

ASSEM

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IMAGE: Ayesha Jordan as Shasta Geaux Pop!

ASSEMBLAGE

Curated by Maori Karmael Holmes

On view April 10 - May 24, 2019

ABOUT THE SHOW

In an attempt to disrupt notions of principality and authorship, *Assemblage* is interested in works created collectively.

How do we identify the most important voice—whose voice gets amplified and under what circumstances. Whom are we addressing and how do we wish to be addressed? How does this disrupt or challenge the status quo (or not)?

Contemporary culture most often places value on authoritative individual (master) voices—when often those voices rely upon the work of others to exist.

In an attempt to de-center the focus on solo auteurs as preferred makers, *Assemblage* looks to highlight works by collectives or collaborative projects made by several artists.

All of the artists featured in the show move in and out of disciplines, cities, and venues—defying categorization or genre, much like the show's curator.

There is an interest in de-colonizing authorship but also genre and discipline and moving away from a focus on outmoded (or at least contested) field structures including mentorship, mastery, and genius.

PEARLSTEIN GALLERY

The Leonard Pearlstein Gallery is committed to exhibiting novel and experimental art in all contemporary mediums including digital, video, sculpture, photography, graphics, and fashion design. Relocated to a larger space in the Westphal College of Media Arts & Design's renovated URBN Annex the Pearlstein Gallery has over 3,500 square feet and invites the public to enjoy our exhibits free of charge.

Founded in 1986, Gallery relocated to its third and current location in Drexel's URBN Annex at 3401 Filbert Street at the end of 2011. Since re-opening in 2012 the Gallery has continued its commitment to exhibiting regional and experimental art in all contemporary mediums including digital, video, sculpture, photography, graphics, and fashion design. Recent exhibitions include Bill Walton: artist to artist, World Press Photo 2015, Chakaia Booker: Are We There Yet?, Ray Bartkus: Story Lines, and The Fox Historic Costume Collection Highlights: Immortal Beauty. The gallery has also featured performances by Leah Stein Dance Company, The Philly Pigeon, Passión y Arte, and held collaborative projects with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pentimenti Gallery and FringeArts.

PEARLSTEIN STAFF

Gallery Director

Orlando Pelliccia

Exhibitions and Programs Coordinator

Leah Appleton

Fellow

Maggie Shaw

BLACKSTAR

BlackStar celebrates the storytelling traditions and visual culture of the African diaspora and of global communities of color, showcasing film, video and multimedia work. Through exhibitions, publications, public programs, and an annual festival, BlackStar highlights the oft-overlooked stories of black, brown and indigenous people from around the world.

BLACKSTAR EXHIBITIONS STAFF

Founder & Director

Maori Karmael Holmes

Program & Administrative Assistant

Sophia Abraham-Raveson

Preparator and Assistant Designer

Derek Rigby

Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. They show us potential histories in the making. Assemblages don't just gather lifeways, they make them.

—Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing

ON ASSEMBLAGE

FARRAH RAHAMAN

In the history of art, *assemblage*¹ refers to the Neo-Dada technique of using everyday cast off junk to de-aestheticize the work and in so doing, reject the commercialization of the contemporary gallery system. Preeminent artists of the genre unsurprisingly failed to achieve this intended refusal, largely because of their focus on protecting individual mastery. It was the artist's (read: white male cisgender American) mere choice and arrangement of the materials that elevated rubbish to high art, folding their myopic efforts into preexisting profit-oriented market flows.

Unlike its titular namesake, the *Assemblage* we encounter in this exhibit is abundantly more disruptive, generative, exciting and certainly beautiful.

Traditional passages of clout, capital and bravado are not relevant where citation is shared, effort is collective and genius is about the imaginative layers and experiential heights a work can achieve through co-creation.

Take for instance TNEG's 4:44, which, as the title track of Jay Z's album, inevitably converses with the idea of mastery. Through montage of phone and archival footage, TNEG calls on the virtuosity of a young black boy singing Nina Simone, who calls on Eartha Kitt, who calls on everyday Black folk, to call on and be called by Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Yagazie Emezie. These utterances are four-dimensional and co-authorial, removing the burden for the single auteur to say it all, instead letting the sagacious multitude resonate together.

Collaboration also attempts to combat the divide and conquer modus operandi of the colonizer², so that sharing power and stake is a colonial unlearning. MVMT, attending to the authority and circulation of racist images, uses montage to blast the film industry by turning the gaze on their ceaseless misdeeds. Taking white savior stereotypes from pop culture movies, *White People Won't Save You* algorithmically pulls similar messianic tropes from new productions in a cycle that's "not going to end unless people stop making white savior movies and TV shows."³

Beyond its engagement with decoloniality and genius, there are many facets of collective work that undo the cultural script of individualism. Distributive labor, mutual reliance, community-based leadership and vision are among some. Labor here is critical as so much of the work and decisions made by people of color and women, which happens around us and for us, is rendered invisible.

It is through this participatory ethos that BARETEETH finds its power. As part of a collaborative process with Southwest Philadelphia residents, *Been Here* exposes how artists, communities and community-based artists can co-produce sensorially rich, necessary and illuminating work, belying the extractive processes which social praxis and documentary work typically reward. This triptych which features poetry by Sophia Poe, rhyme by Nyfease Sims, and the drumline Second To None, can itself be considered an assemblage through the lens of anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing⁴;

"Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. They show us potential histories in the making. Assemblages don't just gather lifeways, they make them.

Thinking through assemblage urges us to ask: How

do gatherings sometimes become “happenings,” that is, greater than the sum of their parts? If history without progress is indeterminate and multidirectional, might assemblages show us its possibilities?

Assemblages cannot hide from capital and the state; they are sites for watching how political economy works. If capitalism has no teleology, we need to see what comes together- not just by prefabrication, but also by juxtaposition.”

Complex Movements with Siwatu-Salama Ra reveal how we might make lifeways which collectively observe and respond to the neoliberal violences pressing on our lives. *Kites on Kites: Shadow to Sky* is capacious, allowing the audience to listen, learn and contemplate the inextricable worlds of political confinement and political liberation. Here, the concept of emergence is also palpable. Coming out of the work of Grace Lee Boggs, Octavia E. Butler, Complex Movements, and popularized by adrienne maree brown⁵, we can think about how divergent, decentralized but interconnected beings must co-conspire to enact transformative social change. When we shape change, we change worlds. In the Earthseed trilogy, Octavia Butler overlooks the typical trappings of dystopian science fiction- cyborgs, alien invaders and imperial spaceships- placing our attention on our ability to co-create in the most dire of human made circumstances.

Partnership is giving, taking,
learning, teaching, offering the
greatest possible benefit while doing
the least possible harm. Partnership
is mutualistic symbiosis. Partnership
is life.

Only in partnership can we thrive, grow,
Change. Only in partnership can we

live.⁶

Earthseed is the belief system made manifest through the protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina and shared among the community which she builds. While the third book of the trilogy is unpublished, the fate remains the same;

The destiny of earthseed is to take root among the stars.⁷

Dark Matter Messages: Parable of Power Chapter 1 forms an extended meditation on the potential for civilization after ruin. *SiriusShapeShifters* imagines one of the infinite possible journeys on the path of finding and rooting elsewhere in the galaxy. With similar futuristic appeals and ethereal talent, it is not hard to imagine Shasta Geaux Pop! fulfilling the destiny of Earthseed by taking root among the stars. She's a self-described, 'lover, a fighter, a people exciter and a crowd igniter'⁸ who gives us a radical joyful hope for a resistant and transformed future.

As we barrel in the direction of global climate disaster, configured by the racialized political economy, we also try to pick up the pieces which help us make sense of the world. Through the co-creation of artists and their cross pollination in this show, we are reminded to place the power in the people. *Assemblage* brings together ideas, images and imaginations which allow us to collectively conceive of alternative landscapes for being human.



IMAGE: d.Sabela Grimes and
Meena Murugesan performing
Dark Matter Messages.





4:44

TNEG (Elissa Blount Moorhead, Arthur Jafa, Malik Sayeed)

BALTIMORE/LOS ANGELES

With the mantra to create cinema that replicates the power, beauty, and alienation of black music, TNEG (comprised of Malik Sayeed, Elissa Blount-Moorhead and Arthur Jafa) created 4:44, the accompanying music video for the title track on Jay-Z's album. The video weaves in archival clips of Eartha Kitt speaking about relationships, a young boy singing along to Nina Simone's "Feeling Good," couples fighting in the street via Worldstar footage and Al Green singing the love song "Judy," among other scenes of found footage. The footage is framed by two dancing scenes: one is of Storyboard P and Okwui Okpokwasili; the second is Beyoncé and Jay on stage dancing and smiling, but almost never directly at one other. In both stories of dance, neither of the dancers touch. The result is a story of love lost and regained, or a story of honest love, where intimacy and distance can share the same household.

Source: Blount Danois, Ericka. "Meet the Creative Women Behind Jay-Z's '4:44' Music Video [Interview]." Okayplayer. 2017.



BEEN HERE

BARETEETH collective in collaboration with Ash Richards and Marie Alarcón

PHILADELPHIA

Been Here is a multi-channel installation that showcases Bartram's Garden's neighbors and friends as they perform everyday acts of art and movement. The focus of these vignettes are the intimate and personal relationships between place and the communities that interact within it, highlighting the creative power that has long existed in these communities outside of the involvement of institutions. The individual movements in this piece gesture towards the multiplicity of creative acts that unfold both within and outside the garden's perimeters by the people who are intimately tied to it. This installation reflects the ideas and artistic practices of BARETEETH as well as the creative talents and visions of the neighbors who collaborated with BARETEETH to make this project possible.



DARK MATTER MESSAGES

**SiriusShapeShifters (Meena
Murugesan & d. Sabela Grimes)**
LOS ANGELES

Moved by how Octavia E. Butler invents interrelated notions of humanness+otherness in her Parable Series, *Dark Matter Messages* dreams Butler's unfinished manuscript, *Parable of the Trickster*, into a sonic experience drenched in visual movement meditations that realize quantum blackness as a means to play within the nowness of imminent futures.



KITES ON KITES: SHADOW TO THE SKY

**Complex Movements (Sage Crump,
Carlos L05 Garcia, Wesley Taylor,
Waaheed, ill Weaver) with Siwatu-
Salama Ra**

DETROIT

Kite
/kīt/
noun

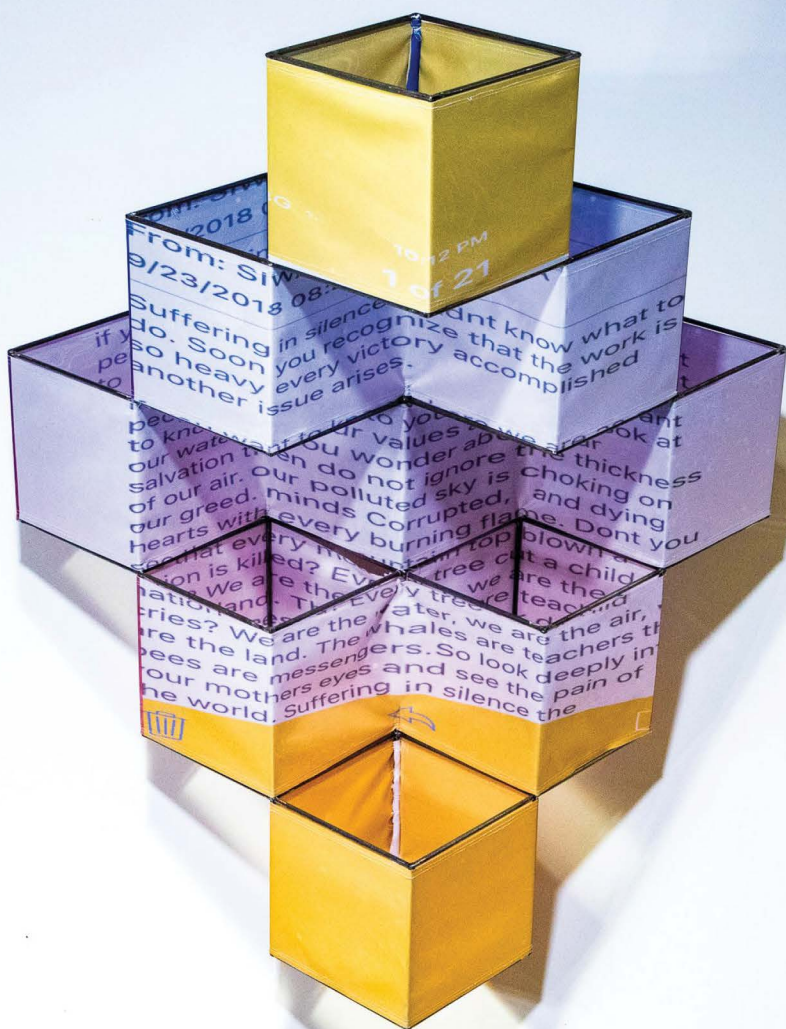
- 1. A toy consisting of a light frame with thin material stretched over it, flown in the wind at the end of a long string.*
- 2. Prison terminology for a written message-- whether a letter, a torn piece of paper, or a medical form. Kites are the primary tool of communication between people who are incarcerated, as well as the formal way to express needs and concerns to prison authorities.*

Kites on Kites: Shadow to Sky is a multimedia installation that combines writing, publication, print, sculpture, video, and sound. It is an ongoing collaborative project between Detroit artist-activist collective Complex Movements and Detroit activist Siwatu-Salama Ra.

For this installation, Siwatu's written kites that she sent from prison are superimposed on the sculptural form of box kites traditionally flown in the sky. Video footage includes Siwatu's phone message to the 2018 Detroit Kite Festival and her first reactions to witnessing the kites after her release from prison. The concept is inspired by Siwatu's words and experiences while unjustly incarcerated for defending herself, her mother, and her two year old daughter. Siwatu was imprisoned while pregnant and forced to give birth under the watch of armed prison guards. Following the construction of the first two kites, she was released on bond pending appeal and continues to fight for her freedom as the work develops. The project aims to amplify Siwatu's reflective writings while imprisoned, as well as her continued advocacy for the rights of incarcerated pregnant mothers, women, parents, and caregivers.

Kites on Kites: Shadow to Sky is connected to *Tower and Dungeon*, an evolving body of work by Complex Movements about the intersections between real estate development and the prison industrial complex. *Tower and Dungeon* is based on the book of the same name by Detroit author and activist Dr. Gloria Aneb House.

ComplexMovements.com
FreeSiwatu.org





SHASTA GEAUX POP!

**Ayesha Jordan, Abigail DeVille and
Charlotte Brathwaite**

BROOKLYN

If Millie Jackson, Roxanne Shante, OutKast and Monty Python had a baby in the year 3030 you'd get SHASTA GEAUX POP!

Shasta is celebrity. Shasta is the future. She's a world famous emcee and performance artist, a humble activist and sex therapist for the general public — she's irreverent and uplifting, and she was born out of a necessity to claim and occupy space for joyful protest. She's a manifestation of pop culture; selfies, fame chasing, luxury on a dime, metallic body suits, the drag war on female subjectivity, and the endless despair of race relations in the United States. Shasta is the dark and the light risen to the surface in a silver sheen and turned to flesh.



WHITE PEOPLE WON'T SAVE YOU

MVMT (Terence Nance, Naima Ramos-Chapman, Janae Williams, Anthony Bartlett, Djore Nance, Emile Mosseri)
BROOKLYN

We provide specialized consulting services for feature film and television productions. Our services help filmmakers who are looking to gain insight on race-themed content at any stage of production - from concept to script to screen. What we provide is simple - peace of mind. After working with our consultants you can rest assured that your project will avoid pandering to white supremacist stereotypes or characterizations, side-step hard to notice racist tropes, and ultimately fly clear and free of the biases that inevitably work their way into your product. If you are in need of our services please contact us here for a quote, we look forward to helping you make your best work.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Assemblage", Art Term, Tate Glossary. [online]
- 2 Malcolm X, "The Black Revolution", Militant Labor Forum. Palm Gardens, New York.1964
- 3 Terence Nance quoted by Sameer Rao, "Terence Nance Remixed Dozens of White Savior Scenes So You Don't Have To". Colorlines. 2018.
- 4 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. 2015.
- 5 adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. 2017.
Note that in Emergent Strategy, brown uses the emblem system of Complex Movements to explain the elements of emergence.
- 6 Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of The Talents*. 1998.
- 7 Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of The Sower*. 1993.
- 8 Charlotte Braithwaite and Ayesha Jordan, "The World of SHASTA GEAUX POP////////// SHASTA 4PRESIDENT & LIVE at the Public Theater/Under the Radar Festival". 2018.



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Free and open to the public