



Bathing In Blackness: A Necessary New Order

Curated by Kamra Hakim

September 3–17, 2020

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday, 12:00–6:00pm

Opening Reception: September 3, 2020, 3:00–9:00pm

SoMad

34 East 23rd Street, 4th Floor

New York, New York 10010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Press Release 1

Works on Display

Chris Cook 3

Daesha Devón Harris 7

Quinn Alexandria Hunter 10

PhenomenaLewis 12

Adee Roberson 13

Tiffany Smith 14

Avery Williamson 15

Gracie Xavier 17

Essay from the Curator 19

So—MAD

For Immediate Release - August 27, 2020.



Daesha Devón Harris, *For many worn and weary hearts Have bathed in this pure healing stream, Just Beyond the River: A FolkTale*, 2017.

Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order

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SoMad is thrilled to present ***Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order*** curated by **Kamra Hakim**. The exhibition will take place in the physical space of the gallery open to the public from September 3rd to September 17th, 2020. Tickets can be obtained on [Eventbrite](#) for the physically distanced Opening Reception on September 3, 2020 from 3:00–9:00pm and also throughout the exhibition period. The show's tickets are scheduled so as to follow COVID-19 physical distancing guidelines and a mask must be worn inside the gallery. An interactive 360° virtual tour of the exhibition will be hosted online at [SoMad.NYC](#) on September 3rd. In support of the (long overdue) cultural revolution happening in 2020, SoMad's gallery commissions from the remaining shows of their 2020 programming will be directed to organizations that support communities and fight for social justice.

Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order is a group show exhibiting all Black artists whose work confronts and defies oppressive realities through documentation and by representing alternative futures. It features artists **Chris Cook, Daesha Devón Harris, Quinn Alexandria Hunter, PhenomenaLewis, Ade Roberson, Tiffany Smith, Avery Williamson** and **Gracie Xavier**. Curator **Kamra Hakim** says, "This collection of works emanates that to be

Black is to be water. Soaking in Blackness can be the antithesis of white supremacy, patriarchy, racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism.”

This show is unique in its powerful consideration of an archival past juxtaposed through contemporary ideology. The works in this exhibition acknowledge the transformative power of bathing, of being submerged, immersed, in Black lives. It also serves as an invaluable record of Black bodies in time-space-reality in opposition to systematic erasure. Each artists’ work serves as a portal to better worlds and futures, for the Black community and everyone, in which the white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy is obsolete. In this future, we no longer rely on this system to have our needs met and have access to resources without violence.

Represented by images of Black protest, through manifesto, and installation, this show is about shifting our focus to a world order that recognizes the inherent essentialness of Blackness, Black bodies, and our watery power. Water being a fluid agent, yet strong and forceful. This is the essence of the Black spirit. Through 500 years of resistance, through Black radical tradition, we have had to navigate systems that seek to destroy us but remain strong and resilient through adversity.

Bathing in Blackness presents artists engaged in the social revolution. In *Black Lives Matter* (2020), **Chris Cook** documents the Black Lives Matter Movement which aim to bring an end to systematic racism; Inspired by stories of the African Diaspora, slave narratives and Harlem Renaissance poetry, in *Just Beyond the River: A Folktale* (2015-2017) by **Daesha Devón Harris**, water becomes symbolic of Freedom; In *A Black Body Manifesto* (2017), **Quinn Alexandria Hunter** reveals the futility of prescribed performative femininity; In *Evolved* (2020), **PhenomenaLewis** represents the subtleties of anger through grandeur; **Adee Roberson** weaves familial archives with rhythm, form and spirit; In *Overseas We are Our Own Islands* (2020), **Tiffany Smith** addresses the Caribbean Diaspora, representation, cultural ambiguity, and displacement; In *Cartographies of Dissatisfaction* (2020), **Avery Williamson** explores historical and contemporary notions of the archive, Black pleasure and spatiotemporal collapse; In *Perception* (2015), Gracie Xavier has created a digital archive celebrating the voices of people of African descent within a global context.

There is a misconception that the revolution has just begun, though Black Folx have been fighting this fight for generations. At a rally for the accountability of George Floyd’s murder in Minneapolis, President of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) Leslie Resmond said, “Black Minnesota is done dying and White Minnesota is done hiding.” Black people are done dying and white people are done hiding. By any means.

About the Curator: **Kamra Hakim**, (They/Them) is a 27 year-old New York (occupied Lenapehoking land) based futurity artist using their Black transgender body as a portal to the futures we need now. They are committed to the power of imagination, and the use of radical discourse as pathways to creative liberation. They are the founder of [Activation Residency](#) and currently raising investments in their Activation Co-op Fund which can be contributed to via Venmo: [@Activation](#), Cash App: [Activation Residency](#), or [PayPal](#).

About the Gallery: **SoMad** is a female and queer led independent art platform, studio, and gallery built on the premise of fostering community through art. The namesake comes from the location, just South of Madison Square Park, but also from their frustration with the lack of support for emerging artists. **SoMad’s** ethos is based on a nonhierarchical, collaborative process enabling artists, curators, and clients access to necessary resources to actualize their vision from production to presentation. **SoMad’s** mission is to empower artists through community, practice and collaboration.

For press inquiries and images, please contact the gallery at press@somad.nyc
and the curator at kamra@activationresidency.com



Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)

Police Van on Fire.

2020

Giclée Print 20x24 in, Edition of 1

© Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist

Christopher Cook is a Brooklyn-native street photographer documenting the city landscape and the people who inhabit it. Cook explores his life as a young Black man searching for belonging in his own community. Cook invokes a contemporary aesthetic along the lines of **Henri Cartier-Bresson, Roy DeCarava, and Garry Winogrand**. Cook is currently a fellow of the AIM (Artist in the Marketplace) Fellowship at the Bronx Museum, and has extensively exhibited his work in group exhibitions in Brooklyn and Manhattan, as well as at the Con Artist Collective and Cultural Center of Cape Cod (2018), and won second place in the Aperture Awards (2018).

The Black Lives Matter protests represent a much-needed movement to resolve years of systemic racism in America. In the ***Black Lives Matter*** (2020) series, Cook focused on the historical site named Abolition Park, the occupation that took place at City Hall for one month during Summer 2020. Cook feels it is the responsibility of the photographer to make the revolution, the lives of young Black men and their unceasing power struggle, visible. He documents both observational and intimate moments, engaged with communal sensations and prioritizing personal dialogue, which when woven together, represent a dynamic narrative. Each photograph distinctively inhabits the ever changing urban environment they share with the artist.

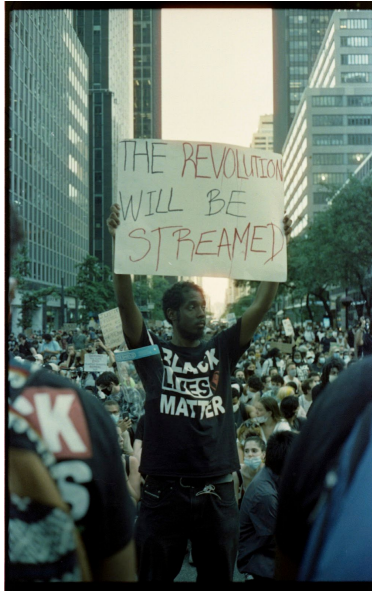


Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Wake Up I
 2020
 Giclée Print 8.5x11 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist

Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Cops and Heli
 2020
 Giclée Print 8.5x11 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist

Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Wake Up II
 2020
 Giclée Print 8.5x11 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist

Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Dr. Crump
 2020
 Giclée Print 8.5x11 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist



Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Streamed
 2020
 Giclée Print 15x19 in, Edition of 1
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist



Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Peace Officer
 2020
 Giclée Print 15x19 in, Edition of 1
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist



Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Equality
 2020
 Giclée Print 11x14 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist

Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
The Point
 2020
 Giclée Print 11x14 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist

Chris Cook (American, b. 1992)
Sign
 2020
 Giclée Print 11x14 in, Edition of 3
 © Christopher Cook. Courtesy of the artist



Daesha Devón Harris (American, b.1979)

On my heartstrings freedom sings all day everyday

Just Beyond the River: A FolkTale

2015

Chromira print, bow and turtle in hardwood box with etched glass. Edition of 1 + 1AP

© Daesha Devón Harris. Courtesy of the artist

Daesha Devón Harris is a Saratoga Springs, New York artist and photographer. She holds a BFA in Studio Art from the College Of Saint Rose and a MFA in Visual Art from The University at Buffalo. She plays an active role in her community as a youth mentor, social activist and cultural history preservationist. The gentrification of her hometown and its effect on the local Black community has played a major role in both her advocacy and artwork. Most recently Harris has been an Artist in Residence at Yaddo Artist Colony, an Aaron Siskind Foundation Individual Photographer's Fellowship awardee and a NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellow in Photography.

Just Beyond the River: A FolkTale (2015) weaves historical imagery and text with found objects and natural elements in the landscape that together elicit incarnations, acknowledgement and resistance. Inspired by stories of the African Diaspora, including folklore, slave narratives and Harlem Renaissance poetry, this series is about a Black experience that is deeply connected to the landscape, the idea of home and its intersections with water. Water becomes symbolic of Freedom, whether it is in this world or the next, and at the same time is evidence of social and cultural boundaries. Water has to be crossed on the journey to Freedom.



Daesha Devón Harris (American, b. 1979)

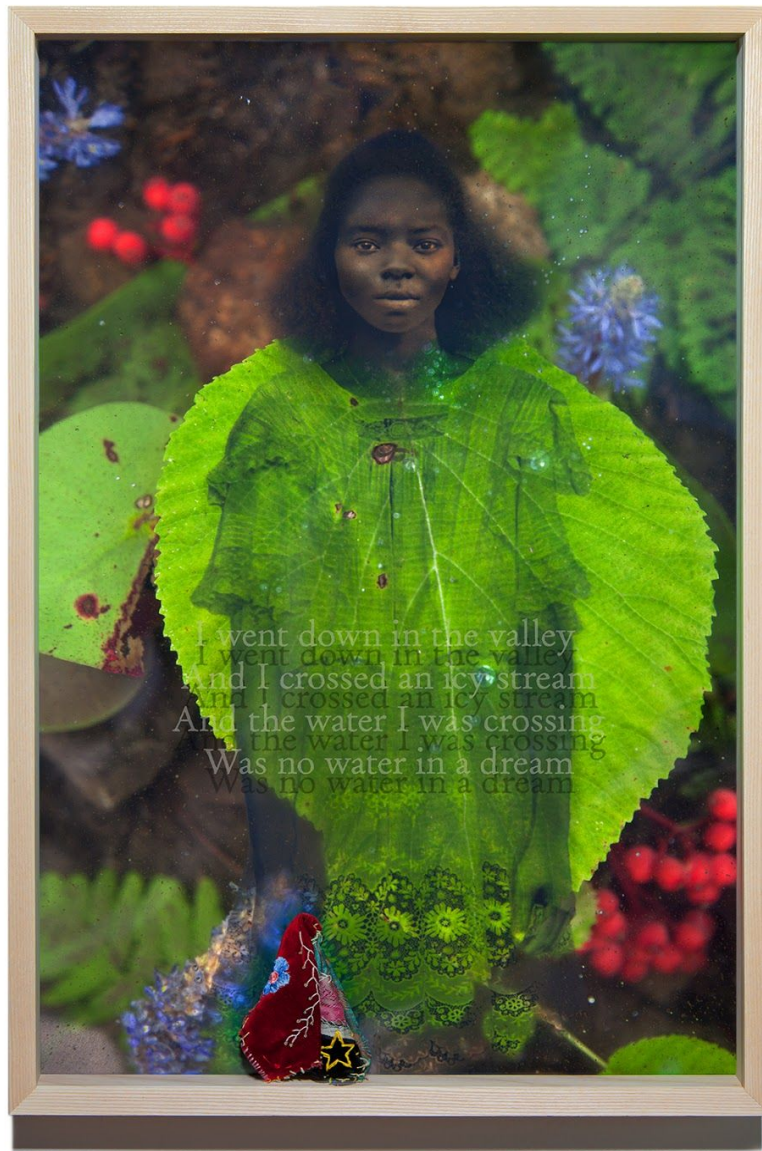
For many worn and weary hearts Have bathed in this pure healing stream.

Just Beyond the River: A Folk Tale

2017

Chromira print with lead bullet, buckeye and leather pouch in hardwood box with etched glass. Edition of 1 + 1AP

© Daesha Devón Harris. Courtesy of the artist



Daesha Devón Harris (American, b. 1979)

I went down in the valley And I crossed an icy stream And the water I was crossing Was no water in a dream. Just Beyond the River: A Folk Tale

2017

Chromira print and quilt square in hardwood box with etched glass. Edition of 1 + 1AP

© Daesha Devón Harris. Courtesy of the artist



Quinn Alexandria Hunter (American, b. 1994)

A Black Body Manifesto

2017

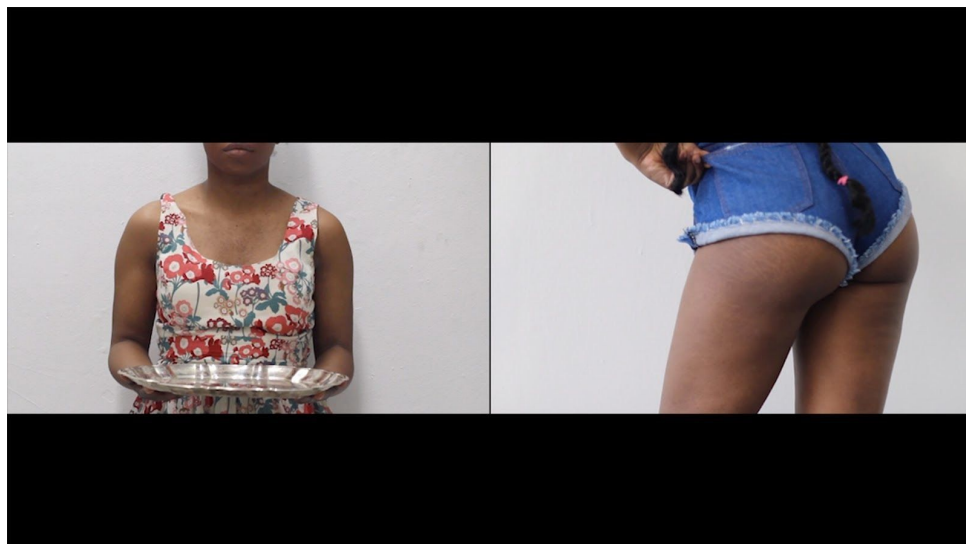
Giclée Print, 15.4x20 in. Edition of 1

© 2017 Quinn Hunter. Courtesy of the artist

Quinn A Hunter is a sculpture and performance artist who works primarily with hair and the African American female body as material. She is interested in the erasure of history from spaces and how the contemporary use of space impacts the way we, as a culture, see the past. Hunter was born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina and did her MFA work at Ohio University(2020). She is a Chautauqua Institution alumni, has exhibited and performed nationally and is the recipient of the I. Hollis Parry/Ann Parry Billman Award.

In ***A Black Body Manifesto*** (2017), Hunter is looking at the way Black women negotiate between the self and the world. Between the crisis and the authentic. Through acts of self-exhibition she is interrupting the view on the body and asking questions about the prescribed performances of femininity to the Black body in divulging their limited imposed meanings. They reveal the persistent futility of Black female body reacting within the culturally allowed space and the subtle absurdity of it all.

In ***Failed Performances of Black Femininity*** (2018), Hunter performs the historic archetypes of Black femininity, the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire, repeatedly. In clothing from her personal wardrobe, she connects to these archetypes for the camera. Hunter's performance then slows down until they, as video, fail to perform. Instead, they become choppy frame by frame animation of a body that has already, due to historic precedence, been caricatured.



Quinn Alexandria Hunter (American, b. 1994)

Failed Performances of Black Femininity

2018

Digital Video, 23 minutes.

© 2018 Quinn Hunter. Courtesy of the artist



PhenomenaLewis (Lewis Derogene, Haitian b. 1997)

Evolved

2020

Giclée Print, 16 x 20 in. Edition of 7 + 1AP

© PhenomenaLewis. Courtesy of the artist

Lewis Derogene, known artistically as **PhenomenaLewis**, was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and currently lives between Connecticut and New York. Her staged photographs reflect her lived spiritual, political and sociological experiences. Through self-portraiture, she reclaims the visual representation of the female body, working to decolonize and redefine the narrative of AfroLatinidad within the African Diaspora. Starting as drawings and poetry, these evocative, vibrant and visceral portraits confront the viewer with the artist and the subject. Heavily inspired by Rembrandt's portraits, her highly contrasted and overly saturated photographs displace the subject while revealing clues to symbolic elements of her identity and cultural heritage. She has shown work at Veiled Art Show, NY; Satellite Art Show, NY; GI Portal in Governor's Island, NY and Conception Art Show, NY (all in 2019); [Fridge Art Fair](#), NY (2018); The Living Gallery Outpost, NY; (2017), Fantasy in Color Gallery, NY; (2017), Black History Month exhibition, SVA's Student Center, NY (2017), and Street Seats, Stamford, CT (2014). She graduated from the School of Visual Arts with a BFA in Fine Arts (2019).

PhenomenaLewis categorizes her self-portraits as "Afro Cogitatio." It is important to be self aware as changing environmental, economic and political situations impact our evolving selves. In ***Evolved***, PhenomenaLewis contemplates words used to categorize her - "aggressive," "angry." She negates violent definitions imposed upon Black women, channeling the sublime and its grandeur. Based on freeform poems, using limited resources at home and digital manipulation, a visual narrative is created.



Adee Roberson (American, b. 1981)

Tamarind

2019

Digital Video With Sound; 2 min. Edition of 1 + 1AC

© Adee Roberson. Courtesy of the artist

Adee Roberson was born in West Palm Beach, Florida in 1981. Her work weaves sonic and familial archives, with landscape, technicolor, rhythm, form, and spirit. She has exhibited and performed at numerous venues including, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Antenna Gallery, Project Row Houses, Palm Springs Art Museum, Human Resources, Charlie James Gallery, Contemporary Art Center New Orleans, MOCA Los Angeles, and Art Gallery of Windsor, Ontario. She is based in Los Angeles, California.

Tamarind (2019) is focused on visual representations of landscape, emotion, and memory as they concern the diasporic movements of Black people. Through abstract paintings, soft sculptures, and video, Roberson offers a refracted timeline of Black movement. Here, the forced migration of Black people via the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, and the subsequent movements of Black peoples in the Caribbean, North America, and Western Africa are collapsed, expanded, and offered as a type of energetic visual field.

Speaking about the work, she says: “I will develop work that explores movement and migration as channeled through my experience of being second generation Jamaican living in the U.S. My grandmother moved from Kingston, Jamaica in 1961 to New York, then to Florida where I was born. I grew up having a connection to Jamaica through stories, photos, food, music and holiday time with extended family. This in-between space is something I [want to explore] around the profundity of Black movement and the un/making of home. Using sound, color, sculpture, and family archives, I will piece together my specific story of home and migration. The objects and visuals created would then become a part of my family legacy and archive.”



Tiffany Smith (American, b.1980)
Overseas We are Our Own Islands
2020
Giclée Print, 24 x 30 in. Edition of 5 + 2 A.P.s
© Tiffany Smith. Courtesy of the artist

Tiffany Smith is an interdisciplinary artist from the Caribbean diaspora working in photography, video, installation, and design. Using plant matter, design elements, patterning and costuming as cultural signifiers, Smith creates photographic portraits, site responsive installations, user engaged experiences, and assemblages focused on identity, representation, cultural ambiguity, and displacement. Smith's practice centers on what forms and defines communities of people of color, in particular; how they are identified and represented, and how they persist. Smith is currently based in Brooklyn, NY, is a Co-Director of Ortega y Gasset Projects and a resident with The Bronx Museum Block Gallery Residency Program.

In ***Overseas We are Our Own Islands*** (2020), Smith presents a photographic self-portrait within a site specific installation that uses lighting effects to mimic light reflections on the surface of water. The image depicts the subject grounded in isolation in the center of the frame against a field of overlapping aquatic inspired patterns. Her hand firmly grips a conch shell, in reference to the artists' Caribbean lineage, as though it is a receiver bearing good news from back home on the other end of the line. The sky and sea blend together creating intentional shifts in perception that serve as a metaphor for the omnipresent and often menacing external forces that surround a politicized body. Asserting that Blackness is questioned, categorized, and threatened by systemic oppressive forces which have irrevocably permeated how we understand Black identity and interior Black life, the work speaks to representing nuance within Black identity, and offers space for release as it applies to Black personhood.

Created in the confines of the artists' apartment while under lockdown during the Coronavirus pandemic, the act of creating this image became a strategy for survival. Channeling the spirit of Yemoja, goddess of oceans and rivers, to manifest measured resilience in the face of turbulent forces, the artist constructs a safe space, replicated through the installation, in which to meditate on their personal affinity for the ocean and memories of days spent in communion with its calming energy.



Avery Webster Williamson (American, b. 1997)

Cartographies of Dissatisfaction I, 2020

Acrylic and colored pencil on paper 10" x 8"

© Avery Williamson. Courtesy of the artist

Avery Williamson is a multidisciplinary artist whose work explores historical and contemporary notions of the archive, Black pleasure and spatiotemporal collapse. She graduated from Harvard College with a degree in Visual and Environmental Studies. There she was awarded the Thomas Temple Hoopes Prize for extraordinary undergraduate work. Williamson has since shown work in Philadelphia, Cambridge, Nashville and Ann Arbor, and recently completed a six month experimental residency at The Hosting in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Her work has been featured by the Instagram Design team and the American Craft Council. Williamson currently lives and works in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

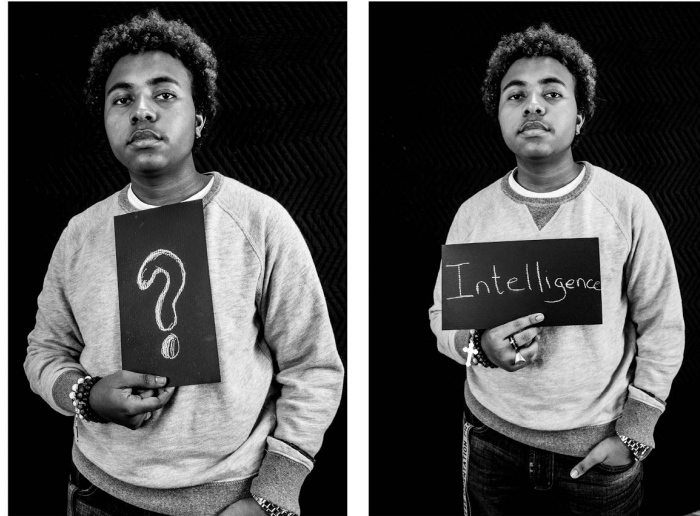
Avery Williamson's ***Cartographies of Dissatisfaction*** (2020) is a series of works on paper that depict abstract narratives of Black pleasure and imagination. Her work captures the inner peace of art-making in isolation. The tension in the outside pandemic world is absent. The work is in response to being confined to the domestic space, to negotiating that space with a partner, to observing new public conversations about Blackness in America, and choosing to visually engage with the parts of Black life that are expansive, alive and generative. Williamson is not interested in the kind of exploration that is dangerous or nefarious. ***Cartographies of Dissatisfaction*** may not even be earthly explorations. The pieces depict a fantasy or alternative reality with the familiar palette of planet earth, but where the terrain is free of earthly dangers. Her marks represent an investigation of the paper - the edges, boundaries, positive and negative space. There are pockets of excitement and tension, as well as play and curiosity. The varied marks on the paper map the presence of ancestors and engagement with spirits who live with us every day. While the media Williamson uses across her body of work varies, the themes of archive and dimension-collapse persist. Layers of pencil and paint allow for transparency and let the pieces float. They are emergent and untethered, and represent a certain kind of exploration that is pleasurable, interior, and safe. These works are an effort to archive this moment in the ways that the news cycle and social media won't and can't. The drawings render the chaos of 2020 and the process of attempting to make sense and order of the times.



Avery Webster Williamson (American, b. 1997)
***Cartographies of Dissatisfaction II*, 2020**
Acrylic and colored pencil on paper 10" x 8"
© Avery Williamson. Courtesy of the artist



Avery Webster Williamson (American, b. 1997)
***Cartographies of Dissatisfaction III*, 2020**
Acrylic and colored pencil on paper 10" x 8"
© Avery Williamson. Courtesy of the artist

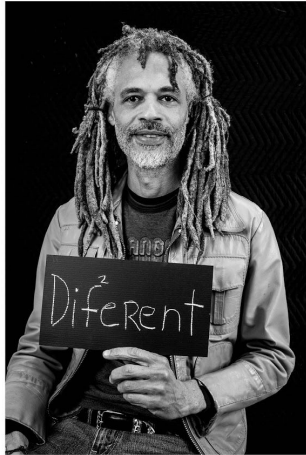


Gracie Xavier (American, b. 1981)
Perception VI – Lost
 2015
 Giclée Print, 36 x 24 in. Edition of 2
 © 2015 Gracie Xavier. Courtesy of the artist

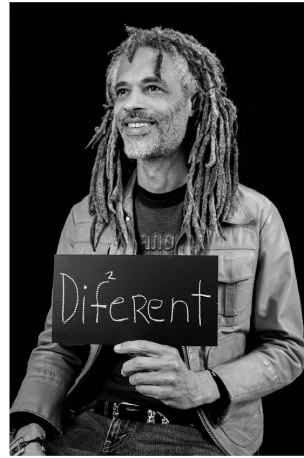
Gracie Xavier (American, b. 1981)
Perception X – Intelligence
 2015
 Giclée Print, 36 x 24 in. Edition of 2
 © 2015 Gracie Xavier. Courtesy of the artist

As a Haitian immigrant growing up in Florida, **Gracie Xavier** understood from an early age the need to create platforms that elevate the stories of marginalized communities. Xavier leverages her experience as a creative strategist, artist and nonprofit administrator to produce large-scale community-focused projects in Detroit, Baltimore, New York City and Haiti exploring the intersections of art, identity and social justice. Xavier's photographs, paintings and mixed media work have been exhibited at the Queens Museum in New York and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, as well as at galleries across the U.S. In 2013, she produced *Spear: A Survival Guide for Young African-American Men*, a web-based resource designed to help young African-American males in Baltimore navigate the economic and social challenges associated with living in often volatile communities. In 2015, Xavier debuted her solo art exhibition, *Cutz: Black Men in Focus*, at Gallery CA in Baltimore. 'Cutz' is a product of a two-year exploration of Black men's stories through the lens of the African-American barbershop. Xavier's current project is the *Black Story Journal*, a visual storytelling project documenting the lives of people of African descent in celebrating their significant contributions to the global narrative. Xavier holds an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and she received dual degrees in psychology and social work from Florida State University. She lives and works in Detroit, Michigan.

Perception (2015) are black and white photographs featuring men holding a chalkboard sign in response: "How do you perceive yourself?" or 'How does the world perceive you?' *Perception* is a series of community portrait sessions that created an opportunity for young African men to connect with one another while collecting attendees narratives through shared storytelling and images. The events involved men across different generations completing a portrait session, participating in a round table discussion and interview. This allowed each participant an opportunity to share stories and build community.



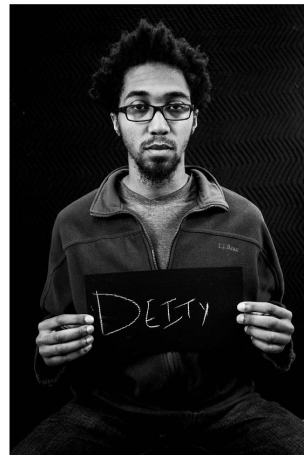
Gracie Xavier (American, b. 1981)
Perception I – Too Different I
2015
 Giclée Print, 36 x 24 in. Edition of 2
 © 2015 Gracie Xavier. Courtesy of the artist



Gracie Xavier (American, b. 1981)
Perception II – Too Different II
2015
 Giclée Print, 36 x 24 in. Edition of 2
 © 2015 Gracie Xavier. Courtesy of the artist



Gracie Xavier (American, b. 1981)
Perception VII – Insignificant
2015
 Giclée Print, 36 x 24 in. Edition of 2
 © 2015 Gracie Xavier. Courtesy of the artist



Gracie Xavier (American, b. 1981)
Perception VIII – Deity
2015
 Giclée Print, 36 x 24 in. Edition of 2
 © 2015 Gracie Xavier. Courtesy of the artist

Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order
SoMad, September 3-17, 2020
Essay by Kamra Hakim

Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order is an artistic attempt at ushering in another Black love paradigm whereby the white-supremacist, capitalist, ableist patriarchy is obsolete. The show requests: “loving Blackness as political resistance,” declared by critic and writer bell hooks (1999). In this case “Blackness” refers to our varied and diverse collections of histories and diasporas as communal identity. Black folks’ historical legacies of resistance exist in many forms, through many generations. This show seeks to draw on those legacies in resonance of seeing and understanding the loved and liberated Black body. hooks asserts loving Blackness as the most effective means to combating white supremacy and racism, as loving Blackness directly challenges the foundations of dominant thought. Loving Blackness as political resistance is publicly concerting that Black lives not only matter, but are sacred.

Historically, loving Blackness as political resistance has been proliferated by Black Queer womanist thinkers, organizers, writers, artists, and Black diasporic populations as an anti-racist practice to combat anti-Blackness and Black folks’ proximity to grief, trauma, and dehumanization. This proximity encourages Black folks to love small, a protection mechanism used to survive a vicious system that consumes and profits off of our bodies and our bodies’ demise (Toni Morrison 1987, page 162), which is why loving Black life is defiant and rebellious. This loving defies anti-blackness, colorism, and plantation logics (Wynter 2003), affirming Black life beyond a neocolonial perspective (McKittrick 2019, page 81). Combahee River Collected notably forged politics evolving from a healthy love for our Black selves and communities (1983, page 270).

James Baldwin discussed the transformative power of love in the wake of oppression and violence, and wrote, “It is for this reason that love is so desperately sought and so cunningly avoided. Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word ‘love’ here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace — not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth” (1963).

Identities are narrative constructions, and as such, narrative making is inventing and negotiating identities (Corey D. B. Walker 2013), which is why loving and bathing in Blackness requires a commitment to decolonizing our [peoples’] mindbodies. This decolonization is a commitment to unlearning white supremacist pathology of Black inferiority as the dominant construct narrative of Blackness. Selfhood is not possible without the capacity to construct our own narratives (Jerome Bruner 2002, page 86). If this is true, then is it also plausible that identities can be both narratively damaged and repaired (Hilde Nelson (2001). Master narratives of Black inferiority reproduce oppression, and counternarratives produce opportunities to transform marginalized identities or reposition our [Black peoples’] stories of ourselves as the only legitimate and noteworthy narratives.

Futures of Blackness must be love centered. adrienne maree brown’s *Pleasure Activism* emerged as an ode to politicizing Black people’s pleasure as a means of liberation (2019). Kimberly Williams and Andrea N. Baldwin spearheaded the Virginia Tech Black Love Exhibit (2019). The gallery exhibit on Black love was generated by the student body in addition to faculty contributors including Nikki Giovanni, Andrea Baldwin, Kwame Harrison, Menah

Pratt-Clarke, Brandy Faulkner, Freddy Paige, Onwubiko Agozino, Lucinda Roy, Larry Jackson, and Letisha Brown showing work spanning from flash nonfiction, creative essay, and poetry, with subject matter having to do with addiction, maternity, marriage, and kinship and covering the fields of civil engineering, political science, women's studies, creative writing, computer engineering, and Africana studies. Initially, students struggled to materialize pieces for this show as they felt they had no context for understanding and representing Black love because Black inferiority narratives of Blackness have been that pervasive. They then began to see their lived memorabilia as an access point for visualizing and artistizing their experience of Blackness and Black love.

In a world where the punishment for living in a Black body is death, loving Blackness is a breach of the social order. George Floyd was murdered in Minnesota at the end of May. An outpour of mutual aid, resource sharing, networks of care, love, and anti-racist strategies affirming Blackness and Black life followed. A new order is not only necessary but also possible and already here. ***Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order*** seeks to contribute to the lineage of Black Love Futures, presenting a landscape of liberated Blackness by a group of artists on the cutting edge of photography, mixed media, and installation. It provokes the question, "What is it to be dripping wet in Blackness?" To be filled by it, with it. Cleansed by it. To be in love with it. Consumed. To *drown* in it, even. Radical Black love politics need to be incessant and consuming, like water, because of constructed panopticon power, and at the very same time we, Black people, are building our own narratives around Black power, self-love, pride, beauty, and self-determination, our, Black peoples', narrative making is wiped out and destroyed. Loving Blackness does not come naturally enough to most people, and is often misunderstood and yet absolutely necessary, being the most direct counter-narrative to a white supremacist democracy built on the dehumanization of Black lives (Glaude 2016). The works in this show acknowledge the transformative power of loving, *bathing in*, Black lives. Black bodies will be recorded in time-space-reality and we will not be erased *no matter how hard y'all try*. This work showcases Black archiving as our portal to better - violence and oppression free, accessible and well-resourced - worlds and futures.

Bathing in Blackness presents artists engaged in the social revolution. In *Black Lives Matter* (2020), **Chris Cook** documents the Black Lives Matter Movement which aims to bring an end to systematic racism and police brutality; Inspired by stories of the African Diaspora, slave narratives and Harlem Renaissance poetry, in *Just Beyond the River: A Folktale* (2015-2017) by **Daesha Devón Harris**, water becomes symbolic of Freedom; In *A Black Body Manifesto* (2017), **Quinn Alexandria Hunter** reveals the futility of prescribed performative femininity; In *Evolved* (2020), **PhenomenaLewis** represents the subtleties of anger through grandeur; **Adee Roberson** weaves familial archives with rhythm, form and spirit; In *Overseas We are Our Own Islands* (2020), Tiffany Smith addresses the Caribbean Diaspora, representation, cultural ambiguity, and displacement; In *Cartographies of Dissatisfaction* (2020), Avery Williamson explores historical and contemporary notions of the archive, Black pleasure and spatiotemporal collapse; In *Perception* (2015), Gracie Xavier has created a digital archive celebrating the voices of people of African descent within a global context.

Each artists' work reads as a contemporary take on identities as narrative constructions. *Bathing in Blackness: A Necessary New Order* is a counter-narrative normalizing gesture, artistic tool, and pedagogical strategy to reverse, dismiss, and de-legitimize notions embedded in racialized Americanness and transnational spaces that Blackness is unlovable. It is a humanizing project as Black lovability affirms our humanity. The revolution is here because Black people exist and are done dying. We have been denied love and life universally, and we will not be denied any longer.