

LABOUR

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Labour

Curatorial Essay by Ingrid Jones

As a collective phenomenon, the industrial exposition celebrated the ascension of civilized power over nature and primitives. Exhibition technologies tended to represent those peoples as raw materials; within the regnant progressivist ideology, they occupied the same category.

— Curtis M. Hinsley¹

...imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations, and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systematic fragmentation which can still be seen in the disciplinary carve-up of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, artwork to private collectors, languages to linguistics, 'customs' to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviours to psychologists. To discover how fragmented this process was, one needs only to stand in a museum, a library, a bookshop and ask where indigenous peoples are located.

— Linda Tuhiwai Smith²

Memory is a tough place. You were there.

— Claudia Rankine³

When we speak of our labour, it is essential to remember how we, the global majority—wonderfully diverse and non-essentialist—came to be recognized, historicized and categorized in institutional spaces. We used to be the exhibitions. From the early 1800s, our bodies and our labour were on display in human zoos, world fairs, and industrial expositions. For predominantly

¹ Curtis M. Hinsley. "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893." *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1991, p. 345.

² Linda Tuhiwai Smith. "Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory." *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (2nd Edition), by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Zed Books, 2012, p. 71.

³ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 55.

white audiences, our songs, dances and traditions were the spectacle. An exploitative confirmation of our primitivity and white "imperial superiority" for the amusement of the masses.⁴ Like raw materials, our value was measured in what we produced or how much we entertained, and once depleted, our worth decreased exponentially. Cast as minorities, we were, and still are, bonded through our intersectional ties to colonization and, by extension, dehumanization. Our bodies were stolen, bought and sold, displayed and dissected, ogled, touched and forgotten at the whim of the dominant.⁵ All facets of our distant proximity to whiteness, which, during the conquests, set the terms of our enslavement, torture and subjugation via the many enunciations of caste.⁶

Our humanity and the complexity of our histories were intentionally dismissed as unworthy of acknowledgement, and our lands co-opted for it was assumed that we, the colonized, had nothing of value to teach the colonizer.⁷ Instead, our pasts were reframed as colourful narratives in which we became 'genuine barbarians' and 'some of the most curious sites ever to be seen.'⁸ As Charles Mills outlines in *The Racial Contract*, the terms of our existence were always predicated on the "assignment of Black and non-Black people of colour as not developed enough to rise out of our state of nature." Ours was never intended to be a one-to-one agreement of equity, but instead one of "whites over non-whites" in which we remained primitives to the European man's civilized ways.⁹ We were hypervisible, yet invisible all at once, and our hypervisibility as raw materials in these spaces predetermined our relationship with the institutional and exhibitionary complexes for years to come. As Mills underscores, white signatories of the racial contract live in a fantasyland of delusion:

⁴ Referencing Bennett's discussion through examples such as Venus Hottentot and the Pitt Rivers Museum of the use of scientific racism and the mythologizing of the primitive to place colonized peoples in the space of Other, between culture and nature. See Tony Bennett. "The Exhibitionary Complex." *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Taylor & Francis, New York, NY, 2005, pp. 71–73, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203991534>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Walter D. Mignolo, 2015. "Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?," pp. 106–123, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Katherine McKittrick, ed., Duke University Press, 2015.

⁷ Ali. A. Abdi, 2007. "Oral Societies and Colonial Experiences: Sub-Saharan Africa and the de-facto Power of the Written Word." *International Education*, Vol. 37 Issue (1). Retrieved from: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/internationaleducation/vol37/iss1/3>.

⁸ Clifton Bryant, 2015. "Pan-American Exposition: Its purpose and plan." PPT video online download, SlidePlayer, <https://slideplayer.com/slide/7086113/>.

⁹ Charles W. Mills. "Overview" *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press., Ithaca, New York, 1997, pp. 12–19.

There will be white mythologies, invented Orients, invented Africas, invented Americas, with a correspondingly fabricated population, countries that never were, inhabited by people who never were—Calibans and Tontos, Man Fridays and Sambos—but who attain a virtual reality through their existence in travellers' tales, folk myth, popular and highbrow fiction, colonial reports, scholarly theory, Hollywood cinema, living in the white imagination and determinedly imposed on their alarmed real-life counterparts. One could say then, as a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement.¹⁰

History points us to how these white mythologies came to be. Long after the conquests, the last human zoo was displayed at the 1958 World Fair in Belgium. At the time, Belgium ruled the mineral-rich central African state, Congo. As part of "Kongorama," Congolese men, women, and children in "traditional" dress were displayed daily behind a bamboo perimeter fence to showcase "native conditions" for the "amusement of white Europeans."¹¹ Only a few years prior, the Colonial Film Unit disbanded in West Africa. Headed by British health officer William Sellers, the CFU engaged in the use of propaganda and experimental techniques to "re-educate" African populations under the guise of modernization. The unit produced 200 films, a media archive that presented Africans as exemplary labourers while being cast as primitive and illiterate.¹² Through these films, both British and French colonial presences crafted a narrative of Africa and Africans that was favourable to the empire as they simultaneously "criminalized Indigenous filmmaking" in an effort to quash anti-colonial uprisings.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Daniel Boffey. "Belgium Comes to Terms with 'human Zoos' of Its Colonial Past." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 16 Apr. 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/16/belgium-comes-to-terms-with-human-zoos-of-its-colonial-past. Accessed 14 July 2024.

¹² William Sellers. "Films for Primitive Peoples." University of St. Andrews, 1941.

¹³ Barthelomew Gerald Aguugo and Kenneth Osunwa. "Stereotypes and the Cinema of Africa." *Journal of American Academic Research*, vol. 11, no. 2, June 2023, p. 20.

Then there is the case of the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford and its collection of 2,800 human remains. These include the Shuar Tsantsas, a display of 120 shrunken heads which are considered sacred to the Indigenous Shuar and Achuar peoples of Ecuador. In September 2020, the museum removed the display, stating:

Our audience research has shown that visitors often saw the museum's displays of human remains as a testament to other cultures being 'savage,' 'primitive' or 'gruesome.'¹⁴

The display, titled "Treatment of Dead Enemies," was known to be both adored and feared by attendees. It was also one of the most sought-after at the museum. The institution even went so far as to deny the printing of the official installation image over concerns of sensationalism.¹⁵ Could it have been that the administration knew something about the display was indelicate from the outset? That it took the museum eighty years—the "unique opportunity" created by a global anti-racist movement¹⁶ and the heightened scrutiny of museums¹⁷—to realize that the display confirmed visitor stereotypes of primitivity and savagery speaks volumes about its consideration of cultural sensitivity.

Yes, when we speak of our labour, it is essential to remember that to the dominant, we were the colonized, a rigidly monolithic anthropological cabinet of curiosities. Though the human zoos, private circuses, and primitive displays at world fairs have, in recent years, faded away, it is not surprising that remnants of this time have not.¹⁸ Depending on the institution, our

¹⁴ Geraldine Kendall Adams. "Pitt Rivers Museum Removes Shrunken Heads from Display after Ethical Review." *Museums Association*, 18 Sept. 2020, www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2020/09/pitt-rivers-museum-removes-shrunken-heads-from-display-after-ethical-review/. Accessed 14 July 2024.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Martin Bailey. "Oxford Museum Rethinks Famed Display of Shrunken Heads." *The Art Newspaper — International Art News and Events*, 28 Sept. 2021, www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/03/06/oxford-museum-rethinks-famed-display-of-shrunken-heads. Accessed 14 July 2024.

¹⁷ Hannah McGivern and Nancy Kenney. "Museums 2020: The Year of Crashing Revenues and Anti-Racism Disputes." *The Art Newspaper — International Art News and Events*, Umberto Allemandi & Co. Publishing Ltd., 28 Sept. 2021, www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/11/27/museums-2020-the-year-of-crashing-revenues-and-anti-racism-disputes. Accessed 14 July 2024.

¹⁸ Muhammad A. Abdul-Aliy. "Decades after Philadelphia's MOVE Bombing, Penn Museum Still Keeps Secrets on the Remains of 12-Year-Old Girl." *Hyperallergic*, Veken Gueyikian, 20 Apr. 2022, hyperallergic.com/725976/philadelphia-move-bombing-penn-museum-still-keeps-secrets-on-the-remains. Accessed 14 July 2024.

servility is still demanded, and our unseen labour continues with ogling and jeers replaced by extraction, erasure, silencing, microaggressions and, at times, outright hostility. Rather than attempt to encourage the recognition of our humanity and diversity through more extensions of our labour and generosity, perhaps it is time to turn to other means. To engage in the willful attuning of our hypervisibility in these spaces as we see fit or practice the unburdening of our labour onto those who continuously demand it.

This interdisciplinary exhibition, inspired by Claudia Rankine's scholarship on microaggressions in *Citizen: An American Lyric*, and themes of perceptibility, seeks to unveil the invisible labour of the colonized. *Labour* challenges societal racial biases through the lens of Blackness and Indigeneity, exploring, among other concerns, how unseen labour might be unburdened and shifted onto the dominant. The evocative works of Natalie Asumeng, La Tanya S. Autry, Tony Cokes, Chantal Gibson, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Kosisochukwu Nnebe, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Martine Syms examine white supremacy's manifestation in institutional power paradigms and its corrosive effects on Black and Indigenous people and people of colour (BIPOC). In so doing, this exhibition operationalizes and reveals unseen labour while activating alternative teachings from Black and Indigenous perspectives. *Labour* asks, what are the motivations for our inclusion in institutional spaces? Who has the right to tell our stories? What is our right to rage in the face of microaggressions and discriminatory acts? And how can we employ much-needed rest as a form of resistance? By reimagining how the colonized perceive, engage with, and ultimately challenge the forces that shape our world, *Labour* becomes a powerful site of defiance.

LABOUR

You could build a world out of need or you could hold everything black and see.

You give back the lack.

— Claudia Rankine¹⁹

¹⁹ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 60.

Don't act like you forgot
I call the shots, shots, shots
Like brap, brap, brap
Pay me what you owe me, don't act like you forgot
Bitch better have my money
Bitch better have my money
Pay me what you owe me
Bitch better have my (bitch better have my)
Bitch better have my (bitch better have my)
Bitch better have my money
— Rihanna²⁰

In *Black Celebration: A Rebellion Against the Commodity*, 1988, post-conceptualist artist Tony Cokes troubles our understanding of looting through his reframing of the 1960s riots in Los Angeles, Boston, Newark, and Detroit. In each city, Black communities, dissatisfied with the uneven distribution of resources for their labour and the crushing systemic discrimination that saw them over-policed and over-surveilled, took to the streets and burned parts of their cities to the ground as they walked away with clothing, staples and electronics.²¹ Rather than play into the capitalist myth proclaiming that their labour would afford them equity, protestors risked their lives to turn the concept of commodification on its head. With *Black Celebration*, Cokes, whose works explore themes of racial representation, invisibility and hypervisibility, intentionally challenges the idea that the riots were criminal or irrational by foregrounding the conditions that catalyzed them.

Cokes' installation is the first to greet exhibition viewers. A charcoal wall with white text welcomes us to a celebration, and to the right of that invitation sits a lone club chair fitted with headphones, facing a vintage Sony CRT atop a fire engine red plinth. With *Black Celebration*, Cokes seductively entices us to engage with the piece by interspersing black and white

²⁰ Rihanna. *Bitch Better Have My Money*, Roc Nation, 2015.

²¹ Farrell Evans. "The 1967 Riots: When Outrage over Racial Injustice Boiled Over." *HISTORY.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2021, www.history.com/news/1967-summer-riots-detroit-newark-kerner-commission. Accessed 17 Aug. 2024.

documentary and archival news footage of the riots with searing quotations from Guy Debord, Barbara Kruger, Martin Gore, and Morrissey. Each quote delivers a message that may feel just as fitting in the current chaos of our world as it did when the riots took place. The original audio of the news transmissions, which might infer a bias against the looters, is replaced by the anti-institution soundtrack of the industrial rock band Skinny Puppy.



Installation view Tony Cokes *Black Celebration*, 1988 Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Gift of Marshall Field's by exchange. 2020.3, Photo Thomas Bollmann

In Guy Debord's essay, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," from which selected quotes in *Black Celebration* are taken, Debord notes that law enforcement and even the Catholic church denounced the protestors, accusing them of "having no leaders," and stating that they were revolting "for no apparent reason," and without any sense of "respect for law and order."²² The media's erasure of the rationale behind the riots only served to amplify what Debord termed as "the racist logic of capital."²³ A logic that, while justifying the looting

²² Guy Debord. "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy." In: Sawhney, D.N., (eds.), *Unmasking L.A.*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, pp. 229–238. doi:10.1057/9780230107236_13.

²³ Ibid.

and commodifying of Black bodies and cultural artifacts from the 1500s onward by colonial presences to build Western economies, also suppressed the histories of the men, women and children who served as unpaid labourers throughout their enslavement. Even "freedom"²⁴ was no respite as slavery's abolishment only highlighted the loss of free labour for white land and business owners, leading to the legislation of "Black Codes."²⁵ The codes, among other measures, expedited the arrest of anyone who did not submit to continued limits on their freedom and contributed to the ghettoization of Black communities. With the 1960s riots, the looting had finally come full circle. The original colonial looters became the looted, and their false humanism and paternalistic attempts to control those they viciously and parasitically manipulated for capital gain were laid bare. As Debord notes:

A revolt against the spectacle—even if limited to a single district such as Watts—calls everything into question because it is a human protest against a dehumanized life, a protest of real individuals against their separation from a community that would fulfill their true human and social nature and transcend the spectacle.²⁶

The riots not only exposed the inequality of Black communities and the erasure of histories for capital gain, but also brought to light the visceral white rage that fed into the media myths, pegging young Black men as the instigators.²⁷ In 1968, a report by the Koerner Commission debunked that notion, concluding that white racism was to blame. Generations of hostile policing, predatory credit policies, inadequate housing and employment as a result of racial discrimination had created a powder keg waiting to explode. Perhaps most damning was the report's finding that "white institutions" not only created the conditions for ghettoization, they condoned it and maintained it.²⁸

²⁴ The text speaks to the conditions of freedom for Black and Indigenous peoples in the West Indies post-emancipation, the myth of freedom for those who remained "apprenticed" or "indentured," and the continuing impact on those communities today. See Jovan Scott Lewis. "Subject to Labor: Racial Capitalism and Ontology in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean." *Geoforum*, vol. 132, June 2022, pp. 247–251, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.06.007.

²⁵ HISTORY.com Editors. "Black Codes — Definition, Dates & Jim Crow Laws." Black History. *HISTORY.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-codes. Accessed 17 Aug. 2024.

²⁶ Guy Debord. "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy."

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Alice George. "The 1968 Kerner Commission Got It Right, But Nobody Listened." *Smithsonianmagazine.Com*, Smithsonian Institution, 1 Mar. 2018, www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/1968-kerner-commission-got-it-right-nobody-listened-180968318/. Accessed 17 Aug. 2024.

In *Black Celebration*, a quote flashes across the screen, stating, "you're not trying to tell me anything I didn't know when I woke up today." Such a sentiment would be a fitting response from the colonized to the Koerner Commission's findings. But, when the truth does not align with the mythmaking of the colonizer, it is a bitter and rage-filled pill to swallow. While the oppressed wrestle daily with Fanon's triple consciousness,²⁹ for the dominant, there seems to be no equal meta experience of being uncomfortably next to oneself and one's feelings under the microscope of a vigilant entity. No apparent questioning of why the discomfort or anger within them exists or why it is so easy to believe that difference equals threat.

For as long as we can remember, in institutional and cultural settings, the supremacy of a colonial chronology insisting that all meaningful life begins with the conquests has set an uncompromising standard by which all are expected to follow. This framework centres whiteness and all of its trappings as the prescriptive the colonized should aspire to.³⁰ As such, could it be that when we, the colonized, decide to question/revolt/ignore this standard, the unsettling is too uncomfortable/unfamiliar/foreign/alien? When we ask who has the right to tell our stories, especially when mythical narratives have cost us our very lives, we are signalling our displeasure that, for generations, our histories have been delivered through a palatable and colonial lens so as not to disturb the comfort of the dominant with our visibility.

But we are among you.

As conceptual artist Kosisochukwu Nnebe observes, exploring and embodying alternative standpoints is crucial to validating knowledge emanating from specific circumstances. For

²⁹ Referencing here Frantz Fanon's description of the triple consciousness he experiences during an encounter with racism on a train. He describes the realization stating: "In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple. In the train, instead of one seat, they left me two or three. I was no longer enjoying myself. I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room. I approached the Other . . . and the Other, evasive, hostile, but not opaque, transparent and absent, vanished. Nausea. I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Ya bon Banania*." See: Frantz Fanon. "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon; translated from the French by Richard Philcox. Grove Press, 2008, pp. 47–59.

EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2632495&site=ehost-live.

³⁰ Sylvia Wynter. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3 no. 3, 2003, pp. 257–337. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>.

Nnebe, this goes beyond casting these viewpoints as akin to victimhood. Recognizing shared histories indicates how those who have been historically othered have "subverted insurmountable situations."³¹ In *an inheritance / a threat / a haunting*, 2022, Nnebe plays with notions of discomfort by employing a cunning juxtaposition of the visible and invisible. On eight screens, installed in a U formation that increasingly envelops the viewer as they step toward them, we watch the artist's seemingly innocuous preparation of cassava. The root vegetable, also known as manioc or yuca, was first used by the Indigenous in South America as early as 10,000 years ago. It was also cultivated in the Greater Antilles by the Arawak at the time of Columbus' arrival. With the violent movement of explorers, traders, and the enslaved, cassava's transport to the Caribbean and Africa increased, as well as Indigenous ways of processing.³²



Installation view Kosisochukwu Nnebe *an inheritance / a threat / a haunting*, 2022, Photo Thomas Bollmann/Seed9

³¹ Tamunoibifiri Fombo. "Kosisochukwu Nnebe: Exploring Ancestral Connections." *Contemporary And*, Institut Für Auslandsbeziehungen, 15 Sept. 2023, contemporaryand.com/magazines/kosisochukwu-nnebe-exploring-ancestral-connections/. Accessed 28 July 2024.

³² Christina Emery, et al. "Cassava: From Toxic Tuber to Food Staple." *Plant Humanities Lab*, Dumbarton Oaks and JSTOR Labs, 21 Jan. 2022, lab.plant-humanities.org/cassava. Accessed 28 July 2024.

As much as cassava is known for providing sustenance, it is also known for its poison. The plant contains high levels of cyanide used by the enslaved in the "Thumbnail Method," a deadly retaliation to colonial aggression.³³⁻³⁴ Through speakers bracketing the monitors, we listen only to the sounds of Nnebe's labour as she reproduces the steps of the poison's preparation in a manner that both displays and preserves the recipe's secret. *Cut, peel, grate, wring, putrefy, harvest, dry, powder, and load.*³⁵ Packed under a thumbnail; the powder could be covertly added to a drink or a meal. What might easily be mistaken for the loving preparation of a cherished family recipe now takes on new meaning.

An Inheritance not only attends to the unlivability of Black life and the surveillance and consumption of Blackness as a means of control, but also to the transformative power of harnessed rage. Acknowledging that the corrosive nature of hidden rage can cannibalize its host, Nnebe envisions the recipe as an imagined inheritance passed down through generations that embraces "a weapon that is hidden in plain sight."³⁶ As Nnebe notes, Black grief in response to dehumanization is an acceptable emotion as it poses no threat, while the uncontrollability of Black rage elicits a fear that must be delegitimized as it foregrounds the potentiality for revenge.³⁷ But the artist's intention is not to incite violence. Instead, Nnebe offers a pathway to resist dehumanization by acknowledging and honouring our anger. In so doing, she encourages the oppressed to act and dream of a future "fundamentally rooted in our humanity rather than one rooted in the disbelief of our basic human rights."³⁸

An Inheritance invokes a masterfully hauntological form of liberation that disencumbers the colonized from the exhausting hypervigilance required to respond to the constant threat of violence. Just as the dominant may feel uncomfortably surveilled in the work's presence, the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Nya Lewis and Kosisochukwu Nnebe. "Kosisochukwu Nnebe in Conversation with Nya Lewis." *YouTube*, C Magazine, 27 Feb. 2023, youtu.be/G7wcPzW_RcU?si=90w2rgk0PNYQ0-_7. Accessed 28 July 2024.

³⁵ Kosisochukwu Nnebe. "An Inheritance (2022)." *Coloured Conversations*, Kosisochukwu Nnebe, 2022, www.colouredconversations.com/an-inheritance. Accessed 28 July 2024.

³⁶ Kosisochukwu Nnebe. "An Inheritance / a Threat / A Haunting (2022)." *Coloured Conversations*, Kosisochukwu Nnebe, 2022, www.colouredconversations.com/an-inheritance-a-threat-a-haunting. Accessed 28 July 2024.

³⁷ Nya Lewis and Kosisochukwu Nnebe. "Kosisochukwu Nnebe in Conversation with Nya Lewis." *YouTube*, C Magazine, 27 Feb. 2023, youtu.be/G7wcPzW_RcU?si=90w2rgk0PNYQ0-_7. Accessed 28 July 2024.

³⁸ Ibid.

surveillance of our bodies continues to this day, as exemplified by the relentless scrutiny contributing to public spaces becoming sites of heightened stress and anxiety for BIPOC during the pandemic.³⁹ Our unease was substantiated by a 2022 Canadian Human Rights Commission report on the use of facial recognition technology in policing. Its findings revealed that implicit and explicit racial biases embedded within "historic and current police and criminal justice systems" contributed to devastating consequences for Black and Indigenous communities.⁴⁰ The report's conclusion that "Black and Indigenous people in Canada are subject to invasive police surveillance that makes it difficult to exist in public space," confirms that, for the colonized, to live and breathe, is to labour.⁴¹ Yet, Nnebe's work foregrounds a formidably potent side to our hypervisibility by tapping into our capacity to invoke the unknowable and uncontrollable. In so doing, we are encouraged to embrace the artist's invitation to float between "fixed identities and seemingly paradoxical realities" as we disquiet the status quo.⁴²

RAGE

A friend tells you he has seen a photograph of you on the internet and he wants to know why you look so angry. You and the photographer chose the photograph he refers to because you both decided it looked the most relaxed. Do you look angry? You wouldn't have said so. Obviously this unsmiling image of you makes him uncomfortable, and he needs you to account for that.

— Claudia Rankine⁴³

³⁹ A 2021 Canadian City Parks Report revealed that in 2020, as we were all encouraged to use public spaces, particularly parks, Canadians who identified as Black, Indigenous or a person of colour experienced higher likelihoods of barriers to entry, with 24% reporting fears of ticketing and 22% reporting outright harassment. Park People. "Lessons from a Pandemic Year." *Canadian City Parks Report 2021*, TD Bank Group, 2021, ccpr.parkpeople.ca/2021/overview/lessons. Accessed 28 July 2024.

⁴⁰ Canadian Human Rights Commission. *Facial Recognition Technology Use in Policing*, 15 Apr. 2022, www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/about-human-rights/publications/facial-recognition-technology-use-policing. Accessed 28 July 2024.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Chloë Lalonde. "Kosisochukwu Nnebe — I Want You to Know That I Am Hiding Something from You / Since What I Might Be Is Uncontainable." *Article*, 2023, www.article.org/en/events/kosisochukwu-nnebe-i-want-you-to-know. Accessed 28 July 2024.

⁴³ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 39.

—to my sisters of Color who like me still tremble their rage under harness, or who sometimes question the expression of our rage as useless and disruptive (the two most popular accusations), I want to speak about anger, my anger, and what I have learned from my travels through its dominions.

Everything can be used, except what is wasteful. You will need to remember this when you are accused of destruction.

— Audre Lorde⁴⁴

With the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Louisville, Kentucky, respectively, in 2020, the world erupted in opposition to police brutality⁴⁵ and all matters of xenophobic hate. Institutions, perhaps seizing the opportunity for relevance or revenue, made quick work of releasing statements of solidarity and promises of inclusivity.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ But what does "inclusion" mean when the dominant set the rules of engagement? With mandates of ushering in meaningful change within spaces previously thought to be inhospitable to BIPOC voices, these hastily crafted missives were followed by a noticeable shuffling in the racial makeup of arts and culture workers.⁴⁸ Overall, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion hires between 2020 and 2021, jumped a staggering 168.9%.⁴⁹ But to what end? Four years on, we are faced with the reality of those reflexive actions. DEI hiring bonanzas soon became a downward trend,⁵⁰ accompanied by frustrating accounts of what actually happened

⁴⁴ Audre Lorde. "The Uses of Anger." *CUNY Academic Works*, City University of New York, 1981, academicworks.cuny.edu/ws/509/. Accessed 17 Aug. 2024.

⁴⁵ Laurin-Whitney Gottbrath. "In 2020, the Black Lives Matter Movement Shook the World." *Al Jazeera*, 31 Dec. 2020, www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/31/2020-the-year-black-lives-matter-shook-the-world. Accessed 17 Aug. 2024.

⁴⁶ Amy McCaig. "Businesses Backing #BlackLivesMatter Are More Attractive to Workers, Have Better Bottom Lines." *Rice News / News and Media Relations / Rice University*, Rice University, 2022, news.rice.edu/news/2022/businesses-backing-blacklivesmatter-are-more-attractive-workers-have-better-bottom-lines. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁴⁷ Abby Corrington, et al. "The Impact of Organizational Statements of Support for the Black Community in the Wake of a Racial Mega-threat on Organizational Attraction and Revenue." *Human Resource Management*, vol. 61, no. 6, May 2022, pp. 699–722, doi:10.1002/hrm.22119.

⁴⁸ Torey Akers. "Are US Museums Becoming More Inclusive? New Surveys of Workers and Trustees Provide Modest Hope." *The Art Newspaper — International Art News and Events*, 17 Nov. 2022, www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/11/16/mellon-foundation-black-trustee-alliance-art-museums-surveys-diversity. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁴⁹ Marina Perla. "Corporate DEI: An Update and Guide to Move Forward." *LinkedIn*, 8 Nov. 2023, www.linkedin.com/pulse/corporate-dei-update-guide-move-forward-marina-perla-qaxne. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

after the placement of BIPOC in leadership positions.⁵¹ Then there were the sudden departures⁵² and broken promises,⁵³ alongside dismissive public statements soon retracted due to their insensitivity and misrepresentation of what attempting to decolonize a colonial institution entails.⁵⁴

The whiplash effect of these sudden and performative gestures that turned on a dime to contempt and condescension was disappointing but also familiar. In 2013, Dr. Kecia Thomas identified the tendency as a phenomenon negatively impacting the career trajectories of BIPOC, particularly Black women. She called it "Pet to Threat."⁵⁵ In each case, a candidate was hired with promises of support by a white mentor and seen as "likeable and moldable," "yet denied access to the power and authority" the role required as well as "the rewards typically offered to others."⁵⁶ The more confident and competent candidate became in their role, the less support and the more hostility they received. In short, these promising hires came to be perceived as threats, or, much like Lorde describes in "The Uses of Anger," harbingers of destruction.⁵⁷ The reward for their competence, proven accomplishments, and labour was to reckon with microaggressions, such as gaslighting, exclusion, and sabotage. In follow-up studies, Thomas later identified "Pet to Threat" as affecting BIPOC across all employment industries.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Lise Ragbir. "I Was a Museum's Black Lives Matter Hire." Interview with eunice bélidor. *Hyperallergic*, Veken Gueyikian, 2 Mar. 2023, hyperallergic.com/804872/i-was-a-museums-black-lives-matter-hire-eunice-belidor/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁵² Alex Greenberger. "Second Indigenous Art Curator Leaves Art Gallery of Ontario as Scrutiny Continues." *ARTnews.Com*, 26 Jan. 2024, www.artnews.com/art-news/news/second-indigenous-art-curator-leaves-art-gallery-of-ontario-1234694269/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁵³ Anam Khan. "Accusations of Racism Shutter Groundbreaking Halifax Institute Studying Canadian Slavery." *CBC News*, CBC/Radio-Canada, 20 Oct. 2022, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/institute-study-canadian-slavery-discrimination-1.6621985. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁵⁴ "National Gallery Director Not Interested in Decolonization." *Galleries West*, 8 Nov. 2023, www.gallerieswest.ca/news/national-gallery-director-not-interested-in-decolonization/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024. Source: Paul Wells' column

⁵⁵ Kecia M Thomas. "The Persistence of Pet to Threat." *Forbes*, Forbes Media LLC, 24 Jan. 2024, www.forbes.com/sites/keciathomas/2024/01/13/the-persistence-of-pet-to-threat/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024. MLT. "Forbes EQ BrandVoice: The Infuriating Journey from PET to Threat: How Bias Undermines Black Women at Work." *Forbes*, Forbes Media LLC, 3 Mar. 2022, www.forbes.com/sites/forbeseq/2021/06/29/the-infuriating-journey-from-pet-to-threat-how-bias-undermines-black-women-at-work/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Audre Lorde. "The Uses of Anger." *CUNY Academic Works*, City University of New York, 1981, academicworks.cuny.edu/wsqr/509/. Accessed 17 Aug. 2024.

⁵⁸ MLT. "Forbes EQ BrandVoice: The Infuriating Journey from PET to Threat: How Bias Undermines Black Women at Work." *Forbes*, Forbes Media LLC, 3 Mar. 2022, www.forbes.com/sites/forbeseq/2021/06/29/the-infuriating-journey-from-pet-to-threat-how-bias-undermines-black-women-at-work/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

As curator, educator, and cultural worker, La Tanya S. Autry notes, it is not unusual for predominantly white institutions to sustain racially hostile environments while employing tokenism and temporary measures of inclusion as a pacifier while "hoarding structural power."⁵⁹ Autry, whose practice includes the development of collaborative freedom projects such as #MuseumsAreNotNeutral that refute the myth of neutrality within museum spaces, employs counterhegemonic cultural methodologies to examine and expel institutional violence. These include profoundly engaging with the lived experiences and testimonies of oppressed peoples to uncover connections, ruptures and possibilities for future navigation. A process that has made Autry question much of the formal education and museum training that embedded her within "mess-colonized thinking."⁶⁰

In her manifesto, *Inclusion Ruse*, 2024, the practitioner offers sage advice in response to exhibition and collection practices that "molest, disfigure, steal, discredit, and incarcerate our heritage" and "our people."⁶¹ The audio work sits amidst a generative selection of texts placed on six wooden shelves. An adjunct library for those desiring to push beyond the performative and sit in communion with the voices and histories of the colonized. The central wooden table with headphones placed at its four corners alongside sunflowers, tools for lemon-ginger tea making and framed images of cherished Black scholars invites us to spend time with Autry's recipe of care.

The curator and cultural worker begins by sharing how her hopes for progress during the surge of inclusion mandates were quickly quashed, resulting in her mindful practice of steeping lemon-ginger tea and the realization that self-protective measures must be put in place. Autry asks us of our institutional interactions, "Is your participation being used to legitimize something or someone? Are you being tokenized?"⁶² Though care is a word at times devoid of meaning in institutional environments, Autry's questions prompt a *knowing*. She speaks to us like a valued mentor or cherished friend who treads the well-worn path alongside us. We recognize her sighs

⁵⁹ La Tanya S. Autry. "A Black Curator Imagines Otherwise." *Hyperallergic*, Veken Gueyikian, 22 Apr. 2021, hyperallergic.com/639570/a-black-curator-imagines-otherwise-latanya-autry. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁶⁰ La Tanya S. Autry. "Autry—Cultural Worker Statement." La Tanya S. Autry, 2024.

⁶¹ La Tanya S. Autry. "A Black Curator Imagines Otherwise."

⁶² La Tanya S. Autry. "Inclusion Ruse Manifesto." La Tanya S. Autry, 2024.

because we too have done the same. Her recipe, in its offering of a calming relatability for the colonized, provides a welcome respite from the myths of equity within such settings that exacerbate feelings of isolation.



Installation view La Tanya S. Autry *Inclusion Ruse*, 2024, Photo Thomas Bollmann/Seed9

Autry refutes white mythology within the institution by engaging with alternative interpretations of myth first introduced to her in childhood by her grandmother and later in the works of Toni Morrison. This engagement releases the need to ground oneself in the belief that factual representation and documentation are the only pathways to reaching a white audience. An audience, Autry notes, that may be more invested in the dehumanization and disavowing of our humanity in order to maintain existing power structures. Instead, Autry focuses on planting seeds within institutional soil, believing that if seeds are left everywhere, there is an opportunity for growth, even if it is through one person. Autry's seed-planting moves beyond superficial forms of inclusion that beget erasure. Instead, her practice offers us the tangible and visible in the form of historical traces and storytelling that others can collect and carry forward.

By extending care to the colonized who are often denied it, and increasing the labour of those who demand it, *Inclusion Ruse* illuminates a common error in perception when it comes to the problem of systemic discrimination—namely, that it is the work of those experiencing it to solve it. But we did not create the problem—the web of castes, the hierarchies of race, the definitions and stereotypes or the demands for transparency. As such, the expectation that we extend our labour to fix the problem on behalf of the institution is unrealistic. If systemic change beyond the performative is truly desired, then the work of fixing must be undertaken by the dominant—those who the imbalance has privileged. Let us readjust our focus away from the distractions of the institution to more generative pursuits.

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg storyteller, scholar, activist, and musician Leanne Betasamosake Simpson offers such generativity through her advocacy for disengagement. She explains: "I am not particularly interested in holding states accountable because the structure, history, and nature of states is exploitative by nature. I'm interested in alternatives; I'm interested in building new worlds."⁶³ For Simpson, this means focusing on grounded normativity—a way of living in relation to other people and nonhuman lifeforms that is "nonauthoritarian, nonexploitative" and "nondominating."⁶⁴ This sentiment is reflected in her piece *Dreaming Beyond the Nation-State*, 2016—a large wall installation, sitting opposite Autry's library, of white text knocked out of an imposing black spatter. The text, taken from a conversation between Simpson and Unanga scholar Eve Tuck, strongly advocates for disengaging from institutions steeped in systemic discrimination.⁶⁵ Instead, we are encouraged to "stop dancing for whiteness" and centre ourselves, understanding that we need no outside validation to dream of other ways of doing and being.

Acknowledging historical forms of injustice, including the use of legislation to devastate Indigenous communities, is foundational to Simpson's desire to see the dismantling of white supremacy. That dismantling includes forming alliances with like-minded individuals and

⁶³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance." *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2016, pp. 19–34, doi:10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.2.0019.

⁶⁴ Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity." *American Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2016, pp. 249–255, doi:10.1353/aq.2016.0038.

⁶⁵ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance."

communities and a mindfulness of not replicating white supremacy through "antiblackness, heteropatriarchy and capitalisms."⁶⁶ For Simpson, implementing grounded normativity allows for a resurgence of Indigenous practices embedded with spiritual, emotional and social systems that encourage independence, community and self-determination. In this way, when imbalances occur, the community can respond in support to assess the impact and initiate a way forward that does not exacerbate harm. Turning inward for support and solutions responds to the fact that, for generations, Indigenous calls for restitution have been met with placating gestures to neutralize their voices. As Simpson emphasizes, the key to stopping this lies in closely examining how change is implemented. This requires actively engaging in struggle, organizing, and building viable alternatives, rather than depending on institutions to drive change for us.



Installation view Leanne Betasamosake Simpson *Dreaming Beyond the Nation-State*, 2016, Photo Thomas Bollmann/Seed9

Simpson's frankness is a welcome shift from the opaque nature of institutional transactions. Her call for coalition with the like-minded provides a viable pathway to changing

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the terms of our engagement as it illuminates that there is strength in our numbers. For BIPOC practitioners, particularly Black and Indigenous, the cycle of institutional imbalance extends to demands of time that are accompanied by multiple and unreasonable requests for unpaid work.⁶⁸ There is also the matter of hegemony and the question of who has the right to tell our stories. When the amount of agency given to Indigenous practitioners remains in the hands of white gatekeepers, attempts at inclusion tend to address symptoms rather than the root issues blocking Indigenous practitioners from the field.⁶⁹ Questions remain, such as, what does reconciliation without truth accomplish? Who controls the funding of such initiatives, and for what purpose?

Simpson's disinterest in reforming the state by choosing to create alternative solutions may draw the ire of the dominant. Yet, for the colonized, it is a means to redirect our energies for the betterment of our communities. It is an invitation to step away from what Claudia Rankine terms the "racial imaginary" in which we are "governed" by a "collapsed relationship and a promise to play by the rules."⁷⁰ Rankine posits that perhaps this imaginary is what racism feels like, noting that at any time, the rules as laid out by the dominant can change or no longer apply to you. To call this out "is to be called insane, crass, crazy," or to be guilty of exhibiting "bad sportsmanship."⁷¹

That said, the stakes of responding in kind to the violence of institutions are high. When we speak of not bending to demands and calling out the inequities of institutions regarding the terms of our inclusion, we recognize the threat to ourselves in so doing. Here, the question becomes, how should we respond to a threat, either real or implied? Perhaps the answer can be found in Martine Syms' practice. The Los Angeles-based artist, whose works employ grit, social commentary and humour to explore representations of Blackness, frequently incorporates theoretical models as they relate to imposed identities and racial inequalities. Her short film *Intro to Threat Modeling*, 2017 takes its name from a method of assessment usually applied to

⁶⁸ Ossie Michelin. "The Hard Truth About Reconciliation." *Canadian Art*, 2017, canadianart.ca/features/the-hard-truth-about-reconciliation/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 29.

⁷¹ Ibid.

software systems. Threat modeling involves identifying, communicating, and understanding potential threats to something valuable and determining appropriate corrective actions to protect it.⁷²

A lone plinth painted safety-orange sits in the centre of a room, washed in the same tone. The embedded monitor plays Syms' vertically oriented film on a loop. Syms, in the form of an avatar, begins by making a passing reference to Bernice Johnson Reagon's "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in which the scholar and social activist speaks to the building of coalitions and the fallacy of safe spaces. As Reagon states:

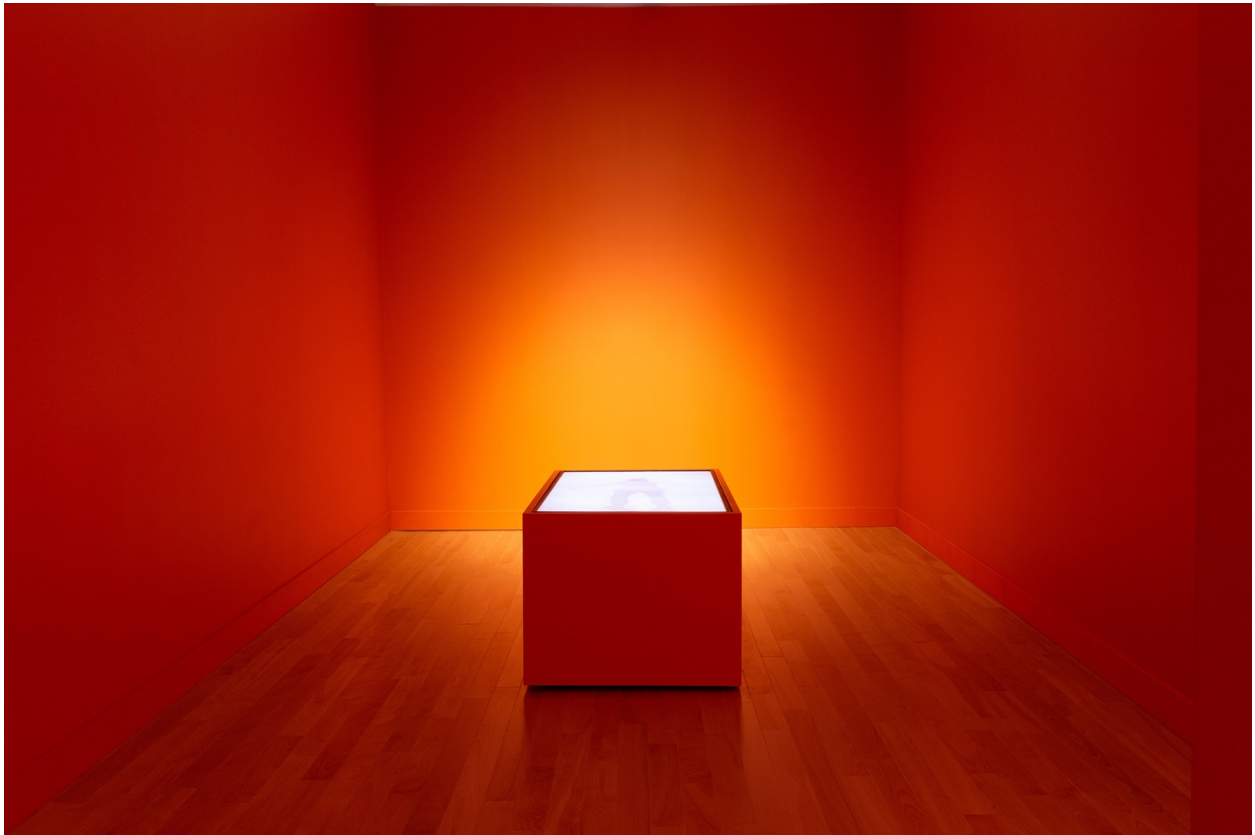
You don't go into coalition because you like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive.⁷³

After debating the worth of coalition building, Syms questions if art is genuinely her safe space or home. As if experiencing a glitch, the artist presents us with a heady mix of screengrabs and email exchanges combined with stock-like, aspirational images of what appears to be a well-travelled artworld life. But looks can be deceiving. Is she elated or exhausted in the frames? Syms' digital incarnation, dressed in a monochrome gray long-sleeve tee emblazoned with "TO HELL WITH MY SUFFERING" on the back, begins the work of threat modeling. Repeatedly asking herself, *Who am I?*, the artist notes that threat modeling requires strength. But, as she self-surveils, we watch her laboriously dance between modes of doubt, self-destruction and the struggle to maintain that strength. The route to empowerment, Syms tells us, is to understand our threat model, as well as what we want to keep private and protect to make decisions about how to live our lives. But the work of withholding is exhausting, and much like Rankine's accounts of simmering rage in response to microaggressions in *Citizen*, in *Intro to Threat Modeling*, there is

⁷² "What Is Threat Modeling? How Does It Work?" *Fortinet*, 2023, www.fortinet.com/resources/cyberglossary/threat-modeling#:~:text=Definition%20of%20Threat%20Modeling,they%20may%20impact%20the%20network. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

⁷³ Bernice Johnson Reagon. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." *Feministische Studien*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1 May 2015, pp. 115–123, doi:10.1515/fs-2015-0115.

a breaking point. A moment in which Syms asks, "Who's trying to fuck me over right now?"⁷⁴ Asserting her right to control the conditions of labour, the artist advises us to stay vigilant.



Installation view Martine Syms *Intro to Threat Modeling*, 2017, Photo Thomas Bollmann/Seed9

Both Rankine and Syms highlight that the issue is not whether one expresses anger in retaliation to systemic discrimination but how that anger is received. As Audre Lorde notes, the hatred of those who seek to "destroy us all if we truly work for change" is not the same as our anger toward systemic discrimination and injustice.⁷⁵ Yet, if our rage is perceived as a mirror to that of the institution, the threat quickly becomes the loss of an opportunity, a reputation, or the ability to secure gainful employment in the future, all of which act as deterrents to making visible our distress. As Soraya Chemaly observes in *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*:

⁷⁴ Martine Syms, *Intro to Threat Modeling*, 2017

⁷⁵ Audre Lorde. "The Uses of Anger."

"Since 2000, more than 700 studies have confirmed links between discrimination and poor health. People who experience discrimination and prejudice score high in measures of self-silencing, have high levels of anger inhibition and often exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁷⁶

If the invisibilizing of our rage when faced with systemic discrimination leads to disease, what shall we do with our anger? If it is at this point that the blood pressure rises, the mouth dries, and the lungs clog, as Rankine describes, repressing all gestures intensifies the body's labour all the more.⁷⁷ The fight in one's mind of processing, flinching, and questioning extends to the limbs, becoming the desire to defend, thrash about and take space previously denied. And though the aggressor may not perceive a single gesture of our rage, the colonized body, in its hypervigilant state, quietly records the machinations of its core in the form of hypertension, heart and autoimmune diseases, anxiety, depression and more.⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹ Perhaps, as Lorde suggests, when it comes to our rage, we must remember what can be used and what is wasteful. Whether employing measures of self-protection, choosing disengagement or rending back control of the terms of our inclusion, the works of Autry, Simpson and Syms demonstrate that our anger can be fruitful and productive rather than rooted in violence like that of the dominant.

REST

...there exists the medical term—John Henryism—for people exposed to stresses stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure. Sherman James, the researcher who came up with the term, claimed the physiological costs were high. You hope by sitting in silence you are bucking the trend.

— Claudia Rankine⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Soraya Chemaly. "Rage Becomes Her." Simon and Schuster UK, 2018.

Quote taken from Chapter 7, The drip, drip, drip

⁷⁷ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 12

⁷⁸ Lillian Comas-Díaz et al. "Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing: Introduction to the Special Issue." *American Psychologist*, vol. 74, no. 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 1–5, doi:10.1037/amp0000442.

⁷⁹ Monnica T. Williams et al. "The Traumatizing Impact of Racism in Canadians of Colour." *Current Trauma Reports*, vol. 8, no. 2, 24 Mar. 2022, pp. 17–34, doi:10.1007/s40719-022-00225-5.

⁸⁰ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 16.

INHALE:

I don't have to wait to be restored.

EXHALE:

I enter rest without apology.

INHALE:

There is beauty in the stillness.

EXHALE:

I am free to rest.

— Cole Arthur Riley⁸¹

For bodies consistently in fight or flight, rest is vital. To acknowledge this is to look to rest as a resistive act in opposition to the tendency of the colonized to do more and more in service to the dominant. What would it mean to take our rest and leave the labour of dysfunction to the powers that be? What would happen if our voices fell silent in problematic institutional spaces and ceased responding to the violence, leaving only the dominant to repeat the regressive histories of their own making to themselves? What does an institution without us have to offer the global majority?

If it is here that you interject to note that not all institutions function with violent intentions, you are correct. Not all do. And it must be acknowledged that these rarified spaces of nonviolence are valued for their attention to the labour of providing conditions conducive to world-building. But, here, we must also respond with a reminder that seeing us in a space does not make that space nonthreatening or nonviolent. We ask that you consider what we have shown you, the overt and covert backlash to our voices, the ruses of inclusion and the assumptions that our bodies equate to currency. These are not easily seen under the veneer of us being *present*, and *our representation does not equal the mitigation of a threat*. Unlike so many of the spaces we inhabit, our need for care and rest is substantive, not performative. And, when we speak of rest, we speak of reconnection to body, mind and soul in forms reflective of our diversity. An

⁸¹ Cole Arthur Riley. "Black Liturgies on Instagram: 'Don't Pay for Rest with Your Body. You Don't Have to Wait for Rest Until It Hurts. #blackliturgies.'" *Instagram*, Meta Platforms, Inc., 2022, www.instagram.com/blackliturgies/p/Ck3bxF9OIok/?img_index=3. Accessed 21 Aug. 2024.

embodied remembering of who we are as connected to heritage, home and land before the colonizer, before the violence, before we were the exhibitions, and before, as Tuhwai Smith observes, the chaos and disorder.

Chantal Gibson's *Appliqué: The Work is Labour / The Labour is Rest*, 2023–24, a haptic-poetry installation, leads us to this place of remembrance. In a darkened corridor that mutes sound the deeper we step into it—she welcomes us with a series of works. *Epigraph: Still Life with Black Girl, Theory, White Folks and Fruit*, 2024, an altered version of Janson's *History of Art*, features an illuminated keyhole revealing a single Black figure from Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1515. The altered text sits beside the artist's process journal, *Swatch Book with Self-Regulation and Pinking Shears*, 2024 that references the colour palette of Bosch's painting and contains notes of the artist's learning and unlearning. We are invited to step onto the carpeted floor and engage our sense of touch, surrounded by *Pink Noise: Sonic Tapestry*, 2024, the ambient sounds of Gibson diligently working on the piece, accompanied by the soundtrack of a summer rainstorm and intermittent birdsong.

Gibson's altering of this particular textbook, a staple of colleges and universities worldwide, is a reminder of the casual nature of institutional violence when history is told from the view of the dominant. In the reader, Janson isolates the "so-called primitive societies of Africa, the islands of the South Pacific, and the Americas" as human groups still languishing in the Old Stone Age.⁸² The author informs us that, though primitive is an unfortunate characterization of these peoples burdened with "all sorts of conflicting emotional overtones," he feels that as a descriptive, no better word will do.⁸³ With this, Janson enacts the traumatic erasure the colonized have come to know well in classrooms from childhood to adulthood as he asserts that primitives have no understanding of the written word and thus little awareness of their history. We are, in his view, unambitious and content with static lives that lack "an inner drive for change and expansion"—all characteristics in opposition to those the author feels the

⁸² Anthony F. Janson and Horst Woldemar Janson. "Primitive Art." *History of Art: A Survey of the Major Visual Arts from the Dawn of History to the Present Day*, vol. 1, Prentice-Hall, New York, New York, 1986, pp. 35–36, archive.org/details/historyofart01hwja/page/34/mode/2up. Accessed 2024.

⁸³ Ibid.

dominant have in abundance.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, he graces us with some credit, adding that our traditions and heritage do add value to the lives of the dominant as part of collections that are "admired throughout the Western world."⁸⁵



Installation view Chantal Gibson *Applique: The Work is Labour / The Labour is Rest, 2023-24*, Photo Thomas Bollmann/Seed9

Gibson considers Janson's text by asking us what it means to do the work. Not only that of confronting colonial power, addressing institutional inequality, and engaging in artistic labour, but also tending to our bodies, minds, spirits, communities, and societies. For Gibson, the work begins with disentangling herself from the violence of the institution and the reconciling of how that "unrelenting process of recognition, navigation and resistance" has become a necessary material (another layer of fabric) that anchors her connection to the labour of other Black women.⁸⁶ The artist's labour of rest takes the form of exhaustive and restorative work, including:

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Chantal Gibson. "Applique: The Work Is Labour / The Labour Is Rest." Chantal Gibson, June 2024.

...the quiet and quieting hours spent alone thinking, writing, making (grinding, crying, sketching, swearing, laughing, plotting, replaying, hating, (not) forgiving, aching ...hugging my dog) processing the chaos of my thoughts, slowly releasing the rage from cells, tuning down the tinnitus in my ears, breathing, drinking a glass of water, breathing, translating that tight mass in my chest into some other material, transforming what's been suppressed into something tangible, readable, some *thing* that *contains* evidence of the evil I see so I can contain it.⁸⁷

Gibson's rooting out of evil through a systematic dismantling and recomposition of Janson's text is a fitting transition from rage to rest. One that reflects on her "lived experience as a Black woman on stolen land" wrangling with the systemic racism and misogyny woven into academic and cultural institutions.⁸⁸ Repurposed shreds, excerpts from journals, notes to self, poems, and ephemera become a pair of rag quilts containing over 700 stitched squares. The first, *"I said I'm sorry I didn't mean it": Quilted Lyric*, 2024 hangs open, shimmering in the light and the second, *The Golden Nope: The Gri(n)d of Everyday Discourse OR The Gilt of Emancipatory Dissent*, 2024 sits closed for viewers to unravel and explore. Before we exit Gibson's transitional space, we encounter *This body (w)rests: Aubade*, 2024, a piece made of delicately woven braids, some coated with a glossy liquid rubber, representing what remains in the quiet moments after the chaos. *Appliqué's* softness is purposefully deceptive as its shreds invoke the destruction required to dismantle the institution. It is through this labour that Gibson provides us with a first step to unlearning colonial ways of understanding.

We arrive at deep rest with the works of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq artist-choreographer Tanya Lukin Linklater and contemporary artist and cultural worker Natalie Asumeng. Two sculptural wooden platforms resembling loungers beckon us to lie back and slip on headphones attached to a matching wooden centre panel. Each offers us one artist's meditation. On the wall facing the platforms is a nineteen-foot projection with undulating visuals of florals moving in and out of focus. There is a peacefulness in this space of contemplation and healing, which is predicated by a reminder that the rest of BIPOC guests should be prioritized.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸



Installation view Tanya Lukin Linklater *Scores for Deep, Tender Rest*, 2022–24 and Natalie Asumeng Eban and *Pressed Garden*, 2024, Photo Thomas Bollmann/Seed9

In Linklater's audio installation, *Scores for Deep, Tender Rest*, 2022–24, the artist weaves together elements of Indigenous ceremony with lessons on colonization. The piece draws on the scholarship of poet and performance artist Tricia Hersey and Dr. Michael Yellow Bird, both of whom view rest as a form of resistance. For Hersey, rest is a liberatory practice, connecting spiritual energy, womanism, somatics, and Afrofuturism to challenge white supremacy and its exploitation of labour.⁸⁹ Similarly, Yellow Bird promotes "neurodecolonization," blending Indigenous ceremony and mindfulness with both secular and sacred practices as a way to heal past trauma and counter colonialism's damaging effects.⁹⁰

Linklater's choice to highlight practitioners emphasizing rest as a means of repairing historical wounds points to an understanding that rest is not solely about self-care. The term,

⁸⁹ Tricia Hersey. "About." *Tricia Hersey*, July 2019, www.triciahersey.com/about.html. Accessed 07 Sept. 2024.

⁹⁰ Dr. Michael Yellow Bird, "Neurodecolonization and Indigenous Mindfulness." *Neurodecolonization and Indigenous Mindfulness*, Mar. 2019, www.indigenousmindfulness.com/about. Accessed 07 Sept. 2024.

co-opted and desaturated by the West, is often mistaken for nights of chardonnay and bubble baths. However, in Linklater's reading, self-care also signifies a gathering of strength for the struggles to come. This requires an unlearning of the lies we have been taught to believe about ourselves, including our troubled relationship with rest that is rooted in generations of colonization for capitalist gain. The extractive commodification of our bodies and cultures has instilled the harmful belief that our worth is tied to our labour.⁹¹

Linklater guides our unlearning by leading us through gentle steps such as "while drinking your morning coffee, watch the morning sky."⁹² The artist, whose practice is compelled by the ephemeral, looks to affective experiences that are remembered, felt, and disappear or have little trace, and her attention to the weathering of our bodies grounds this work in the realm of our relation to each other and to that which is other-than-human and more-than-human. In this way, the focus centres on connections through which our strength can be found. Linklater shares this connection on her terms. This meditative practice is not a revelation of sacred ways of ceremony as not all is revealed. What is shared is what the artist permits us to receive, not out of pride but out of reverence for Indigenous traditions. "Let us punctuate our time with philosophical and embodied rest," she tells us before beginning a series of steps to release the tension held in our bodies.⁹³ As we settle in, the sounds of gentle rain offer a calming backdrop to the soothing timbre of Linklater's voice.

Natalie Asumeng's soundscape *Eban*, 2024 and short film *Pressed Garden*, 2024 bring our meditative journey to a close. Through an immersive installation that merges environmental soundscapes, photography, and video, Asumeng pushes the boundaries of auditory perception while revealing the hidden harmonies in our lives. *Eban* explores four stages of healing, beginning with *The Storm*, which symbolizes the ensuing chaos and despair after trauma, self-doubt, and isolation. It is followed by *The Flood*, a purifying force that cleanses the mind of toxic emotions. Asumeng then guides us to rest with *The Calm* and *The Depth*, stages that unfold as a spiritual cleanse, easing the listener into a state of serenity and reflection. As we progress

⁹¹ Shereen Marisol Meraji and Tricia Hersey. "Why Rest Is an Act of Resistance." *NPR*, 13 Oct. 2022, www.npr.org/transcripts/1127470930. Accessed 07 Sept. 2024.

⁹² Tanya Lukin Linklater. "Scores for Deep, Tender Rest." *Tanya Lukin Linklater*, July 2024.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

through each phase, we are invited to either close our eyes or become mesmerized by the artist's looped video of pressed flowers, gently swaying in the wind and slightly out of focus, offering the mind a moment of pause.

It is Asumeng's interest in the embodied power of sound and light that inspires her collages of poetry, audio and nature. Her works are cerebral yet measured, a welcome feast for the senses. The artist tells us that as we encounter microaggressions, we seek a greater understanding and might not realize "the weakening of our mental state."⁹⁴ As a balm, Asumeng provides us with a healing space fostering "open and honest dialogue, emotional well-being, and a sense of belonging for those who may experience prejudice or hostility."⁹⁵ A refuge for us to dig deeper into our feelings without judgment. In this way, Asumeng not only offers us space for contemplation but also sanctuary as a sensual invitation to open "our ears, our hearts, and our minds."⁹⁶

RELEASE

Sometimes you don't survive whole, you just survive in part. But the grandeur of life is that attempt. It's not about that solution. It is about, you know, being as fearless as one can and behaving as beautifully as one can under completely impossible circumstances. It's that that makes it elegant. Good is just more interesting. More complex, more demanded. Evil is silly. It may be horrible but at the same time it's not a compelling idea. It's predictable. It needs a tuxedo. It needs a headline. It needs blood. It needs fingernails. It needs all that costume in order to get anybody's attention. But the opposite, which is survival, blossoming, endurance—those things are just more compelling intellectually, if not spiritually and they certainly are spiritually.

— Toni Morrison⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Natalie Asumeng. "Sound Installation Artist Statement." *Natalie Asumeng*, 2024.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Toni Morrison and Juan Williams. "Toni Morrison on Trauma, Survival, and Finding Meaning." *YouTube*, Google, 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xvJYrSsXPA. Accessed 08 Sept. 2024.

Prescription of the correct cure is dependent on a rigorous analysis of the reality.

— Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o⁹⁸

Then the voice in your head silently tells you to take your foot off your throat
because just getting along shouldn't be an ambition.

— Claudia Rankine⁹⁹

There is a fable, "The Story of the Great Emperor Moth," that is most attributed to British naturalist and biologist Alfred Russel Wallace.¹⁰⁰ It tells of a gardener who happens upon the cocoon of a great emperor moth and impatiently watches as it struggles to free itself. The gardener, assuming his help is required, cuts a hole in the cocoon, allowing the moth to be free, and expectantly waits for it to fly. But without completing its struggle against the walls of the cocoon, the moth emerges with a swollen body and weakened wings. It needed to do the work of fighting for liberation and, as such, soon perished, never experiencing the glory of flight.¹⁰¹ It is somewhat ironic that Wallace—said to be both the gardener and the fable's author—felt his intervention was necessary to hasten the moth's labour. Wallace, a good friend and collaborator to Charles Darwin, believed Black and Indigenous peoples to be inferior to Europeans, noting that, in his estimation, Black people tended not to work and exert themselves except under the pressure of necessity.¹⁰²

Sometimes, an institution functions much like the emperor moth's gardener. Rather than thoughtfully cultivate a space of generativity and collegiality, it oversteps, assumes, demands and weakens those it professes to help. Like Wallace, an institution can be a remnant of a

⁹⁸ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. "Preface." *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Boydell & Brewer, Limited, Martlesham, UK, 1986, pp. ix–xiv, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utoronto/detail.action?docID=6311142. Accessed 2024.

⁹⁹ Claudia Rankine. "III." *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014, p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ MistressoftheInk. "A Story of Struggle | Inkblots and Icebergs." *InkBlots and IceBergs*, May 2018, inkblotsandicebergs.wordpress.com/2018/05/06/a-story-of-struggle/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2024.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Henry F.J. Guppy. "Notes on the Capabilities of the Negro for Civilisation" *Internet Archive*, Journal of the Anthropological Society of London, 1 Jan. 1864, archive.org/details/jstor-3025215. Accessed 08 Sept. 2024.

Taken from page 6, Henry Guppy's recounting of observations made by Alfred Russell Wallace concerning the intellectual capabilities of the Black people.

colonial past that stubbornly refuses to keep pace with the times. It is in such spaces that our labour is distorted. Rather than metamorphose into the joy of doing the expansive work of growing, healing, making and innovating, our labour becomes the grimace of attending to problems borne of out inhospitable conditions and the manifestation of exhaustion, disease, self-silencing, self-surveillance and more. In short, our bodies bloat, and wings shrivel as flight is continuously interrupted or denied.

As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o notes in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, the universal language of liberation, the "real language of humankind," is the language of struggle.¹⁰³ In order to plot our course forward, we must examine both coldly and consciously "what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe."¹⁰⁴ Here, we ask ourselves the most challenging questions. What have we forfeited to be in coalition with those who diminish us? How has our view of each other been tainted through the institutional lens of scarcity? This process of self-examination is the first step in decentring and unsettling the institutional paradigms that we have been taught to accept from childhood to adulthood, including those that have wrongly led us to believe that obedience to imperialism defines us as strong, intelligent and beautiful, while in contrast, resistance defines us ugly, dishonest and weak.

If the narrative thus far has been one of Eurocentricity with colonialism at its centre, what does a reimagining look like with our stories and histories at its core rather than on the periphery? To do this work of deep introspection is not to centre the institution but to consider the possibility of centring ourselves. If, as Toni Morrison states, good is more interesting, complex and demanded, then let us be good and resist all that is boring and performatively trying to get our attention. For so long, we have done the work. We have taken on the labour both seen and unseen. The works of Tony Cokes, Kosisochukwu Nnebe, La Tanya S. Autry, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Martine Syms, Chantal Gibson, Tanya Lukin Linklater and Natalie Asumeng have shown us that we can dream beyond the confines of the institution and that our

¹⁰³ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. "The Quest for Relevance." *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Boydell & Brewer, Limited, Martlesham, UK, 1986, pp. 88, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utoronto/detail.action?docID=6311142. Accessed 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

perceived weaknesses are actually our strengths. Now, it is time to unapologetically take our restorative rest to survive the struggle in whole or in part. To assess how we wish to turn our faces to the sun and seek out what inspires, rejuvenates and restores us. And so, let us be in communion with those who ask rather than demand, who make space rather than extract it and who labour in solidarity rather than expect it of us.

Let us be fearless.

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To the work.

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