always an element in her life from birth. However, during her adolescent years, she developed a passion for writing and music. At the age of 18, she moved to Canada, where she studied Theatrical Performing Arts. She currently combines her love for music and art by making songs and painting to them. Dancehall and reggae are her favourite genres of music, and paint is her favourite medium for visual arts. Her work resembles and mimics life, and its struggles. She dreams of becoming a mainstream artist, or at least big enough to sustain herself.

**Chukwudubem Ukaigwe** // is a Nigerian-born song, dispersed by a transient Atlantic breeze, currently passing through Canada. He consciously uses a variety of mediums to relay a plurality of ideas at any given time. He approaches his art practice as a conversation, or a portal into one, and in some instances, as an interpretation of this ongoing exchange. Chukwudubem operates as an interdisciplinary artist, curator, writer, and cultural worker. Ukaigwe is a founding member of Patterns Collective.

**Jan Wade** // is a Vancouver-based artist. Wade's work deploys the materials and symbols of the everyday to explore issues of post-colonial identity, ethnicity and spirituality. Drawing creative resources from her own cultural history, Wade's examination of New World Black diaspora reflects upon the relations between past and present, self and collectivity, and brings voice to the staunchly political nature of those encounters. Wade's work focuses on altars as vehicles of worship and memory, as vessels for African spirituality and to reconcile the painful past of the African Diaspora.

**Judah Iyunade** // is an artist-photographer based in Winnipeg Canada, originally from Ogun, Nigeria. His work focuses on the black experience from an African's point of view in the diaspora. He has worked on a number of photo projects and short films on black masculinity, gender and Afrocentrism. Iyunade's work primarily focuses on identity and a need for consciousness in African art.

**Karma Clarke-Davis** // is a Trinidadian/Canadian artist who grew up and first established her artistic career in Toronto, Canada. She currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany, and has done so for almost 20 years. In Toronto, she was the Co-founder of one of the first Woman of Colour Run Artistic Collectives, Syndicate. As part of the Present Tense Project Series, Karma was the first Black/woman of Colour to have a solo exhibition at the AGO. This exhibition was curated by Michelle Jacques, one of the Curators of this project: WHILE BLACK. Karma's often complex work reflects her own hybridity. Intertwining the Multi, the Interconnectedness it seeks to shine a light on the interstices that exist, as someone who identifies as in-between/an Outsider/Other/Alien. Drawing on her extensive artistic background not only in visual arts, but in dance, theatre and music as well, Karma acts as a Cultural DJ making connections between various disciplines. Research into thematic topics and wide-ranging references from Art, Music, History, Writing, Spirituality, Philosophy, Science, Religion inform the work according to the circumstances. Drawing from High and Pop Culture, Karma produces multi-media installations, video and paintings. She has showed extensively internationally including solo exhibitions in Berlin.

**Kemi Craig** // is a film and dance artist originally from the Southeastern U.S. She completed her MFA at Emily Carr University of Art and Design and has studied both film and dance locally and internationally. Currently she lives in Lkwungen and WSANEC territories (Victoria) where she continues her practice creating film installations for galleries and artist-run centres, facilitating workshops and performing with independent dance companies.

**King Kxndi** // Artist. Political scientist. Activists.

**Lucie Chan** // is a Guyana-born artist who makes multi-layered drawing installations that often include animations and working with participants to discover potentially connected cross-cultural narratives between seemingly disparate lives. She has participated in several duo and group exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada, Carleton Art Gallery, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Eyelevel Gallery, MOCCA, Richmond Art Gallery, TRUCK Gallery, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oboro, Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery, and Center A, among others. Her work has also been featured in solo exhibitions at such venues as the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the MAI (Montréal Arts Interculturels), and Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery. She also has completed residencies across Canada, Portugal, Spain, France, and Italy. She was long-listed for Canada's prestigious Sobey Art Award in 2005 and 2010. She currently lives in Vancouver where she is Associate Professor at Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

**Niyi Adeogun** // is an interdisciplinary artist, design engineer, and creative entrepreneur. In 2017, he grew in his passion for digital/graphic art, leading him to plan and execute art shows all over Canada through an agency he created called ZeroResistance Studios.

**Reequal Smith** // is the Founder and Artistic Director of Oshun Dance Studios. An emerging dance artist originally from the Bahamas, now based in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, she is a graduate of Holland College's School of Performing Arts. There she majored in Dance Performance. She also holds a BA in Marketing from her hometown. She currently continues her dancing career as an independent artist, choreographer and educator in Charlottetown, taking part in festivals such as DiverseCity, River Clyde Pageant, Stratford Fall Festival, Social Distancing Festival, Performer Under Liliona Quarmyne "Intersect" in Halifax and Kemi Craig "Bearing Witness" Art in the Open PEI. Reequal is also the event coordinator for The Black Cultural Society of PEI for seasonal projects and has been a Volunteer Coordinator for Art in the Open for two years. She continues to hold positions on boards in the art community and expresses her art by fusing cultural patterns together as one creating something beautiful and wishes to bring more excitement and diversity to the PEI Community.

**Robin Gessy Gislain Shumbusho** // is a photographer, aspiring filmmaker, and currently the Art Director at ZeroResistance Studios, a multi-disciplinary creative studio where he has directed multiple visual campaigns and exhibitions to success. Shumbusho is fascinated by the beauty of people who look like him, people with a creative drive, and he looks to create a platform/space that binds purpose, God, and the beauty among people by telling stories through stills and motion direction.

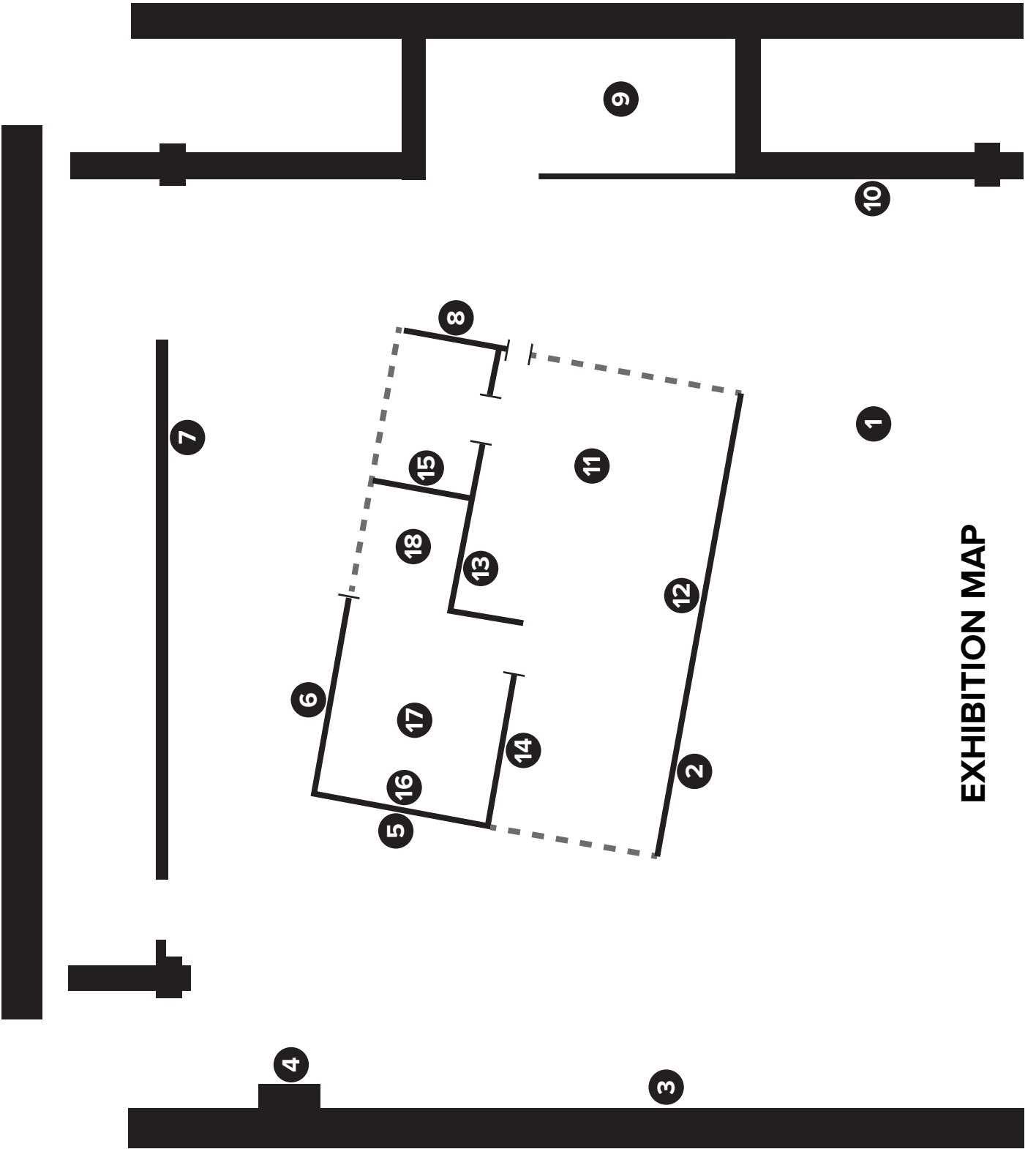
**Sammo Mossa** // is based on Prince Edward Island and was born in the land of a thousand hills (Rwanda). Having never taken his art seriously, the pandemic pushed him to take his craft to the next level by moving from paper to canvas.

**Selecta Chevron** // Chavez "Chevy" Edgcombe is a Music Producer & DJ from Nassau, Bahamas. He fuses his Bahamian upbringing along with Afro & Hip Hop influence to create his music. He teamed up with painter Sammo Mossa to present the "Women is Power" collaboration art piece

**SPATIAL-ESK** // is an artist of Zambian heritage based in Canada. He explores the interplay between urban space, architecture and cultural experience. His work comprises of carefully photographed 'col lage-models' which bring imagined and constructed worlds to life. His approach draws from the works of Kurt Schwitters, celebrating juxtaposition between defined architectural objects and cut out figures. The theme of juxtaposition is common to his eclectic cultural experiences of living in South Africa and England. He uses collage as a medium to present disruptive and provoking concepts which often materialise into larger temporary and built works. His work has since been published in Blueprint Magazine – UK, Burrasca Journal, Italy, Parksify, California and has had work exhibited at the 'Future of Art' exhibition at Tate Modern, London. He currently works from his studio in Toronto.

**Stanley Février** // is interested in issues of power in the era of globalization. His work addresses intimate questions concerning the relationship to oneself and to others. A graduate of visual and media arts studies, his recent artistic and conceptual concerns are based on institutional criticism, identity and the violence and inequalities engendered by the latter.

**Valérie d. Walker** // is a Neo-Renaissance Transmedia Artist, alchemist, Indigo Griot & curator. An Afrofuturistic time traveler, Her artwork weaves together enviro-positivity, natural dyeing, quotidian actions, sensorially immersive installations, solar-power, circuit-bending, story-telling, Black Panther-esque community empowerment, Eco-Sexual activism & Guerilla-Grrrl radio waves. Valérie's degrees: BSc. EECS UC- Berkeley, MFA NSCAD Univ., 5th Level *Ikebana & Chado, Nihon Seikashi Shyogetsudo Koryu Urasenke*. Volunteer works: Queer Arts Festival/Pride in Art, City of Vancouver-Black-Diasporic Advisory Group, BLAC Arts, FiberShed working towards greater equity and conciliation. Her work featured in *Vancouver Special Echo and Dislocations* at The Vancouver Art Gallery, 2012-22. [www.ValerieDWalker.com](http://www.ValerieDWalker.com) @IndigoVdW



**EXHIBITION MAP**

# WHILE BLACK

## List of Works

1. Kemi Craig  
*What Can't the Gallery Hold? 2021*  
audio, 3:37 mins  
Courtesy of the Artist
2. Stanley Fevrier
  - 1) *Invisible Minority*,  
screenprint on cotton  
Courtesy of the Artist
  - 2) *Infiltration*  
Video, 4:11 mins  
Courtesy of the Artist
3. Valérie d. Walker  
*Indigo Waters...Mami Wata's Release, 2021-2022*  
Adiré/Shibori-zomé hand-shaped resist patterned, hand-dyed natural bio fermented Indigo, organic cotton,silk  
Courtesy of the Artist
4. Chukwudubem Ukaigwe  
*Tracing Currents*  
six channel video, 3:02 min  
Courtesy of the Artist
5. Lucie Chan  
*What Can't the Gallery Hold? 2022*  
digitized ink and brush drawings  
Courtesy of the Artist
6. Jan Wade  
*Family Photos, c.1952-1955*  
digital print  
Courtesy of the Artist
7. SPATIAL-ESK  
*Afro Space, 2021*  
digital prints  
Courtesy of the Artist
8. Anne Jane McIntyre  
*The World Calls Them Its Singers and Poets and Artists and Storytellers; But They Are Just People Who Have Never Forgotten the Way to Fairyland." L.M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables, 2022*  
digital prints  
Courtesy of the Artist
9. Karma Clarke-Davis
  - 1) THE ESSAY: "YOUR SILENCE WILL NOT PROTECT YOU"/FULL CIRCLE, 2022
  - 2) THE MONUMENT/ WE ARE MONARCHS-WHILE BLACK(VIDEO), 2022
  - 3) THE PLAYLIST: "REVOLUTION IS NOT A ONE TIME EVENT," 2022Courtesy of the Artist

10. Judah Iyunade  
*Bond*, 2019  
digital prints  
Courtesy of the Artist
11. Reequal Smith  
*Satisfy My Soul of Soles*, 2022  
wood cutouts with accompanying playlist  
Courtesy of the Artist and Kelly Caseley
12. Niyi Adeogun and Gessy Robin  
*Come As You Are/A Visual Expression*, 2021-22  
digital prints  
Courtesy of the Artists
13. Baha Royalty  
*Yass Anxiety*, 2022  
mixed media on canvas  
Courtesy of the Artist
14. Robin Gessy Gislain Shumbusho  
*A Family Bond-Black Lives Matter March-June 5*, 2020  
digital photograph  
Purchased, 2021  
Collection of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, CAG 2021.10.5
15. King Kxndi  
*once a nigga, always a nigga*, 2022  
print on vinyl  
Courtesy of the Artist
16. Sammo Mossa  
*Empress Taytu*, 2022  
*Harriett Tubman*, 2022  
*Mariam Makeba*, 2022  
*Portia Simpson*, 2022  
*Bell Hooks*, 2022  
*Tout va Bien*, 2022  
all are acrylic on canvas  
Courtesy of the Artist
17. Selecta Chevron  
*Fly High*, 2022  
stereo audio, 5:35 mins  
Courtesy of the Artist
18. *Selection of personal items  
from the artists*

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The Confederation Centre acknowledges that the land on which it operates is the traditional unceded territory of the **Mi'kmaq**. We acknowledge with respect, the history, spirituality, and culture of the Mi'kmaq people—who have lived here for over 15,000 years.

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