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...An Already Dreamed State Already Dreaming State Already...

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Virginia Commonwealth University

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*...An Already Dreamed State
Already Dreaming State
Already...*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, Sculpture
+ Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Le dedico esta tesis a la memoria de mis abuelos y prima cercana ya fallecidos: Felicia, Emilio, Heroino y Yicaury.

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* Note on style: due to the visual and creative nature of this thesis paper, page numbers, capitalization, punctuation, and typography standards have been ignored. Translation of text written in Spanish has been withheld intentionally.

Abstract

...An Already Dreamed State
Already Dreaming State
Already...

A compendium of horizontality through the means of theory, facts, fictions, questions and other ruminations on the Caribbean and the diasporic experience.

~ ~ ~

meditation? check. tea and oatmeal? check. writing exercise? check. mantra in the name of the mothers? check. stretching? check. slightly scenic walking? check. being love. being flight. being all of it. being light. being free. being loved for it. being table. being tree. being generational degree. being water. being dirt. being sun daughter. all three?

she's off. we'll have to get back to you.

—Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity*



*The state of dreaming
of being horizontal, of envisage
unsaturated faculties
unrestrained knowledge
transcending normalizations
An already dreamed state...*

*Manifestations of lives to live
portrayals of lineages
reachable touches
untapped sources
negotiation, transit, mediation
Already dreaming state...*

*Cloud walking
sleeping in dreams
dreams of rest
dreams of pleasure
wildest dreams
Already...*

*Uncompromising the ethereal
comprehending the eternal
of ruminations of becoming
Being...*



SIEN QUESTIONS

“...The essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously— and to answer clearly the innocent first question...”

—Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

1. How do you lose an island?
2. How do you find an island?
3. How do you escape from an island?
4. How do you live in an island?
5. How do you die in a island?
6. How do things get buried in an island?
7. What happened in the end?



Fanon’s text from *The Wretched of the Earth* and “Concerning violence” are foundational to understand the decolonial process, “a violent phenomenon”, which will require a “murderous and decisive

struggle” between colonizer and colonized. In his text he also presents class and race intersectionality discerning that the most effectible are poor people of color. Fanon’s text opens a door to seeing the world of the colonized who have only known of violence perpetrated against them and who consequently see in violence the retaliating action needed. Further, Fanon helps to identify the different players that still in today’s context help colonization and violence to be maintained through systemic forms of governance and oppression.

While his ideas on violence have sparked controversy where people reading at a superficial level see it as an endorsement of violence, my appreciation of Fanon’s texts comes from his positioning as a revolutionary that understood and observed first hand the cruel reality and condition of colonized subjects. In today’s context, we see this systemic forms of violence manifested in the high rates of incarceration of black people and the industrial prison complex, in the resurgence of white supremacist ideals, in the mass shootings mostly done by white subjects, in occupations, travel bans and border walls, in anti-muslim and anti-semitic sentiments, in the gentrification of poor neighborhoods, in the funding of art institutions running parallel to the defunding of arts education vis-à-vis boards being led by capitalists, and last but not least, in neoliberal policies that tightly bond politicians and the plutocrats.

The most important thing I find about “Concerning Violence” is Fanon’s observation that the true decolonization process only happens when our “social structure [is] being changed from the bottom up”, when the colonized people truly claim and render themselves as humans. At the same time, Fanon mentions how the decolonial process “cannot be clear to itself...[until] we discern the movements that give it historical content”. Within our current time, I feel that “bottom up change” is happening when we engage into local politics and movements like the “Black Lives Matters”, “Me Too”, and the “March for Our Lives”.

From an artistic position, I find it very energizing to learn and engage with the activist group Decolonize This Place. They have had a big impact in challenging cultural institutions as it relates to their boards members and the means of their funding, the provenance and purpose of works of art and the ethical position of the museums’ administration. From their public protests at the Whitney Museum of Art to the American Museum of Natural History, they are demanding accountability and rectification. I think these are essential responses and contributions from my artistic generation to the decolonial process. Nonetheless, I feel more needs to be done to seize the means of production and have a major say in the institutions that affect our lives, from education and social services to the judicial and governmental systems. Maybe part of the movement will involve cryptocurrencies and blockchain systems that are easily

accessible to people in order to destabilise capitalist structures with socially conscious cooperative systems and trade to affect purchasing power.



1. How do we embody the radical?
2. Will history absolve itself?
3. How to avoid metaphysical catastrophes?
4. How to evoke connection to an else and an other?
5. How did the Arawaks call the islands?
6. Which stars are not satellites?
7. What is a thing on the water?



I am also fascinated by a type of multidirectional scaffolding with horizontal formations that I see in the game of dominoes as it is played on horizontal planes. Considering the game a poetic of connection of dots, shapes, people and discourses, the network of dominoes moves across a landscape where relationships and strategy are negotiated not to impose but to work side by side. Additionally, the domino game can also be built, arranged and taken apart easily just as a scaffolding system would. Given the capitalist and neo-liberal structures of competition and inequality that utilize the constant “building higher and/or stacking on top”, I aim to challenge this system with this work.

~~~~

/still

/will

/bill

/

/yell

/bell

/tell

/collect

/

/all

/fall

/pillar

/patrolled

/wall

/

/fellow

/electronically

/collaborative

/

/really

/repellent

/generally

/kill

/gallery

~ ~ ~

When clouds get pinched

Déjà Rêves

fall



Out in the open, a spiral staircase stood in a nowhere place and a center. It seemed to be part of a house, but only a grand staircase could be seen. It opened right into a body of choppy water. People jumped in the turquoise water that reflected the bluish sky. Before them at the staircase, a big mountain stood stoic and apparently unmovable. A mountain with yellow-orange-red-violet-blue-green greenery. Like a pico, a molar half-way through a gum. Around and underneath it people could be seen swimming. They broke the water's surface every so often coming up for air and would head back down getting very close to the mountain. They avidly moved covering different areas bringing their faces closest to the rock. Upon close observation, people could be seen getting close to the rock to lick it. They would take their tongues out and lick as if it was a frio-frio, a coquito, a piragua. What kept them going and afloat? Were their extremities bloated? It felt like centuries have passed of me standing at the grand staircase watching the constant task. One day, a slight lavender breeze caressed my face and whispered: the rock is licked to hide it from those not worth it of seeing it. I dove in.



1. How do keys open a memory when it rains?
2. How many miles do you travel when you finally decide not to escape your emotions?
3. How can seeds, when spreaded with grace, light up unexpected bulbs?
4. How to get close to family in order to scream at the fear of vulnerability?
5. How do you tuck away pride when the only thing left is to ask for help?
6. How do you stab the stomach of an obsession that leaves you empty?
7. How can you only find the needles in a haystack?

~ ~ ~

La Llama  
te llama  
Mañana

~ ~ ~

I'd like to engage in a discussion about the continuous *re-turning* by women artists and thinkers like Suzanne Césaire that contribute to the post-colonial discourse using her own context of the Antillean Archipelago. On her series of essays published in the book *The Great Camouflage*, Suzanne Césaire challenges the colonial condition manifested in the Caribbean, at once a paradise and a hell. In the essay that gives the name to the book, Césaire remarkably “camouflages” a poetic language that brings to life the beauty of the tropics and that exposes the bleakness of everyday reality. She speaks of the “hide and seek”: the dissonance where poverty, hunger, inferiority complexes, and so forth hide in plain sight amongst the beautiful natural resources found throughout the islands.



Nonetheless, as she points out, this blindness only happens to those that don't see beyond, not wanting to critically analyze the consequences of the colonized condition. On this point, Césaire shares Fanon's denouncement of the "colonized intellectual" who is part of the "colonialist bourgeoisie" who becomes a yes-man to protect his own interests. By trying to over-intellectualize movements and by the mere fact of having the privilege of an education and jobs, we find ourselves disconnected from the reality of the everyday. We ultimately render the working-class and poor invisible. These texts are a call to real action towards a true decolonizing process of minds, bodies, and resources.

*"...Down with the reversible world, and against objectified ideas. Cadaverized. The stop of thought that is dynamic...Routes, routes, routes...The Carib instinct".*

The idea of emergent strategy "emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind". The act of reimagining new existences and futures entails accepting imperfection in people and in movements; at the same time, to re-exist allows us to *turn around* the lessons of the past, applying them to our current context with the criticality to see the intersections of race, class and gender. Furthermore, a new re-existence is an invitation

to dig into our selfhood with open senses to find the deep pleasure of connecting to ourselves and to others. This the most loving radical action we could do for resistance.

~ ~ ~

*Water  
is harder  
than stone*

~ ~ ~

I might be a guide...I might not

~ ~ ~

*Hello, who are you?  
Can I touch you?  
Let's move around the space...  
I would need your help today  
I don't know why I haven't requested it in the past...  
but, before, I have some questions  
Here...don't share this with anyone,*

*Time will come to do that.  
And, here, this might help you find the light and time to answer  
it might not...*

*Hola, ¿quien eres?  
¿Te puedo tocar?  
Vamos a caminar por el espacio...  
Voy a necesitar tu ayuda hoy  
No se porque no te la he pedido anteriormente...  
pero, antes, tengo una preguntas  
Aquí, no lo compartas con nadie màs,  
El tiempo vendrá para hacerlo.  
Y, aquí, estoy te podría ayudar encontrar la luz y el tiempo para responder...  
tal vez no*

*~ ~ ~*

*Te veo  
en un  
ratito...*

*~ ~ ~*

The exhibition *Paradise Lost* by Chris Ofili keeps you enchanted and captive in both the best metaphorical and literal sense of these words. The work is a striking monochromatic cube (or cage)

featuring mural paintings and canvases in the values of the gray scale; a departure from Ofili's best known palette with luscious tropical colors and sparkly bejeweling. The walls have been painted in a fresco-like technique covering the space from ground to ceiling. The most prominent feature in this room is a metal chain link fence which has been erected around the cube also going all the way to the ceiling. The paintings inside the cubed metal fence are titled *Embah*, *V*, *Ellipsis*, and *Libido*. While the paintings for the most part are abstracted, two of them have very explicit imagery like a phallus (*Libido*) and a triangular shape (*V*) which point to specific sexual and gendered identities. However, we start to experience Chris Ofili's genius as we try to figure out the roles of *Embah* and more importantly *Ellipsis* in the poetics of this installation.

A quick search tells us that *Embah* is a direct homage to the late Emheyo Bahabba whose nickname is Embah. He was a Trinidadian artist deeply rooted in local folklore and was championed by Ofili. One can suggest that *Embah* assumes the positioning of a quintessential character in caribbean folklore stories which is that of the shape-shifter: the creature that has the ability of completely transforming its physical form. Hence, one may suggest that *Embah* could be either God or the Snake in the biblical story. On the other hand, *Ellipsis* could be the possible unraveling... or not. Taken literally, ellipses represent the unfinished thought, the pause, the awkward silence, and the intentional omission; this could be very generative for the audience as they are mediating a space with the kaleidoscopic effect of the paintings in the center which, is heightened because the physical fence abstracts the patterns further while obstructing the clear view of the paintings.

The audience has been enchanted and captivated in between the physical fence and the pictorial fence both keeping us away from the story in the center and from the bodhisattvas-like-figures painted on the wall. This signals our expulsion, our paradise lost. It also means that we are in our own cage... molting, teared-down and heading to a new direction "...hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, through Eden [in our] solitary way...".

~ ~ ~

1. When was the last time you felt the contour of your teeth with your fingers?
2. Have you bitten your tongue enough times?
3. Have you been teeth-stabbed?
4. What if you leave more than teeth under your pillow?
5. Do you have pearly blacks?
6. Can I touch you?
7. Where is your sensible spot?

~ ~ ~

to bring the image, the feel, the smell of a match  
a precarious element to keep hope  
Keeping afloat, warm light is comforting  
is ephemeral  
it can really burn too before it goes out

~ ~ ~

*The Transcendental and Cosmic Beauty of the Black Woman*  
(FA on Simone Leigh)

By presenting the female body in this way, Leigh is making a feminist statement that re-imagines the Mammy archetype and that of the body of the everyday woman of color. The body is presented with agency, whole and sound, daring by showing her bear torso in a non-sexual or objectifying way. The figure is in an assertive position, assured that is a vessel on her own terms.

It is interesting to realize that this is the only sculpture powdered in graphite in the exhibition. One imagines a playfulness on its surface that connects to drawing, to smudging, to the act of leaving a trace. By creating this dark-graphited skin, there's an entry into the unofficial history of black people and diasporas that has been written and made in the ephemeral. The viewers are cue into looking for the remnants, the evidence of existence, the fingerprints of an unresolved history. It feels as it is up to us to continue the investigative work as this history has been passed amongst generations through adaptability and orality. On one hand, the charcoal brings notions of shapeshifting where the figure could be rub out, re-formed and re-imagined. On the other hand, there's the metaphor of the carbon copy; this sculpture in the form of a female body with her subversive gesture could be copied and taken on by new generations to decolonize and write herstory in their own terms.



*Activaci  
ón*

Ian - adrienne @  
Bryan - Chinua @  
Chino - Zora @

Eric - Nalo @  
Joy - Claudia @  
Aaron - Valeria @

Marianita - Rita @  
Brianne - Aria @  
Nicole - Jasmyn @

Luis - Josefina @  
Kelly - Suzanne @  
Sandy - Alexis @



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Appendix / Images

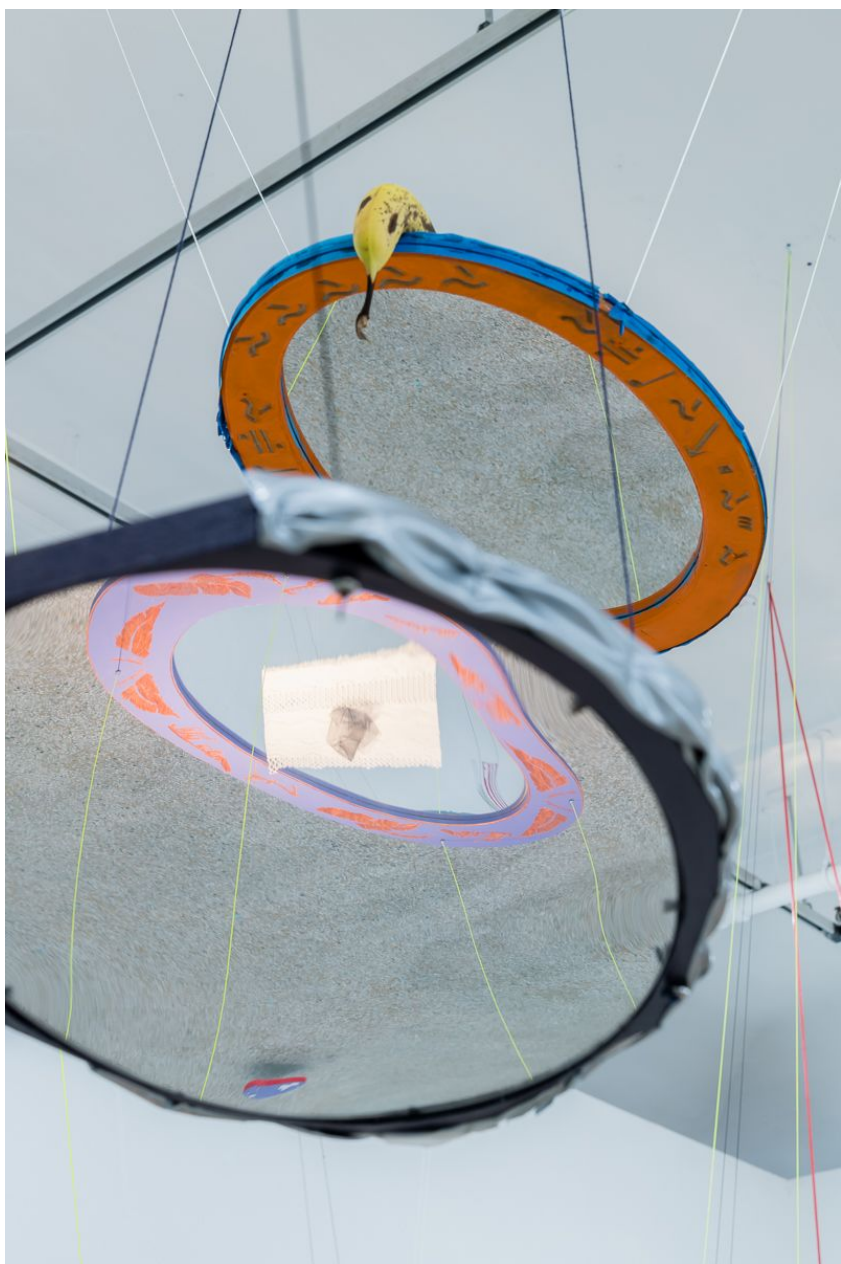
\*Installation photos of thesis exhibition

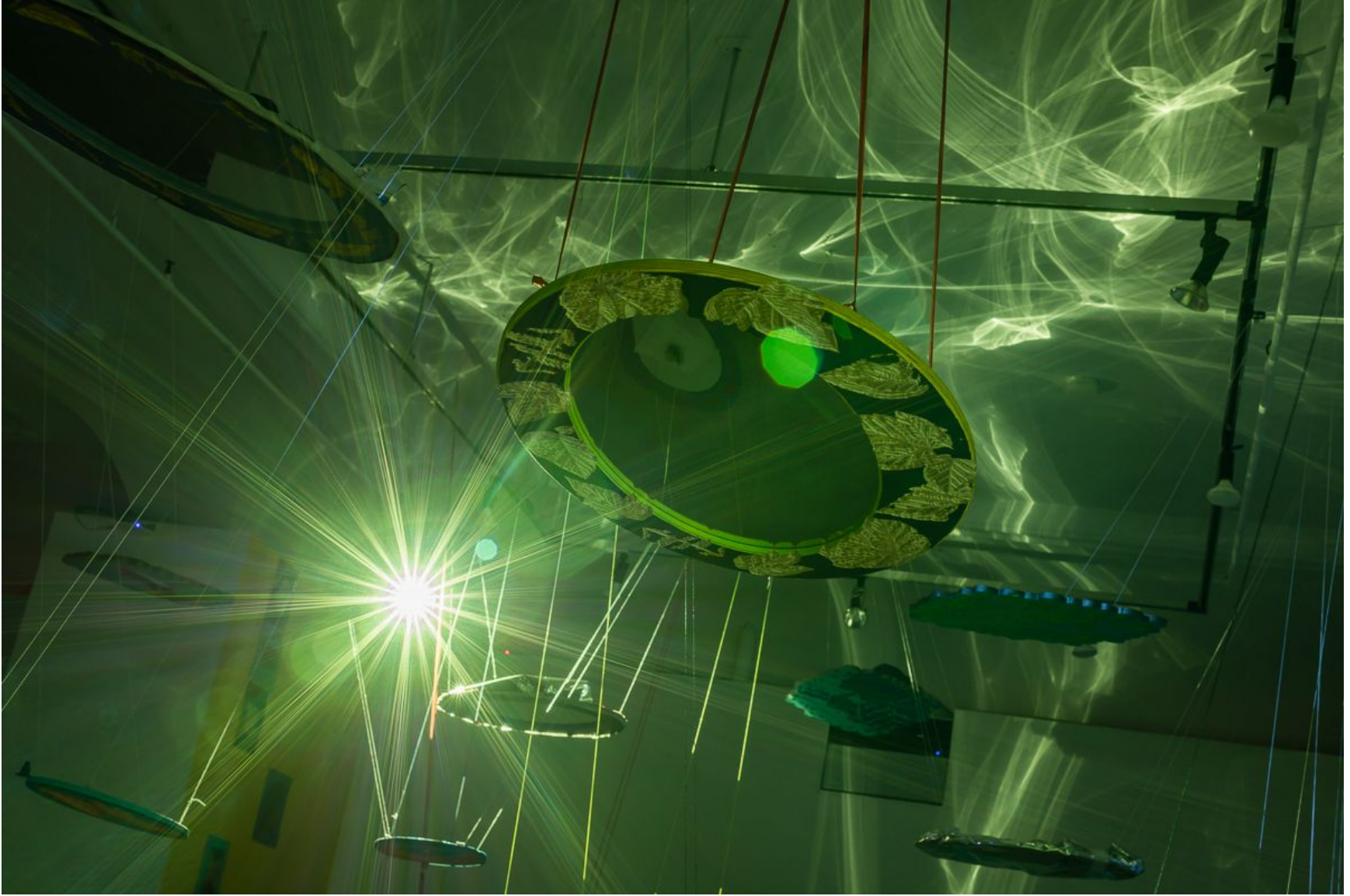




























~ ~ ~