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Pleasure is All Mine

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Abstract

One's identity is shaped by many factors such as race, culture, physical appearance, nationality, and religion—amongst many more. As an artist, the subjugation of identity in the context of race, gender, and sexuality is a world I examine closely. Subverting myths of sexual deviancy and racial inferiority that perpetually pathologizes Black feminine sexuality, I often use and reference my own body to create avenues of power through physical and intellectual pleasure. Through material use of clay, metal, photography, and installation, I emphasize on how contemporary Black social cultures are able to write their own narratives in order to further progressions of an inclusive present and future for themselves.

"To name ourselves rather than be named we must first see ourselves. For some of us this will not be easy. So long unmirrored, we may have forgotten how we look. Nevertheless, we can't theorize in a void; we must have evidence."[1]

—Lorraine O'Grady

Introduction

As the daughter of a Nigerian immigrant and a Black American, I was born equipped with a bilateral lens in which I viewed the world. On one hand, my African heritage taught me the value of hard work, tradition, and ancestry. On the other, my Black American heritage taught me the value of family, perseverance, and strength. None of these worlds actually taught me how to use one to inform the other—how to use one to understand the other. I give credit to my upbringing, experience and research for how I assess and process my identity as a Black, femme, queer, artist. I owe this identity for being the heart of my practice.

Throughout my art studio practice, I use the body form, as well as, the absence of the body to contemplate complexities of *jouissance* as an ongoing search for due process implicating sexual and racist tropes. I work with clay, cement and metal as these materials help play on the tensions of historical and contemporary invisibilities and hyper-visibilities in regards to state regulation of Black bodies in labor. I use sculpture as a way to avoid flattening the Black feminine identity as it is intersectional and dynamic in nature. In addition to ceramic sculpture; photography, fabrication, and ready-made materials support the expression of my own reality in the form of installation or stand alone works of art. The dichotomies in my work explore the tensions of vulnerability and agency in which I intend to challenge sexuality politics, gender constructs, and discourse surrounding feminism.

As an artist whose identity is based primarily in the intersections of Blackness, queerness, and womanhood, my practice becomes a way in which I process circumstances situated within these identities. Oftentimes I am challenging the limitations placed on the Black feminine body by creating a productive complexity within Black sexual politics that confront racist histories keeping these limitations in place; ultimately limiting accessibility to express basic human rights. Through research, I find exploring tensions of hyper-visibility and invisibility in regards to state

regulation of Black sexuality often lead to questions circumferential to exploitations of race, class, gender, socio-economics, and the interconnectivity of them all, which I refer to as Black Sexual Economies (BSE).

I begin to examine my own catalog and it's connectivity to BSE in chapter 1, *With Labor and Love*. BSE, a term created by Black feminist studies scholar, Adrienne D. Davis and the Black Sexual Economy Collective. It references Black 'sexualities that have been constructed as a site of sexual panic and pathology in US culture while viewed as a threat to normative ideas about sexuality, the family, and the nation'.[2] The BSE collective is comprised of eight scholars: Adrienne Davis, Marlon Bailey, Matt Richardson, Jeffrey McCune, Felice Black, Xavier Livermon, L.H. Stallings, and Mireille Miller-Young—whom I will refer to later on in scholarship. Proving slavery provided the foundations for modern political Black sexual economies, Davis' work 'has made explicit the links between markets, labor structure, and sexual exploitation and the false dichotomy between notions of public and private relations'.[3] As an artist, I look to Davis' work, as well as other members of the BSE collective, for language, theory and framework that guides me in visually reconstructing the narratives surrounding pathology of Black feminine sexuality, and how it has been both externalized and internalized by Black subjects.

Providing theoretical context for my work, I navigate rap/hip-hop discourse of feminine rappers as I discuss readings of power and agency through *Self-Indulgence, Ego and Sexual Pleasure* in chapter 2. I analyze costume aesthetics and correlations between adornment, *bling* and expression of sexuality. Supplementary to this discourse is the process of titling my ceramic

works. Borrowing from the female rap/hip-hop genre, I generate discourse that expands the idea of what a model could look like; thus and so, introducing the *Perfect Model*.

In Chapter 3: *A Good Day to be Black and Sexy*, I analyze racial political histories as genesis and foundation to my work through the entry of my ceramic sculpture series. I lay the premise for my work as I locate the ways in which I respond to the internalization and resistance of gender, sexual, and racial expectations set for Black femininity. I use the guidance of Black feminist theorists; Hortense Spillers, Joan Morgan, Adrian Piper, and Dorothy Roberts, to provide an external voice that represents power and agency within Black feminine identity. I use parts of Audre Lorde's, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Mireille Miller-Young's discourse on Black women in pornography, as well as the female rap/hip-hop genre to further elaborate on the context of my work. I am interested in the dichotomies of the African diaspora, Western culture, corpulence and the 'ugly aesthetic'. I use these instances to expand possibilities, thought and language through the lens in which we understand beauty, desire, and pleasure in Western social politics.

I continue to lay the premise for my work in chapter 4 introducing, S*ecret Language of the Fast Tailed*, a language I reference metaphorically as I discuss my work, *Double Dutch Queen*. I give light to my own narrative as a young adolescent underscoring the complexities of occupying a young Black feminine body. I use scholar, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, and the "Politics of Silence" as I consider the ways pathology of the Black feminine sexuality has informed my childhood and adulthood, touching on the internalizations that affect how Black femmes are able to view themselves.

Throughout chapters 5 and 6, I rely heavily on theory as I give insight to reasoning behind my decisions to focus on pleasure and desire as a premise to my work. *Obscuring the*

Gaze takes a look into my use of photography, collage, and the significance of image manipulation as means of reimagining narratives set for Black femininity. I use histories of ethnographic photography to point out modern art's problematic pathology of Black feminine sexuality, as well as, artist Renée Cox, to underscore those of whom are actively working to create alternative narratives. In Chapter 6, I locate ways in which feminist theories have come short of representing Black femme narratives surrounding sexuality in visual culture. In addition, I propose counter theories by feminist theorists who challenge core philosophies I reference within my art practice; thus, allowing space for compelling dialogue to take place. Finally, I end this text with my concluding statements and remarks pointing to a future that progresses representation of femininity through art.

Terms of Endearment

Without language, articulation of subject matter is lost. Language is quintessential to understanding, as understanding is the quintessence to change. Creating and refiguring language surrounding discourse of underrepresented subject matter, such as Black feminine sexuality, is vital when assessing Western fundamentals in language. The ability to articulate self is how one goes about acquiring a voice, thus demanding recognition by others. Throughout this text, I use a multitude of terms such as *femme*, *model*, and *jouissance* to both describe premise and help the reader better understand the narrative I wish to tell. These words become "terms of endearment" as they all endear an action I wish to see carried out: liberation. Not just a liberation for which every *feminist* is equal to their male counterparts; but, a liberation in which radically calls for a new visual narrative. A narrative that demands to be seen through an alternative lens in which captures how *we* should be seen rather than how Western society wishes to see us. As an artist, I use these terms to cultivate a narrative that combines racial otherness, Black femininity, pleasure, beauty, desire, and sexuality in order to reshape a history that fails to fully represent complexities in identities centered in Blackness. These terms become a beacon for which these new narratives are to be understood.

The term *woman* or *womanhood* is generally understood to reference the female human being and/or state of being a woman. In the context of my practice, I find my interest in the subject matter of gender reaches far beyond the limits of what the term *woman* offers. In fact, I do not only wish to address the female human being or state of being a woman. I am interested in the narrative of any person who identifies or is implicated by social constructions of womanhood. This includes qualities, attributes, and characteristics of womanhood that are traditionally cited as feminine. Interested in this broad association, I use *femme*, *femininity*, and

femmehood interchangeably to conceptualize a gender that opposes limitations of what a *woman* is *supposed* to be. These terms are my preference for the feminine being.

I use the term *model* to address my ceramic sculptures. These models capture in essence my corporeal references to the Black feminine body, thus, rendering them ideal, exemplary, and archetypal. Subverting Black femininity in corpulence (the "fat Black woman") as the 'ideal' is a direct refute to the othering created by 'racial and religious ideologies [of the West] that have been used to both degrade Black women and discipline white women'.[4] My art practice has been heavily inspired by corpulence. Particularly referencing Western culture's societal disdain for fat bodies, I have always been interested in the fixation with proving fat bodies to be inferior, unhealthy, and disjoined as a means of prioritizing European standards of beauty. Layers of race, religion, and class only fuel my curiosity. My understanding of the word *model* is a very estranged one, up until rather recently. A naive idea of what a model entailed derives from what was sold to me by fashion industries. I was conditioned to believe a true embodiment of a model was to be slender, tall, white, and aesthetically pleasing—a fragment of the European beauty standard we know today. Anyone who dared to exist outside of this standard was a sore to society, myself included. This mode of thinking existed throughout my adolescence and into my young adult years. It wasn't until a shift in visual culture occurred when society started to push its limits on what the ideal model was by including identities of the disabled, plus-sized, racially unambiguous and the LGBTQ+ community into its discourse. This shift in culture presented a shift in how I perceived my own identity in relevance to the model and the language I used to identify myself.

> Not until the early nineteenth century in the United States, in the context of slavery, religious revivals, and the massive immigration of the persons deemed 'part-Africanoid',

> did these notions come together under a coherent ideology. In the United States, fatness became stigmatized as both Black and sinful. And by the early twentieth century, slenderness was increasingly promoted in the popular media as the correct embodiment for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant women. Not until after these associations were already in place did the medical establishment begin its concerted effort to combat "excess" fat tissue as a major public health initiative. In this way, the phobia about fatness and the preference for thinness have not, principally or historically, been about health. Instead they have been one way the body has been used to craft and legitimate race, sex, and class hierarchies.[5]

Analyzing the literary work of Sabrina Strings, author of *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, offered me new ways of processing the othering of fat Black feminine bodies. I depict corpulent Black feminine bodies as not only ideal models; but, sexually emancipated and detached from any carnations portraying them as burdens to society. I deter from 'expectations of personal morality and rational social values rooted in traditional, bourgeois views of sex for the reproduction of proper families and citizens'.[6] In the context of my work, these identities become self-serving and worthy of new contexts that allow them to relish in their full entirety. Once used as a domestic and reproductive machine as means of producing labor for the Atlantic slave trade—thus, catering to the well-being and security of white families in Reconstruction era—are now fully investing labor into their own selves. A body that has never truly belonged to them has been returned in the form of pleasure, whether imagined or self produced. These models are able to explore avenues of humanness by conquering aboriginal tropes, revenging histories of caricatural attacks, correcting lazy assumptions, and advocating for a language that sets Black feminine existence outside of a Westernized traditional lens tainted with historical othering.

A history of literature or visual material that depicts *jouissance* for Black femmes has been few and far behind. The english translation describes it as *a physical or intellectual pleasure, delight, or ecstasy.*[7] French psychoanalyst, Jacques Marie Émile Lacan, defines *jouissance* as enjoyment, in terms both of rights and property,[8] and of sexual orgasm. Ineptly, Lacan wasn't speaking of *jouissance* as it pertains to Black femme liberation but rather an opposition to Sigmund Freud's theory that 'the course of the mental process is automatically regulated by the "pleasure principle"'[9]—ultimately, the human drive is determined by the absorbance of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Instead, Lacan looks "beyond the pleasure principle" and believes one's drive is not determined by pleasure but by the inhibition of desire itself. Though Freud and Lacan both give a convincing read of human pleasure and/or desire, it is grievously understood through the qua white maleness; thus, providing an inaccurate reading representing a wide spectrum of human *jouissance*.

Using *jouissance* in the context of art and subject of desire relating to Black femininity poses a peculiar juxtaposition. As the term itself doesn't adequately translate in English, the word retains an additional foreignness to my premise: my subject matter and its "otherness" to Western ideals. Visually working to diminish abjectness of the feminine sexual experience, I reimagine *jouissance* outside of a white patriarchal lens of desire. Drawn to the term, as is Julia Kristeva and other feminist Lacan contrarians, I use it to visually depict pleasures that exceed or transcend the self and to capture a bliss that exceeds language[10]. My use of the term in this text goes beyond the exceeding of language as it also radically exceeds visual displays of what *jouissance*

can look like for Black femmes. If one's drive is determined by the mere obtaining of *telos*, how does one exercise their desire if it is endlessly pathologized? I use *jouissance* to challenge the status quo of pleasure as the avoidance of pain by suggesting pleasure, or desire, in being looked at *despite* a Western lens in which historically places the Black feminine body in the context of psychological pain. With *jouissance*, I am able to visualize a utopian world for the Black feminine body in a context that disconnected from a haunting history of captivity.

With Labor and Love

Lola Ogbara, *With Labor and Love*, 2020. Iron, glass, rhinestones, nickel, plastic. (fig. 01)

My work informs my interests in creating occurrences that reposition power imbalances and inequalities for Black feminine identities. *With Labor and Love* (*WLL*), is a mixed media installation that encompasses an object of both chandelier and tree stump. *WLL* features a fully functional tiered rusted iron-based, crystal embellished chandelier consisting of sixteen amber colored vintage '*Mrs Buttersworth*' glass syrup bottles (fig. 01). Each bottle is open ended, identical in height and width, and diverse in style. Adorned with varying sized rhinestones, clear plastic hair beads and silver-toned earrings, they all come capped with commercial bottle pourers. Few are filled with the exact beads and crystals that adorn them, all becoming a vessel in which services the installation. Suspended from the ceiling with a three foot metal rod, the chandelier hovers over a fabricated tree stump, resembling that of a maple tree, tapped with three embellished spigots.

When imagining this piece, I'd hoped it'd be somewhat substantial in its presence. While seeking to be activated by human labor, *WLL* incorporates an element of performance which I refer to as "activation". The job of the activator exists to service this installation, pouring a syrup-like substance (laced with glitter, ceramic slip and oil)—that smells like maple— into open-ended glass bottles, serving only two opposites at a time. The substance is funneled through the bottle into the bottle pourers, landing directly onto the fabricated tree stump that rests below. The substance enters the tree through an opening centered in the middle of the stump. It is then funneled through a circulation of 'tree tapping'; however, in this instance, the syrup enters the tree to be tapped through three spigots embedded on the sides of the tree, eventually filling ceramic buckets cast from Mrs Buttersworth bottles.

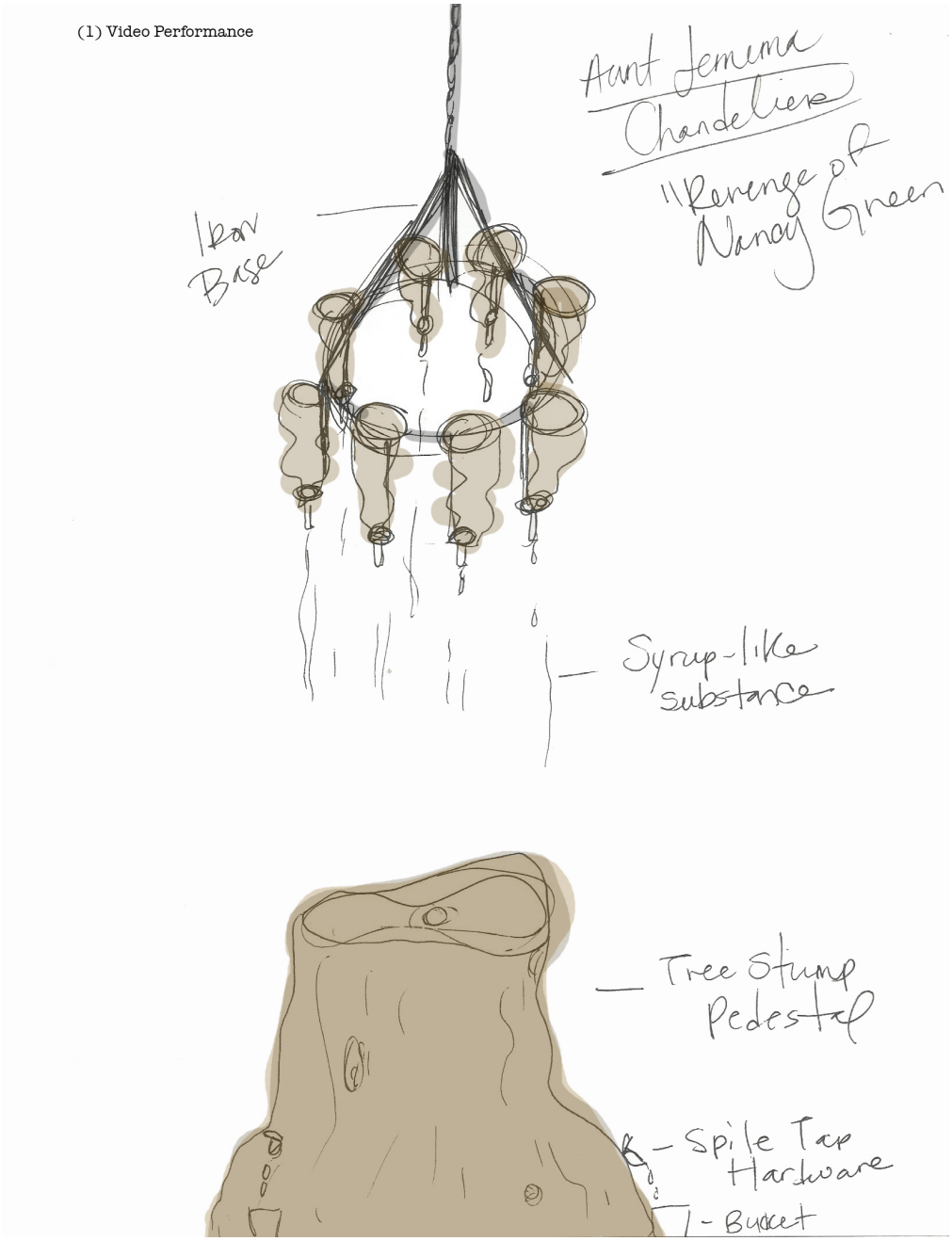
Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P. (activated by Maren Hassinger),* 1977. From: California African American Museum. (fig. 02)

I had always imagined performance from an interior point of view and not invariably focused on what an audience perceives—though I admit its importance is still relevant—but, more interested in what the performer collects for themselves. My desire to reconstruct how performance is read aligns with my desire to subvert labor for self. I often think of Senga Nengudi's[11] performance of objects and her struggle to find a receptive audience early on in her career. Nengudi has had a successful career undoubtedly; but, surely her need to perform could not have regulated whether or not an audience received it well. Arguably, that could be of great magnitude in regards to discourses concerning the performance of art; however, I suspect Nengudi performed for herself. After all, her "R.S.V.P." installations were inspired by her own body in response to experiencing childbirth.[12] I further suspicions by inserting an internalized

jouissance; either a physical and/or intellectual pleasure in performing OR a physical and/or intellectual pleasure in expressing her most intimate inner self. This suspicion, in regards to Nengudi, as well as other Black femme performance artists, has led me to make conceptual decisions that complicate how pleasure is read, or isn't read, in the discourse of art, visual culture, and the Black feminine experience.

In *WLL*, the activator plays an important role as a catalyst as they are the labor that initiates this performance. The demonstration of this performance becomes a symbolic reference for US economies that contribute to the labor exploitation of Black feminine reproductive capacities and sexualities. The activator isn't as relevant to the work as the demonstration itself is enough gratification.

WLL redirects the labor in which holds overbearing sexual politics on the backs of Black feminine identities. Mrs Butterworth's glass syrup bottles hold much significance as they represent the literal caricatural image of the Mammy,[13] and in this work, a conceptual representation for Black feminine labor contributed to US economies. I merge the domesticity of invisible laborers and the industries that capitalized their image, using Mammy to actively subvert servitude into a gesture that conceptually allows for that labor to be poured back into self. The uncompensated labor that is performed—starting with Mammy's domestic labor that kept the white American home and ending with the conservation of self from sexual and racist tropes placed upon the Black feminine sexuality—is being honored here; thus, creating space for Black feminine subjects to claim sexuality as their own, countering centuries of subjugated obedience under patriarchy, racism, and sexualized identities.



Lola Ogbara, *With Labor and Love (sketch)*, 2019. (fig. 03)

The utility of the chandelier in this work bears meanings that contain many intersections. Undoubtedly, the chandelier implicates the wealth of the bourgeois class lifestyle of the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the church as a commonwealth practice and a power source of class hierarchies; and, the physical labor of which the decorative aesthetic entails. It is a functional decorative fixture that captures the essence of light all while connecting the corporeal, labor, and wealth. Taking elements from the lives of my ancestors—not limited to the women who served similar lives as Mammy themselves—I suggest exemplifications of *jouissance* for these figures as a vital part of processing material and subject matter. So much of the body and soul is given in the labor of sustaining US economies benefiting white audiences. In an attempt to overturn atrocities that arise from this relationship, I have molded a space where the exploitations of laborers are not primary beckoning; but rather, a space for their labor to solely benefit them. Taking an entity like the Mrs Buttersworth syrup bottle, that at once had been used to service hungry families, and repositioning this entity as a tool to be used in the self-servicing of the subjects it once exploited provides a space and opportunity for a subversion of power. Analyzing the life of Mammy, alongside Sapphire and Jezebel tropes, allows my work to unite discourses surrounding both ownership of Black bodies as well as sexualized phobias of the body. The uniting of discourses fuel my artistic curiosity. In obscuring these stereotypes, my hope is for my audience to understand the ambiguity within the intersections of racism, ageism, sexism, and classism. While Mammies around the US might have served as a vessel of labor at the hands of white families, her presence within my work is transformed, making her a self-servicing vessel of her own *jouissance*. I believe the success of this piece lies with its ability to

subvert its original exclusive receptiveness and become accessible to the ancestral histories it once exploited; thus, providing a new perspective of understanding history.

Kara Walker, *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, 2014. Photo: Creative Time. (fig. 04)

As an artist, I am interested in the image of Mammy because of what she represents and how it still, in some ways, remains intact today. I seek to imagine the possibilities of intellectual and sexual pleasure in historical contexts as a re-written framework to present radical moments that serves to further new groundwork in how Black femininity is depicted in present art. I often call upon mutual heroines who also use the image of Mammy as contextual reference. American artist, Kara Walker, uses the Mammy to challenge expectancies of Black feminine sexuality with *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby,* 2014, held at the historic Domino Sugar Refinery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (fig. 04). Walker collapses the mammy with hyper-sexualization, derailing from histories of asexual identities and amplifying hyper-sexualities. She uses the mash

up of the Mammy-Sphinx to indulge in sexual discourse that employs labor economies of sugar, furthering complexities in the referencing of sugar byproducts. Ultimately, Walker creates a new world for Mammy to exist. What I find to be quite compelling is the overlapping in my use of Mammy and the byproducts of her image, in addition to Walker's use of sugar byproducts. The metaphor of *brown sugar,* an aphorism by Black women as they internalize their own eroticism, is explored here in both the works of Walker and I.

Advancing discourse that fuels *WLL*, as well as informs my art practice, is to mention the parallels with visual artists and theorists who have preceded me. To indulge in the dichotomy of *brown sugar* in regards to the Black feminine sexuality is to engage in the work of not solely Kara Walker; but, Black feminist scholar, Mireille Miller-Young. I have become quite inspired by Miller-Young's writings—particularly, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography.* Miller-Young discusses Black women pornographers and the labor of Black feminine sexuality as a metaphor to brown sugar, as it exposes how their sexual labor has been historically embedded in culture and the global economy[14]:

> Brown sugar, as a trope, illuminates circuits of domination over Black women's bodies and exposes Black women's often ignored contributions to the economy, politics, and social life. Like sugar that has dissolved without a trace, but nonetheless sweetened a cup of tea, Black women's labor and the mechanisms that manage and produce it are invisible but nonetheless *there.*[15]

…

> …brown sugar exposes how representations shape the world in which women come to know themselves. But stereotypes usually have dual valences: the may also be taken up by the oppressed and refashioned to mean something quite different. Although brown sugar has been used as a phrase to talk about Black women as lecherous, prurient sex

> objects, unlike other tropes such as Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire, it conveys sweetness, affection, and respect.[16]

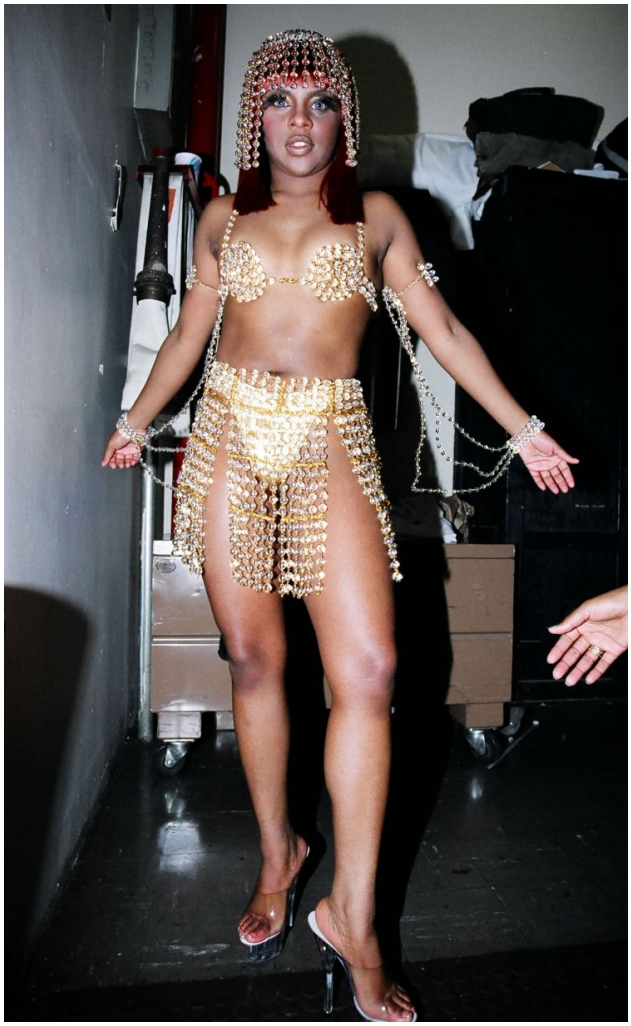
Miller-Young lays a perfect example of how Black femmes take to efforts in expressing themselves as desired and desirable subjects. Much like how the meaning of brown sugar has become refashioned to fit the needs of Black femininity, I attempt to visually create narratives that allow for Black femininity, sexuality and gender to be reimagined and reclaimed for self.

The Perfect Model

"Women in hip hop—whether singing or rapping—have not been complicit in their own subjugation."[17]

— Heidi R. Lewis

As an avid listener of the hip-hop/rap genre—femme rap in particular—I witness an empowerment through the expression of explicit sexuality in hip-hop now more than ever. This genre has informed my practice in a way that clearly recognizes and identifies my subject matter in context. My work is inspired by my interest in the catalogs of Lil Kim, Trina, Khia, and Foxy Brown, artists who paved the way for musicians like Bbymutha, Megan the Stallion, Cardi B and Cupcakke—a new generation of female hip-hop artists. These artists are engaging in discourse not only about their bravado personas; but, an amplified explicit domination in Black sexual politics as a whole. I find remnants of Lorde's, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power*, layered throughout each of their lyrics, some even engaging in discourse surrounding the performing of cunnilingus. Lorde proclaims:



Lil Kim at the 1997 MTV Video Music Awards. Photo: Jeff Kravitz. (fig. 05)

> Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama. For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source,

> but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.[18]

Lorde speaks of the erotic as an assertion of the life-force within Black femininity. In the intersection of art and hip hip, I believe we can learn a great deal from our erotic selves when treated as a source of power for the progression of Black sexual politics, specifically in the development of *Hood Feminism.*[19] This line of inquiry leads me to challenge the privileges and gender power dynamics not only in hip hop, but in general consensus. Is it possible for Black feminism, in a broader context, to alter in a way that does not rely on its proximity to men for equality, but, accessing the erotic in order to improve quality in all aspects of life? Furthermore, is agency obtainable, in a context like rap/hip-hop, a genre known for how it hyper sexualizes the body and places women in a lower standard of humanity? Despite most models of power and agency being molded from a white Western patriarchal position, I hope that my work reinvents a lens that generates new contexts in which places Black femmes as authors of their own narratives.

I'd like to think that my participation in fine art discourse via Black sexual politics is similar to how Black femme rap/hip-hop artists navigate the music industry; and, how Black femme pornographers navigate the porn industry. I relate to the subject matter of the underrepresented because I am the underrepresented. Society assumes—and with great historic evidence the assumption is made—that situated within the sheer presence of the Black femme body comes a site of access, ownership, trauma, and/or labor. In fact, these assumptions become inseparable so much so that it is impossible for society to see through an alternative lens that

views Black femme bodies without any of those attachments. A lens that is able to advocate for the empowerment of Black femininity by celebrating lives that had been criminalized for existing. In my practice, I use Black femme rap/hip hop discourse as an entry point to understanding the narratives of the underrepresented as their narrative in this genre is self-authored. I use some rap lyrics to title my ceramic models; one example being *I Ain't Never Been a Lady,*[20] a lyrical excerpt from rapper Bbymutha's song, *DOTD*, 2018. By giving these models a context and name under the identities of songs I listen and relate to, this renders the work more personal and personable. In addition to lyrical rap titles, my use of "bling-bling", crystals and studded rhinestones references the flashy jewelry worn by rappers, especially as an indication of wealth or status.[21] This adornment can also be seen on the costume decoration (fig. 05) of rappers to extend the idea of acquiring wealth. In addition to the rap context of *bling*, I also reference the sensuality of jewelry as one's sexual attraction for another can be enhanced by their adornments. In my work, I use both contexts to engage in the principles of desire as I am interested in: how desire itself implicates viewership; how one comes to know and exercise their own desires; how one internalizes their desirability or possible lack thereof; and, the implications that derive from racial, gender, and sexual expression of desire. With this line of inquiry, I depict the underrepresented as the *Perfect Model.*

*"**There is not justice for Black women without pleasure**"*[22]

—Brittany Cooper

A Good Day to be Black and Sexy

Lola Ogbara, All That Glitters Ain't Gold, 2020. Stoneware, glitter, paint, satin. (fig. 06)

All That Glitters Ain't Gold (fig. 06), is a grandeur study of relations between Black corpulence and white class hierarchies. Firmly planted on two limbs, standing thirty-seven inches high, this robust ceramic model possesses rolls, dips, curves and folds similar to that of excess fat found on the upper body. Located on both front and back of the model, these folds are corporeal in leisure. Structurally hollow on the inside, the model's bodily interior is lined with Black satin fabric. I use the materiality of glitter as surface texture to associate with an accessible feminine potentiality. Even then, the glitter is obscured by a stone asphalt-like painted surface. The sensual curvaceousness further renders this model perceptible to a feminine nature.

"All that glitters is not gold" is an aphorism first used in William Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*. The proverb is metaphoric in meaning: *not everything is as valuable as it appears to be*. In other words, appearances can be deceiving. My rendition of this phrase is simply a paradigm of the original text that has been refashioned by Black communities through African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In this work, this metaphor stands to deceive the viewer as this model never actually confronts the viewer and is unaware of which side is front or back facing. This provides some psychological space between the viewer and the model representing a reversed hierarchy—a surrendering of power and agency to be left with the model. Whether moved or unmoved, what ought to be accounted for is the certainty leveled in its corporeal presence and its ability to entice an un-comfortability, even when there is no actual human body present. This inherently proposes the question: why is everyone so uncomfortable at the sight of a bigger body?

Lola Ogbara, *Devouring Binds*, 2019. Stoneware, cement, jute rope. 42 x 24 x 22 inches. (fig. 07)

Devour is to *swallow or eat up hungrily, voraciously, or ravenously; to consume destructively, recklessly, or wantonly; to engulf or swallow up; to take in greedily with the senses or intellect*.[23] In this work, devour means all that is stated above. The model, in two parts, is a ceramic stoneware body that stands forty-two inches in space. Its mortared cement surface is painted a fleshy brown color, its cavity openings painted red emulating a lipstick stained mouth. This model actively devours the jute rope and all of the hidden layered and complex connotations that, in proximity to the body, attempts to subvert them imposing an unspoken power dynamic.

Through the discourse surrounding Black feminine sexual identities, *Devouring Binds* is a continued reading of pleasure. I use the ceramic vessel as a base and pull from historic associations of mortar (cement) and jute rope to convolute its corporeal significance. The jute rope, in companionship to the model, epitomizes bounds, labors, physical violences, and sexually related traumas that the Black feminine body has endured by way of atrocities sustained during transatlantic captivity and prevailing European hegemonies. My use of the jute rope exposes a provocative tension between domination via ownership and the Black body, or flesh. In reference to the Black flesh in captivity, I turn to Hortense Spillers' in scholarship. When the captive body is reduced to an object, Spillers suggests:

> 1) the captive body becomes the source of irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming being for the captor; 3) in this absence from a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; 4) as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies

> sheer physical "powerlessness" that slides into a move general "powerlessness," reasoning thought various centers of human and social meanings.[24]

Here, Spillers explains the process of *pornotroping,* in which immanently share undercurrents of 'Afropessimism',[25] as do a strain of other Black studies and literature. In this statement, I question, what is it exactly that makes this sensuality 'destructive'? Perhaps the answer lies with the same lens in which Western cultures and societies use to devalue the Black feminine body. How can my work disrupt ideas of the Black body as sexualized, objectified, and abject by using that same 'othering' as a source of power? Most importantly, how can I use *jouissance* to claim agency for the Black feminine body in art and visual culture? I use the arguments of Spillers, alongside this line of questioning, to help guide me in my creative and conceptual decision-making as I have with *Devouring Binds* and the remaining models of *A Good Day to be Black and Sexy*.

Lola Ogbara, *Land of the Free*, 2019. Stoneware. 20 x 15 x 16 inches. (fig. 08)

At many angles, *Land of the Free,* favors parts of the human body; concomitantly, favoring a landscape. A form so relative to the sun bleached backs of my ancestors exists as a biomorphic form that mutates in its stillness, presenting as both body and land—land as body (fig. 08). I use brown, a natural color, intended to represent both flesh and land. Notably, it is made to rest on a circular rotating pedestal that stands three inches from its feet. Identical in surface texture and color, the model and pedestal become one. This model rotates ever so slowly that movement is almost unrecognizable at first glance. I found myself in my studio on several occasions staring—mesmerized by how captivating this model had become as it relentlessly morphed not only in stillness, but while in motion. I was inclined to push the envelope further. I wanted to be even more absorbed by its mystery.

Adrian Piper, The *Mythic Being (performance)*, 1973. Photo: Walker Art Center (fig. 09)

I assess the hierarchies of patriarchy and racial power dynamics as I analyze my own body-land disassociation. Re-imagining a lens in which I see myself in a presumed power that inherits some privileges of the human male body in space, I imagine what that could possibly look like. Only naturally did the work of Adrian Piper serve as a theoretical and visual reference for the conceptual thought that was to be conceived. I doubled back on Piper's first performance, the *Mythic Being* in 1973, as it had interested me prior to the development of this work. In her performance, Piper dressed in drag—a mustache, afro wig, and mirrored sunglasses with a cigar hanging from her mouth. She strolled the streets of New York in a persona she had created out of a combination of her own personal experiences, stereotypes of Blackness and masculinity in popular culture. Piper's fair-skin contributed to my initial reading of the *Mythic Being* as racially ambiguous. This ambiguity and performed maleness allowed for Piper to act in ways that was not anticipated from a Black femme. The ability to obscure what was *expected* from any one person—and in this case the Black femme—was an observation I had conceptually adopted in my own work long before I had been able to intellectualize it. I am interested in rendering corpulence within Black feminine identity desirable as Piper interests lie within the racial passing of her body. Upsetting the heteronormative fantasy is where Piper and I find common ground. In result, I sought to further complicate this disruption with *Land of the Free* (fig. 10).

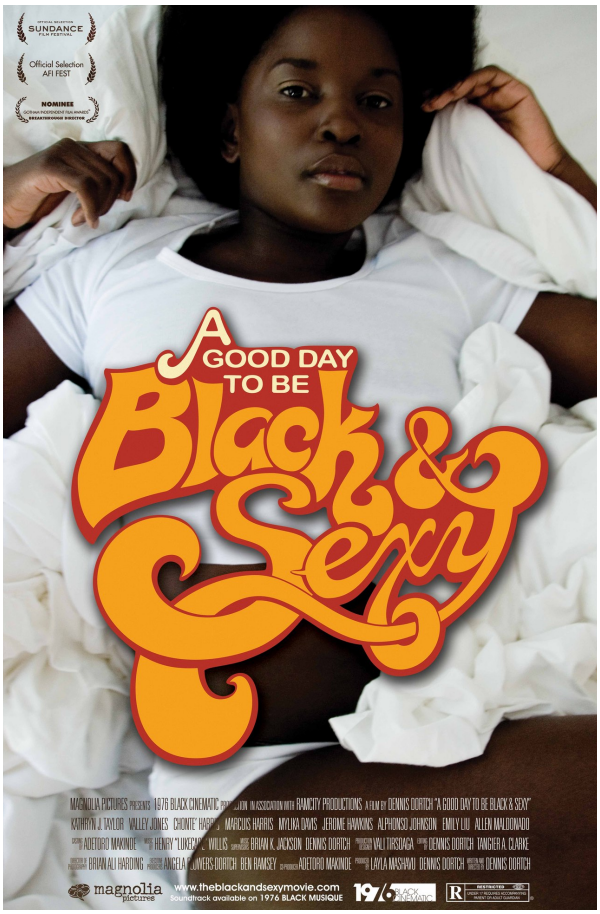
Lola Ogbara, *Land of the Free with Projection*, 2019. (fig. 10)

I fixate on the merging of both sculpture and projection as I am interested in intercepting *pleasurable imagoes* projected onto Black feminine bodies. I explore digital projection and collect images of Black femme pornographers who are explicitly engaging in self-pleasure acts and/or sexual encounters where the perverse of female-male power dynamics are definitive. I began to experiment with these found images and project them onto the *Land of the Free* model. The gif images were particularly arousing as they contributed to a third layer of motion; the model itself, the model on a rotating pedestal, and the model on a rotating pedestal with a projected moving image. The visual obscured the actual object three times over, sequentially, satisfying my commitment in creating space between viewership and object. This disruption of visual creates tension as it complicates the viewer's gaze, inhibiting the obtaining of total power in *knowing*. This is a gesture not only seen in the works of ceramic models but carries over to my two dimensional roots in collage and photography.

Lola Ogbara, *I Ain't Never Been a Lady*, 2018. Stoneware, aluminum. 16 x 10 x 11 inches. (fig. 11)

I created this series with no real idea of how far each final form would land. Prior to every ceramic model I had ever created, absent was a precise sketch of its final physicality. Solely, a vague conception of how grand it ought to be. This is not to say much thought isn't taken into consideration with every work of art; but rather, my body itself has become a vessel for what ever form sought to be in existence. It wasn't until I concluded the first model of the series (fig. 11) when I understood how and what this body of work *should* be. My omnipresent desire to interrogate what Western bourgeois beauty and social standards had set for a nation has led me here, with this series.

A series of monumental abstract figures that represent pinnacles in Black femme sexuality, *A Good Day to Be Black and Sexy*, heightens the grotesque by indulging in the racial and gender optics of beauty industries, porn/BDSM culture, and corpulence—immersed in Black feminine aesthetics. I adopted this title from a 2008 film (fig. 12), written and produced by Dennis Dortch; in which explores the subject of sexuality and relationships in Black communities. My interest in this film became prevalent as it attempts to dismantle stereotypes about Black sexuality by presenting the narratives of characters who complicate controversial aspects of mundane contemporary Black sexual politics.



A Good Day to be Black & Sexy (Movie Poster), 2008.
Photo: Magnolia Pictures. (fig. 12)

Inspired by Dortch's film, I wanted to create objects that obliged *dangerousness*[26] surrounding Black femme sexuality from a subjective point of view; thus, further extending the idea of 'otherness'. Within this series of works exists six sculptures, in which I refer to as models. I have discussed four of those models as they were conceived during my MFA tenure at Washington University. As an artist, I challenge the way Western society views Black feminine bodies while rendering them non-passive, activated subjects empowered by their own presence and fully servicing self. I often hint at a suggested 'ugly beauty' and the visual aesthetic of the *grotesque* as a result of kinship to the racial othering of Black people. I use the manipulation of

surface texture, alongside, unsettling contrarieties between the sensual and the rugged to heighten this aesthetic. Despite viewer's potential reading of the models in this series, the model remains un-gendered as I am interested in dismantling the sense of priority in gender constructs —a rhetoric I share with theorist, Hortense Spillers'. Spillers argues that Black people are not in control of their identity, but assigned to an infrastructure by historical placement.[27] A complex and thoughtful analysis of how American grammar consistently marks Black feminine bodies with an array of meanings that profoundly complicate their gendering, Spillers states:

> Embedded in a bizarre axiological ground, they demonstrate a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean. In that regard, the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property plus. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made in excess over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness.[28]

In other words, 'gender [is] an issue for everybody and not just for women, or Black women and Black men. They simply re-describe some prior hegemonic sense of priority.'[29] Like Spillers', I find gender constructs to be both problematic to the discourse of sexuality and a rich site of exploration. Throughout my work, the viewer observes a tension in my use of material and form that complicates readings of gender projected onto objects.

Navigating conceptual aspects of my practice, I often times find myself questioning; Can agency change the way we view images? Why wouldn't agency influence our sensibility of images? I look toward Black feminist theorists as they believe agency can act as a bellwether and affect the ways we view Black feminine sexuality. I have become quite familiar with Joan Morgan's, *Why We Get Off: Moving towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure*, as it is 'an

origin's tale committed to reframing existing narratives about Black women's sexuality by positioning desire, agency and Black women's engagements with pleasure as a viable theoretical paradigm.'[30] Morgan's assessment of "Pleasure Politics" asks:

> What possibilities can a politics of pleasure offer for Black feminist futures? Specifically, how can deepening our understanding of the multivalent ways Black women produce, read and participate in pleasure complicate our understanding of Black female subjectivities in ways that invigorate, inform and sharpen a contemporary Black feminist agenda?[31]

These inquiries act innately as threads to my theoretical framework in which I, throughout my practice, attempt to visualize pleasure reading in contexts that exemplify Black femme subjects as beholders of their own narratives in visual culture.

Early workings of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) has, and continues to, address the United States for its horrid histories of sexual abuse and violence against Black femininity by engaging in discourse that centers Black femme sexuality as a site of reoccurring trauma—'the place where intersecting oppressions can be counted on to meet and violently coalesce.'[32] Theorists, artists, and culture leaders have done the groundwork that repudiates dehumanizing stereotypes; however, 'inattentiveness to Black women's engagements with pleasure—the complex, messy, sticky and even joyous negotiations of agency and desire that are irrevocably twinned with our pain,'[33] has ultimately served Black femmehood a disadvantage. My hope is for my practice to become a vital contender in the progression of discourse surrounding feminism rooted in *jouissance*, liberation, and reclamation for Black femmes through art.

Secret Language of the Fast Tailed

Lola Ogbara, *Double Dutch Queen*, 2019. Iron. 20 x 15 inches. (fig. 13)

Double Dutch Queen, 2019 (fig. 13) is an iron casted replica of my childhood jump rope. The object model rope (fig. 14) lies in bodily position, braided and escorted by three small hair barrettes.

This work evokes both quandary for those unfamiliar to a collective nostalgia in Black culture. Double Dutch is a game which requires three players; two long jump ropes operated by two players who turn the rope in opposite directions, and one (or more) player who jumps simultaneously. Double Dutch culture is an esoteric practice made popular by African American girls and I refer heavily to it as a symbol of Black femme adolescence. My reference to rope holds significance in terms of binds and bounds that limit the body. I use the metaphoric meaning of the rope, alongside the scientific bodily references of iron, to reference entanglement, complexity, and struggle that is consequential to inhabiting a Black pubescent femme body. The barrettes suggest youthfulness, as the number of barrettes exhibited is symbolic for the number of players needed to play a game of double dutch.

Exhibiting this work requires its positioning to be placed on a floor. The awkwardness of having an object placed on the ground without clear indication that that object is even there, ultimately disrupts a flow of leisure. Showing this work in experimentation, I often watched interrupted patrons stop, crouch down, and examine the work closely. As I hoped this placement would warrant these notions, the work became successful as it rendered this often forgotten community visible; thus, challenging the way society is implicated in the hyper-visibility, or invisibility, of Black femme youth. Most viewers may not even recognize or understand the object at hand but for a moment, they are forced to lean in on a conversation that needs so desperately to be redirected.

My desire to focus on Black feminine sexuality derives from the sheer lack of academic discourse surrounding it, as well as, the internalized silencing of feelings, desire, and pleasures that convoy. There are politics of silence and respectability that plagues Black femmehood. It is, described by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham as, 'an emerged political strategy by Black women reformers who hoped by their silence and by the promotion of proper Victorian morality to demonstrate the lie of the image of the sexually immoral Black woman'.[34] This silence becomes a way in which Black femmes protect themselves and the intimacy of their inner lives in spite of long histories of sexual violence perpetrated against Black femmes in America. The silence itself, while just, becomes a hinderance to the development of one's sexual identity. I am interested in Audre Lorde as she presents a progressive thought and framework to my art practice that breaks these politics of silence: '*it is a false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within women's lives and consciousness can women be truly strong*.'[35] Lorde suggests that the added strength Black femmes carry is an illusion as it is *doctored by male models of power.*[36] In adopting Lorde's statements of power, I also recognize its flaws as it presents a sexual hierarchy.[37] Throughout my practice, I aim to unthaw these politics of silence and respectability by

Lola Ogbara, *Double Dutch Queen (in progress)*, 2019. (fig. 14)

emphasizing on a proclamation of *jouissance*, focusing not only on the physical, but an intellectuality, allowing for an extension of humanity to be unveiled.

I refer to my own "politics of silence" as the *Secret Language of the Fast Tailed*. This language takes credit for how I began to understand how silencing has taken place in my own coming of age, how I internalized it throughout my adolescence to my adult years, how this internalization informed my understanding of self, and I began to unlearn it. To be a "fast-tailed" girl is to be sexually precocious in some way.[38] When I speak of the *Fast Tailed,* I am speaking for the stereotyped, hyper-sexualized Black girl who had an implied sexual appetite, whether sexually active or not. I am speaking for the young girls who have been accused of being complacent in their own sexual abuse. I am speaking for me. This term has been created and proliferated by elders in Black communities as a way to both protect and shame Black girls against Jezebelian theories. BFT, Mikki Kendall, suggests:

> Feminism must challenge these narratives, or risk yet another generation being told that respectability can save them while they watch admitted harrowers and assailants face no consequences for their crimes. The problem has never been the ways that victims don't tell, so much as it has been that some victims aren't seen as valuable enough to protect.[39]

In my work, I use the narrative of the Fast Tailed to unpack the complexities of sexualization in attempts to shift conversations about young femme sexuality and gender. By advancing the narrative of the subjected, I am making sure the thoughts and voices of the *Fast Tailed* are heard, and valued.

Obscuring the Gaze

Lola Ogbara, *Untitled, 2018.* Digital print. (fig. 15)

My use of photography is an extension of my interests in depicting alternative narratives for Black femmes. It also extends my concerns with corpulence and aesthetics of the grotesque. I address the perpetuated male gaze of twentieth century modern art painters and depictions of the 'savaged' Black feminine subject. Painters like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Paul Gaugin all found themselves inspired by ethnographic black and white photographs taken by "scientific photographers" who exploited African feminine subjects with the circulating of postcards and other souvenirs. Disrupting an eroticized image of bare breasted African women that had been photographed as cultural furniture for twentieth century modern art painters (fig. 16), I reimagine an image that doesn't continue the cycle of objection; but rather, distorts it. I warp overused narratives of 'savage' sexuality by 1.) depicting a potential narrative that confides in the subject's own *jouissance* of viewership; and/or 2.) Physically and intellectually altering the image itself to obscure the gaze. This altering may take form in the modifying of image size, distancing the proximity from lens to body, and/or the arrangement of which the image is to be viewed (fig. 15). My contentment with a work is determined by knowing the viewer would have to visually reconstruct the image themselves—never fully satisfying a complete access. This labor is then transferred from subject to viewer. By revisiting colonial African portraiture through the feminine gaze, I am able to make space for feminine perversion by presenting narratives of *jouissance* without the re-exploiting the Black feminine body.

Lola Ogbara, *Untitled #1 (Ecstasy in Isolation)*, 2020. Polaroid on inkjet print. 6.5 x 7.25 inches. (fig. 17)

I often rebel against what is expected of me—I find that is where much of the power lies. Tearing, cutting and combining images feels rather intuitive for me as my art practice originates with two dimensional works. It felt right to return back to these works now that I finally knew how to resolve them. What I find to be most profound of these works is the piercing return of the gaze. A gaze so blaring it implicates the viewer's reason for receiving such a stare. Quite evident to me is the fact that pictured, is nude subject; however, the deconstruction and reconstruction of the image revokes the gaze leaving the viewer to do most of the visual work thus relying on their very own imagination to fill in the gaps. The subject stares back at you, but you cannot fully see them. Only pieces and fragments protected by their mystery.

Carl Günther, *Six Ashanti Women (Dahomey Amazons)*, 1893 (fig. 16)

What happens when the Black feminine subject intentionally puts themselves in an already perceived vulnerable position to be gazed upon? What happens when they find pleasure from it? Furthermore, what good can come from the viewer acknowledging the potential pleasures of the subject?

Renée Cox, *Baby Back (American Family, series),* 2001. Archival digital print, 30 x 40 inches. (fig. 18)

Renée Cox depicts herself reclining on a yellow motif lounge chaise in the nude, backside facing the viewer (fig. 18). The red patent-leather heels and leather whip pictured is a nod to BDSM subcultures via sexual submission, yet they also evoke the long history of African American enslavement. In an interview for *Aperture* magazine, Cox is quoted as insisting, 'If anybody's going to be using the whip, it's going to be me. It's not going to be used on me. I'll be using it. Okay?'[40] In this work, I am interested in Cox's ability to shed light on the tensions between pleasure and prohibition inherent within the feminine existence. Cox renders her own

jouissance visible despite inherent readings of hyper-sexuality onto Black femininity; thus, pointing to liberation through the attaining of sexual power—an assertion that we both share.

Reconstructing of intent concerning the gaze is a premise you will see throughout my catalogue. The heightening of *jouissance,* whether in or outside of my own*,* is a direct impediment to male virility in modern art and the hyper-sexualized stereotype of Black femmes. Through the obscuring and manipulation of image I am able to control, to my satisfaction, narrative, intent, and the gaze I wish to see.

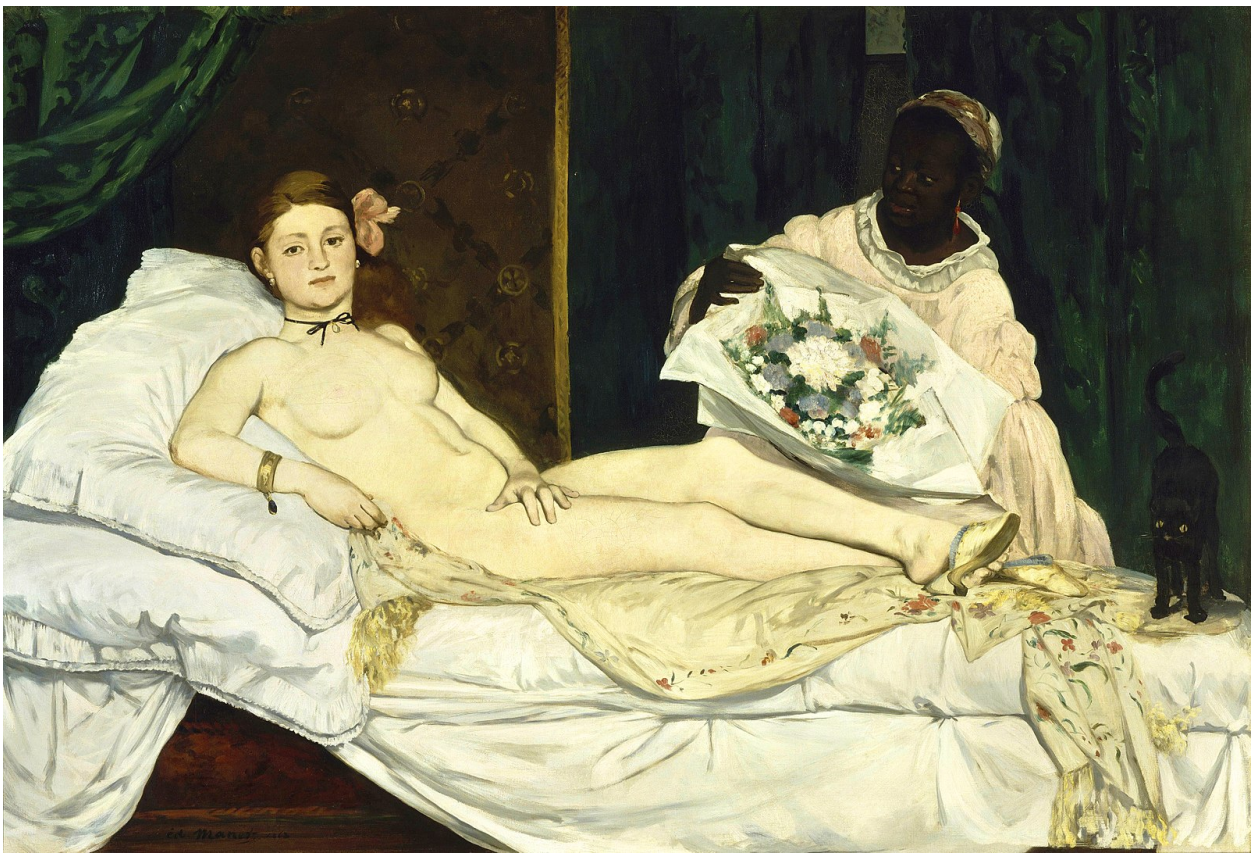
My Pleasure Principle

The exploration of licit and illicit sexuality in my work has become a ground zero for not only analyzing performances of sexuality; but, reading and understanding possibilities for pleasure to be had. For me, pleasure is a chance to focus on the idea of liberating intersections of sex, gender, and race through the advancement of feminist theory. I focus on Black feminine interiority as a power source instead of an incurable injury, as underscored by some feminist culture studies. My use of discourse surrounding explicit sexuality—in some cases pornography —could be made problematic to some feminist theorists who would argue that pornography is a patriarchal weapon used against women. I welcome scholarship in which challenge the frameworks I use within my art practice. Without it, this exact framework would prove decrepit if only held up by those who in scholarship provide champion.

> Consider also our spirits that break a little each time we see ourselves in chains or full labia display for the conquering male viewer, bruised or on our knees, screaming a real or pretended pain to delight the sadist, pretending to enjoy what we don't enjoy, to be blind to the images of our sisters that really haunt us—humiliated often enough ourselves by the truly obscene idea that sex and the domination of women must be combined.[41]

This excerpt was originally found in "Ms.," a liberal feminist magazine co-founded by Gloria Steinem. It reappeared in Andrea Dworkin's, *Pornography: Men possessing Women*, in 1979 as Dworkin used this passage to underscore her argument that pornography not only constitutes violence against women; but, a violence in which cultivates rape culture. Dworkin adopts Steinem's theory in which associates sex with love (or erotica) and pornography with prostitution (and/or rape). In analyzing Dworkin's *antipornography* stance, I gather her assumption that there is no agency, dignity, nor value for those who participate in sex work. With the help of ancient greek language, Dwokrin defines *pore* and *grapher,* as "writing about whores." Labeling

pornographers as *whores*, she claims: "Whores exist to serve men sexually."[42] Dismissing any male participation in pornographic sex, Dworkin sees pornography as central to the male and an overall eyesore that climactically amplifies a "dirtiness" annexed with women's bodies and genitals.



Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm. Photo: Musée d'Orsay, Paris. (fig. 19)

Dworkin's anti-liberal chapter on pornography does a great deal of "slut shaming" as it adopts the same patriarchal ideals it attempts to refute, making for a paradoxical argument. Dworkin's ability to disregard the intent, pleasures, and desires of sex workers is tied to her flawed ability to hold femmes to a level of standard that renders them equal to their male counterparts—an anti feminist semantic. In a larger context, Dworkin's arguments run parallel to bourgeois Aryan ideals that establish the bodies of European women as pure, modest and

embodiments of beauty in order to further agendas of Black inferiority. These same racist patriarchal ideologies, or "African Physiognomy", can be found throughout fifteenth to nineteenth European high art (fig. 19). By focusing on that of the male desire and gaze, she refuses any possible productive reading of the subject's will—whether it be concerned with economic gain, pleasure or desire—thus, recirculating a narrative that dismisses feminine agency as a whole. Dworkin, and *antipornographic* feminist theorists, who don't see femmes as beholders of their own narratives serve a disadvantage to a progressive and inclusive feminist theory, ultimately denying sexual agency to all femmes.

> Women's sexual agency, our sexual and our erotic autonomy have always been troublesome for the state. They pose a challenge to the ideological anchor of an originally nuclear family, a source of legitimation for the state, which perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society. Erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation. And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge irresponsible citizenship or no citizenship at all. Particularly for the neocolonial state it signals danger to respectability—not only to respectable Black middle-class families, but most significantly, to Black middle-class womanhood, given the putative impulse of this eroticism to corrupt, and corrupt completely.[43]

Furthering scholarship, I challenge the frameworks of *antipornographic* feminist with this excerpt on erotic autonomy. I call upon BFT, M. Jacqui Alexander, as she provides a mode that allows for visual culture to be examined differently. I reference the Black feminist theoretical archive—'a collection of scholarly texts and visual images created by cultural producers invested in recovering Black [feminine] bodies'[44]—as I use sexual autonomy and *jouissance* to engage in discourse surrounding Black feminine sexuality that progresses visual culture. By repudiating beliefs that places the mere sight of the Black feminine body in perpetuated state of injury, my

perception is that feminist theory could widen ideas of what liberation for ALL femmes looks like appropriately challenging liberalism of feminism.

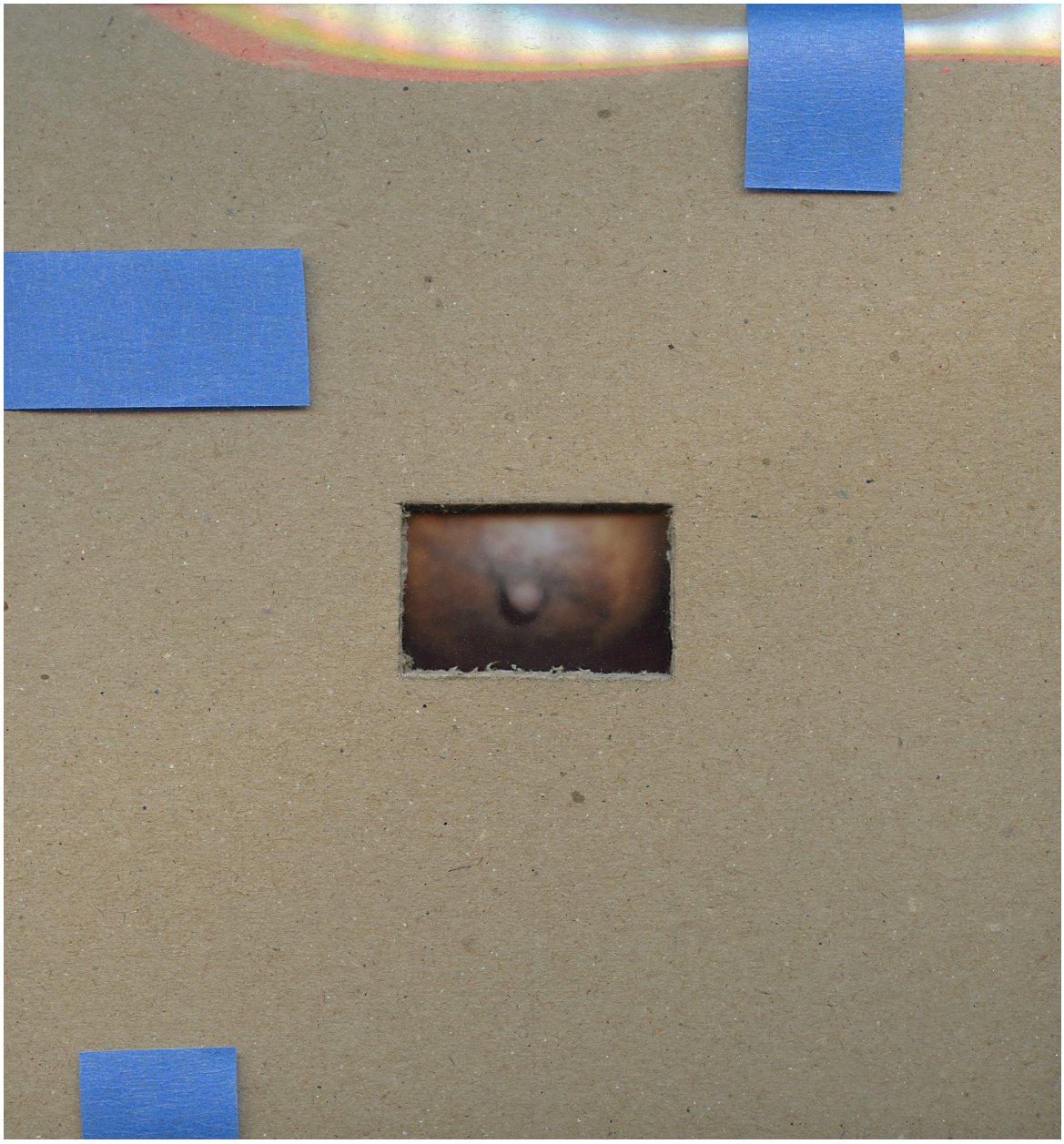
Concluding Remarks

Lola Ogbara, *Untitled #2 (Ecstasy in Isolation),* 2020. Polaroid on inkjet print. 4.5 x 4.5 inches. (fig. 20)

In recent events, the space between viewer and art object has become a lot larger. Oddly enough, the space between artist and art object has also become monumental in size. With no access to my studio or art objects in progress, this peculiar circumstance becomes a metaphor for accessibility—or rather, the lack thereof—between Black femmehood and popular feminist theories. COVID-19 has presented an unforeseen challenge in the accessing of daily routine, this includes the finalizing of some artworks. The rapid turn of events has made continuing an art practice in sculpture very arduous and burdensome. Fortunately for me, as someone who has grappled with little access to resources my whole life, I take this challenge as I always have—with grace. What do you do when the body is the only source of material? It has been a struggle exercising creativity in midst of a pandemic health crisis. Much like the access Black femmes have had to the expression of sexuality, my access to materials and space has been extremely reduced; however, it isn't the only access that has been revoked. The lack of physical social interaction, the disconnection between body and self, and the overwhelming feeling of inactivity has informed my practice both physically and conceptually. I am forced to dive deeper into my creative endeavors as a way to process this new state of being.

In my most recent works, I find bringing together my two dimensional collage roots and unconventional means of sculpture has been a rewarding gesture to my practice. My use of photography has become more experimental on an intimate level. Using some recycled materials from the packaging of online shopping binges, alongside vintage pornographic magazines and Polaroid camera, I create intimate moments that reawaken my connection to making (fig. 20 & 21). Utilizing my own body as a literal source of inspiration, I practice image obscurity, depictions of the erotic, and subversion of narrative as continuance to the transgression of

popular theories of identity, pathology, national belonging, and political correctness in American visual culture. It is my hope that with the subversion of restricting narratives and circumstances, I am able to alter the lens Western society utilizes in viewing pleasure as it is read for the Black femme now and in the years to come.



Lola Ogbara, *Untitled #3 (Ecstasy in Isolation),* 2020. Polaroid mounted on cardboard. 7 x 7 x 4.75 inches. (fig. 20)

Notes

[1] O'Grady, Lorraine. "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity" in *Afterimage* 20*,* no.1 (Summer, 1992), 14.

[2] Davis, Adrienne D and The BSE Collective. *Black Sexual Economies: Race and Sex in a Culture of Capital* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 2.

[3] *Ibid,* 2.

[4] Strings, Sabrina. *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 6.

[5] *Ibid,* 6.

[6] Miller-Young, Mireille. "A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography" (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.

[7] Oxford, s.v. "jouissance," accessed April 19, 2020.

[8] Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller. "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis" (New York: Norton, 1994), 281.

[9] Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* (London: The international Psycho-Analytical Press, 1920), 1.

[10] Jennifer C. Nash. "Introduction" in *Black Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 2.

[11] Senga Nengudi (b. 1943) is an American sculptor and performance artist well-known for one material in particular: nylon pantyhose, variously stretched, tied, and filled with sand, made over into abstracted renditions of the body.

[12] Little, Colony. "How Senga Nengudi's 'Performance Objects' Stretched Sculpture Into New Forms-and How She's Still Pressing the Limits Today" in *Artnet News*, July 3, 2018.

[13] "The word "Mammy"—or "Auntie," "Negro Nurse," and "Colored Nurse"—is originally part of the nineteenth century lexicon of antebellum plantation literature and folklore. It is a term that describes both a role and a person serving as baby nurse, cook, and all-around domestic help within the plantation home. Primarily through well-established physical attributes—large dark body, substantial blossom, ever-expanding lap, and round face marked with a permanent smile—representations of Mammy point to a long-lasting and troubled marriage of racial and gender essentialism, mythology, and presupposition of the Black female body as ultimately maternal."

Wallace-Sanders, Kimberly. "The Body of a Myth: Embodying the Black Mammy Figure in Visual Culture" in *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 163.

[14] Miller-Young, Mireille. "A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography" (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

[15] *Ibid,* 4.

[16] *Ibid*, 5.

[17] Lewis, Heidi R. “Let Me Just Taste You: Lil Wayne and Rap's Politics of Cunnilingus” in *The Journal of Popular Culture,* no. 49 (2016): 289-305.

[18] Lorde, Audre. “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 59.

[19] I refer to *Hood Feminism* as an intersectional feminism “with a specific focus on supporting the most vulnerable members. It focuses largely on the experiences of the marginalized, and address the issues faced by most women, instead of the issues that only concern a few.”

Kendall, Mikki. “Introduction” in *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women that a Movement Forgot.* (NewYork: Viking, 2020), xviii.

[20] Ogbara, Lola. “Pleasure is All Mine” (MFA diss., Washington University St. Louis, 2020), 43.

[21] Merriam-Webster, s.v. “bling,” accessed April 25, 2020.

[22] Morgan, Joan. “Why We Get Off: Moving Towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure” in *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 4 (February 2015): 36–46.

[23] Dictionary, s.v. “devour,” accessed April 19, 2020.

[24] Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” in *Diacritics* 17, no. 2, *Culture and Countermemory: The "American" Connection*. (Summer, 1987): 67.

[25] “Afro-pessimism is a lens of interpretation that accounts for civil society’s dependence on antiBlack violence—a regime of violence that positions Black people as internal enemies of civil society, and cannot be analogized with the regimes of violence that disciplines the Marxist subaltern, the postcolonial subaltern, the colored but nonBlack Western immigrant, the nonBlack queer, or the nonBlack woman.”

Oxford Bibliographies, s.v. “Afro-Pessimism,” accessed April 25, 2020.

[26] Dorothy E. Roberts: George A. Weiss University Professor of Law and Sociology, and Raymond Pace and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Professor of Civil Rights University of Pennsylvania

In her lecture, *What’s So Dangerous About Black Women’s Sexuality?*, acclaimed theorist, Dorothy Roberts traces the long history of policing and punishing Black women’s sexuality, including current policies that sustain fearful stereotypes of Black female licentiousness. Why, Roberts asks, is Black women’s sexuality considered to be so dangerous, and how has this fear worked to impede sexual liberation more broadly?

Roberts, Dorothy. “What's So Dangerous About Black Women's Sexuality?” at *Wolf Humanities Center*, March 1, 2016.

[27] Allen, Don. "Analyzing Hortense Spillers "Mama’S Baby, Papa’S Maybe" And The New Black,” *Our Black News*, May 24, 2015.

[28] *Ibid,* 65.

[29] Spillers, Hortense. “Whatcha Gonna Do?: Revisiting 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book’: A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan” in *Women’s Studies Quarterly 35*, no. 1/2 (Spring, 2007): 305.

[30] Morgan, Joan. "Why We Get Off: Moving Towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure" in *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 4 (February 2015): 82.

[31] *Ibid*

[32] *Ibid*

[33] *Ibid*

[34] Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,*"* *Signs 17,* no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 251-74.

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[35] Lorde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider*. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 53.

[36] *Ibid*, 53.

[37] Lorde expresses a sexual hierarchy as she states: "…we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling."

Ibid, 54.

[38] Kendall, Mikki. *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot* (New York City, NY: Viking Press, 2020), 47

[39] *Ibid*, 66.

[40] Cox, Renée. "Renée Cox: A Taste of Power," interview by Uri McMillian, *Aperture* Issue 225, 2016.

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[44] Jennifer C. Nash. "Archives of Pain" in *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 30.

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