

Exploring Passages Within the Black Diaspora

Curated by Berette S. Macaulay

Our exhibition asserts the authority of subjective knowledges by interrogating the interiority of *black* diasporic peoples, to engage the performances of transcultural identities, and celebrate actions of reinvention. The Pacific Northwest is as hungry for such discourses as any corner of the world populated by Afro-descendent peoples, who are creating and discovering empowering ways of archiving themselves, of researching lost histories, discarding fantasies of Pan-African nobilities, and rejecting colonial spiritual practices to root themselves anew.

The artists in this show weave singular yet interconnected subjectivities of their lives that transverse any static time or prescriptive aesthetics. They are not being radical, but rather, they invite us to radically reconsider our read of traditional and imaginative gestures emblemized across the world. From Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean, their witnessing asks us to examine our own selective views, to question our prior knowledges of and entitlements to land and bodies, our ideas of paradise and commodity, the climactic effects of our touristic play, our expectation of poise in the face of social injustice, our denial of right to place and resources despite invested and embodied histories, our discriminatory values of beauty ascribed to skin and gender. There is a collective honoring here, each carefully researched or personally relived to produce the visual stories we engage on these walls. And while they perform important knowledges, we are only guests. There is no appeal for our approval. These stories are only theirs; while we can witness, we must also accountably consider our own.

Around the world, we see a daily tectonic shift in power structures that demand both the real and semiotic dismantling of global coloniality. *Exploring Passages Within the Black Diaspora* signals a continuum of a people mapping both traditional and traumatic histories to future autonomous assertions of a communal body.

What is it to recall the past in service of *transversing* static narratives, to create new yet fluid futures? This is one of many inherent aspirations at the center of *Exploring Passages...* This visual conversation intentionally privileges subjective histories and archival actions of storytelling, by interrogating and confronting ideas of transcultural and transnational decoloniality, identity, memory, meaning-making, and self-(re)invention.

Artists: Abigail Hadeed, Courtney Morris, Intisar Abioto, LeLeita McKill, Mia K McNeal, Miatta Kawinzi, Nadia Alexis, Nadia Huggins, Ricky Weaver, Tiffany Smith, and Zoraida Lopez

This PCNW exhibition is part of a series of public events conceived by Berette S. Macaulay, in partnership with Frye Art Museum and Jacob Lawrence Gallery to bring *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora** to Seattle.

*The seminal photography journal and global commitment of *MFON Women Photographers of the African Diaspora* was conceived, founded, and published by artist Adama Delphine Fawundu and photographer Laylah Amatullah Barrayn, and inspired by the life and work of their friend and colleague, Nigerian-born American photographer Mmekutmfon 'Mfon' Essien.

This exhibition was made possible by the collective efforts of Terry Novak, Erin Spencer, Michelle Dunn Marsh and the PCNW Team.

Funding provided by Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

#ExploringPassages

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Exploring Passages – Panel #2

We are on a continuous journey that unfolds as a series of questions that require clear and full agency in the answers.

What does it mean when the value of social justice vocabularies like *representation*, *inclusion*, and *diversity* become intellectual and progressive trends?

Cédric Fauq offers quite simply, “There are many ghosts to give up: universalism in the first instance.” So, what is *blackness* exactly, and how does it trouble or untangle the contemporary use of the word *diaspora*? Does either descriptor include the interrogations of individual interiority? Do they bridge historical knowledges to imaginative tools of community resistance and survival - to continue *being* quite simply, *human*?

We live in a world in which we are accustomed to the narrative of *blackness* being a disembodied state to be appropriated, commodified, contracted, endured, emancipated, erased, fetishized, liberated, saved, sexualized, survived, or transformed - as *free*.

What does it mean then to transform the making and curating of *blackness*, by choosing the right to opacity without reproducing these violently flattening overtures of anthropological gazes? For a start, it is to recognize how progressiveness of universalism renders the complexity of transcultural blackness as invisible; and then, - create space for stories that sing.

In *Living A Feminist Life*, Sarah Ahmed says “Protest and punishment share the same terms”, so then, the right to a manifesto, an exhibition, that imagines alternative destinies and pursues them, defines new terms for legacy infused with love, the activism of pleasure, and the power of vulnerability, - thereby transcending mere performance of self-determined futures.

—Berette S. Macaulay

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