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## Drowning in our Tears

Kelley-Ann A. Lindo

*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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Drowning in our Tears

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

Kelley-Ann Lindo

BFA, Painting, The Edna Manley College of the Visual & Performing Arts, 2015

MFA, Painting and Printmaking, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021

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Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

May 2021

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To those who came before me...and to those will come after.

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In no specific order:

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## ***Table of Contents***

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	iii
<b>Abstract</b>	v
<b>Vita</b>	vi
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Archive I</b>	
<i>Little Boys Play With Trucks</i>	3
<i>Sisters</i>	3
<i>K.D</i>	4
<i>Self Portrait</i>	4
<i>Family is a Helluva Thing</i>	5
<i>Trauma Stays With You</i>	5-9
<b>Archive II</b>	
<i>Untitled</i>	9-13
<b>Archive III</b>	
<i>New Haven</i>	13
<i>Memories Keep Us Afloat</i>	17
<i>Rain Neva Yet Fall a One- Man Door</i>	21
<b>Archive IV</b>	
<i>Untitled- Boy a Big Balla,</i>	25
<i>Two Generations,</i>	28
<i>Soul System: I Say a Little Prayer,</i>	33
<i>Wall: False Sense of Security</i>	40
<b>Conclusion</b>	43
<b>Bibliography</b>	

*Abstract*

Drowning in our Tears

By Kelley-Ann Lindo, Master of Fine Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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*Drowning in our Tears* is a series of works – installation, print media, and sculpture that explores themes of precarity, ephemerality, collective memory, and vulnerability. The need to create and preserve an archive has been the of the driving forces behind the works. I am interested in this notion of creating new language and perspectives from past trauma and hardships. The archive presents us with a site where excavation of meaning can occur, identities preserved, and new identities formed. In my work, I try to bridge the gaps, using the fragments of memory, the past and present experiences to create new perspectives and alternative futures where disenfranchised Black people have transcended systematic inequality.

## Vita

Kelley-Ann Lindo was born in Kingston, Jamaica on October 27, 1991. She graduated from The Priory High School, Kingston Jamaica in 2008. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from The Edna College of the Visual and Performing Arts, Kingston Jamaica, in 2015. She worked as a curatorial assistant at the National Gallery of Jamaica in Kingston, Jamaica in 2017. She lectured at the Edna Manley College of the Visual & Performing Arts in 2018. She also worked as an Adjunct Lecturer at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia in 2020-21.

## **Introduction**

I've come to understand the importance of archives. It is the site for excavation, reconstruction and re-presentation. How do we preserve an archive that has been destroyed or hidden? Water exposes the truth of how black, displaced bodies are consistently positioned and disenfranchised. My relationship to water exists not only as memories but also as a marker of my precarious post-colonial system position. Natural Disasters are naturally occurring phenomena that impact us all. Who are the people who suffer the most? Where are the people located? Why? These are the questions I am interested in, both in the Caribbean and US landscape. The colonial legacies and how the inherited colonial system is designed; Black people are destined to fail and are placed socially and economically in a position where they are already predisposed to have the cards stacked against them.

A significant aspect of my research is examining racial segregation and division in the United States to similar systems in the Caribbean. I employ the archive to recall and investigate individual and shared memories and explore histories, testimonies, and identities. In my work, I try to use the gaps and lapse in between fragments of memory to reimagine new and alternative futures for displaced, disenfranchised Black people. The explorations take various forms, some being two dimensional while others take a more three-dimensional, sculptural form that almost always involves communication and engagement.

***Archive I:***

*Trauma Stays with you, Family is a helluva thing, Little boys play with trucks, Sisters, K.D, Self Portait*

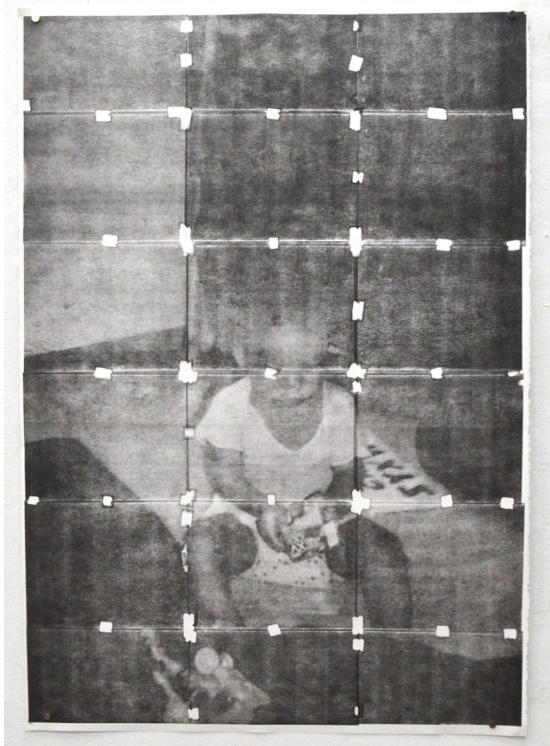
Before coming to the United States, I found an inability to locate works or conversations centered around the dynamics of water-related trauma, family separation, and barrel children - a term referring to children who have been left behind by one or both parents who have migrated.<sup>1</sup> I was always interested in finding stories and conversations that resonated, and the fact that I couldn't find them bothered me. I wanted to bring forward issues that deserve to be a part of a larger discourse. As a departure point, I started having conversations with acquaintances who had similar shared experiences. I began constructing a photographic archive of people who too had experience with personal connections to familial separation, specifically Caribbean connections.

These photographs became a symbol of trust between the owner and me. In the process of sharing their photographs with me, especially those with whom I had no close personal associations, a relationship was formed. In the portrait series, I pulled images from the archive, excavating memories, as a starting point for creating fragmented, inaccurate, solvent transfer prints. The inadequacies and variations of the tears in the paper and the image revealed the truth within the context of the original photographs. I printed the images in a poster format using

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Barrel child* reflects the parents' need to disguise their absence with material goods and remittance for the children.

Jokhan, Mala. "Exploring the Barrel Children Cycle: Parent-Child Separation Due to Migration." Childhood Explorer. Accessed April 20, 2021. <https://www.childhoodexplorer.org/exploring-the-barrel-children-cycle-parentchild-separation-due-to-migration>.



*Little boys play with trucks*, solvent transfer on paper, 44" x 30", 2019.



*Sisters*, solvent transfer on paper, 44" x 30", 2019.

8.5 x 11 inch Xerox's and employed a toner transfer printing process. The image consisted of 18– 72 Xerox portions, depending on the scale of the final print.

The image was reconstructed from the enlarged portions using cellophane tape. I followed by using acetone; the images from the reconstructed Xerox prints, dispersing ink in the archival printing paper's fibers, creating an enlarged image in a single sheet. Similar to water during a flood, acetone is a colorless liquid with the ability to harm the body. The transfer process offers many impacts.



K.D, solvent transfer on paper, 44" x 30", 2019



Self portrait, solvent transfer on paper, 44" x 30",2019

The reconstruction process created simulated tears and grids that are apparent after the transfer process is complete. The brokenness of the grids signifies vulnerability and fragility and allows room for various interpretative possibilities. The results are so deconstructed that the image changes significantly from the matrix, which allows for a discussion on memory, migration, and how the distance creates disruptions and instability. The photographs I collected were taken of the individual at the age when they were separated from their parent (s). The photographs I requested needed to be documented at that specific moment because of the context and the history of these realities.

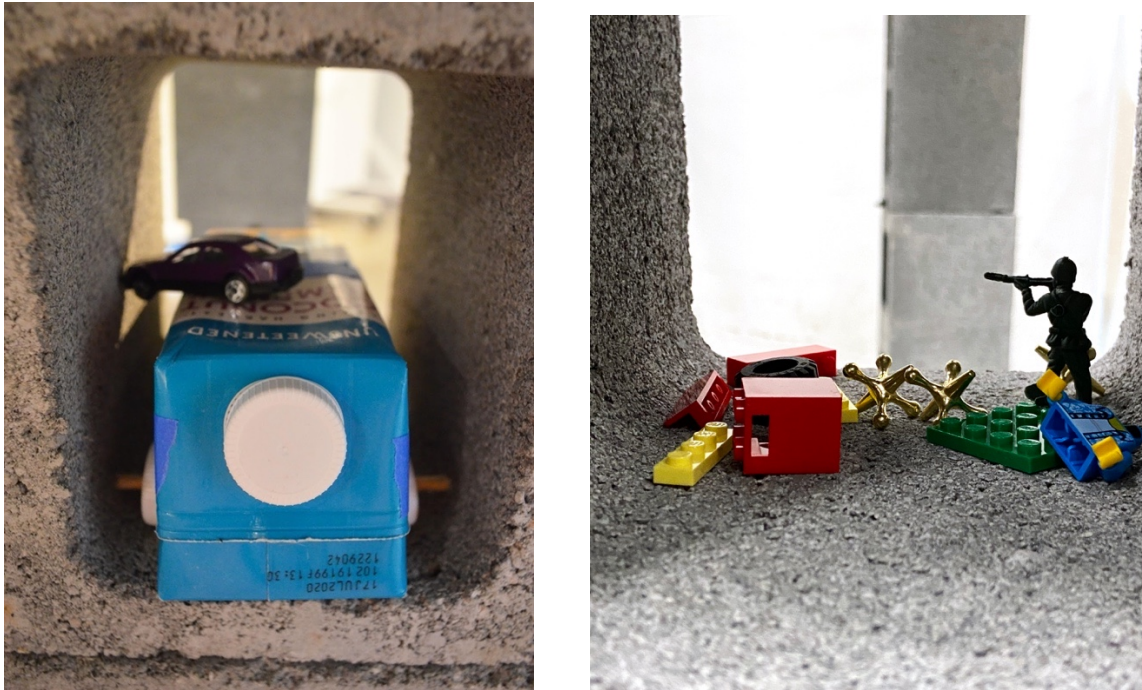




Family is a helluva thing, solvent transfer on paper, 88" x 90", 2019

*Family is a helluva thing* came to fruition after a conversation with Barbados filmmaker Lisa Harewood; Harewood's *Barrel Stories*, a collection of oral histories from migrants. I expressed my desire to expand the conversation of familial separation and migration beyond myself and close friends. She connected me with one of the individuals she interviewed for her barrel stories project. The installed structure, *Trauma stays with you* consists of toys, cinder blocks, and a settee. As a child, I would make toys from anything I could find, from juice boxes to bottle caps. As with most children, I was fascinated with the idea that an object could be transformed into anything with just my imagination. I used this as an opportunity to imagine realities other than the one I was living in. It is this resilience and resourcefulness that I am attempting to convey in the way I construct the works I make.





Detail *Trauma Stays With You*, mixed media installation 2019

In his book *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan writes about a child's spatial frame being restricted and how children are more concerned with things themselves than the precise spatial relations.

A child's spatial frame of reference is restricted. Children's art provides abundant hints of this restriction..... "Separation" is another type of evidence that hints at the child's inability to depict, or simply indifference to, the spatial relations among objects. For example, the picture of the cowboy on his horse may show a prominent gap between the cowboy's hat and his head, and another gap between the cowboy and the horse.<sup>2</sup>

The installation *Trauma Stays With You* references Yi-Fu Tuan's work and explores spatial relationships with objects and the body. By stacking the settee on blocks over 6 ft in height, I am establishing a relationship between childhood memories with objects and space and hurricane preparedness in Caribbean culture. This construction allows for the act of reaching and playing

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<sup>2</sup> Tuan, Yi Fu. 2001. "Space, Place and the Child." In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Place*, 26. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

with objects which further disclose their separateness and relative spacing. The height produces the reality of how both children perceive and engage space and objects but also the concern is less on the spatial relations and more about the objects themselves. Viewers are able to move around it and under it. In doing so, I am initiating little moments that speak to my own specificity, memory and history. In an attempt, challenging the notion of accessibility and functionality, metaphorically functioning as portals into the past and present creating a transformative experience.



Detail *Trauma Stays With You*, mixed media installation 2019



Detail *Trauma Stays With You*, mixed media installation 2019



*Trauma stays with you*, mixed media installation, 2019





*Trauma stays with you*, mixed media installation, 2019

## *Archive II*

### *Untitled,*

For generations, stories, accounts, histories were passed down through oral history. It became both a significant and legitimate tool for "historical inquiry and documentation" thanks to the development of recording technology.<sup>3</sup> In *There is no such thing as a Natural Disaster*

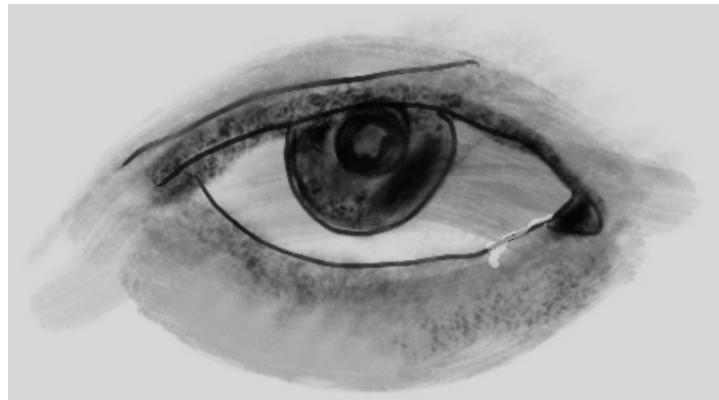
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<sup>3</sup> Stein, Alan H. n.d. "Oral History, Folklore and Katrina." *There is no such thing as a Natural Disaster* Race Class and Hurricane Katrina 39

*Race, Class and Hurricane Katrina*, Alan H. Stein and Gene. B. Preuss gave written testimonies of black women who were impacted by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. One woman described the treatment residents received from the U.S military personnel:

"They set us up so that we would rebel, so that they could shoot us," another woman complained. "At one point they brought in two truckloads of dogs and let the dogs out" (Myers 2005; Hodges 2005). Another woman was even more emphatic: "We was treated worse than an animal. People do leave a dog in a house, but they do leave him food and water. They didn't do that. And that's sad."<sup>4</sup>

In a similar way, oral traditions and histories were retold to me while growing up with my grandparents. They existed as living archives. Oral histories play a significant role in preserving one's cultural identity and understanding the past. Storytelling then becomes an important tool for advocating for one's presence as a way to self-actualize. Darren Fever writes about the artist's use of the archive as a strategy of "collecting, recording, cataloging, searching and re-presenting."<sup>5</sup> The archive is a way to recall and review individual and collective memories.



Video *Untitled*, 2020

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>5</sup> Fever, Darren. 2018. *Archive Fever Academic Essay – ARTIST WITH ARCHIVE*. April 29. Accessed March 1, 2021. <https://darrendai.wordpress.com/2018/04/29/archive-fever-academic-essay-artist-with-archive/>.

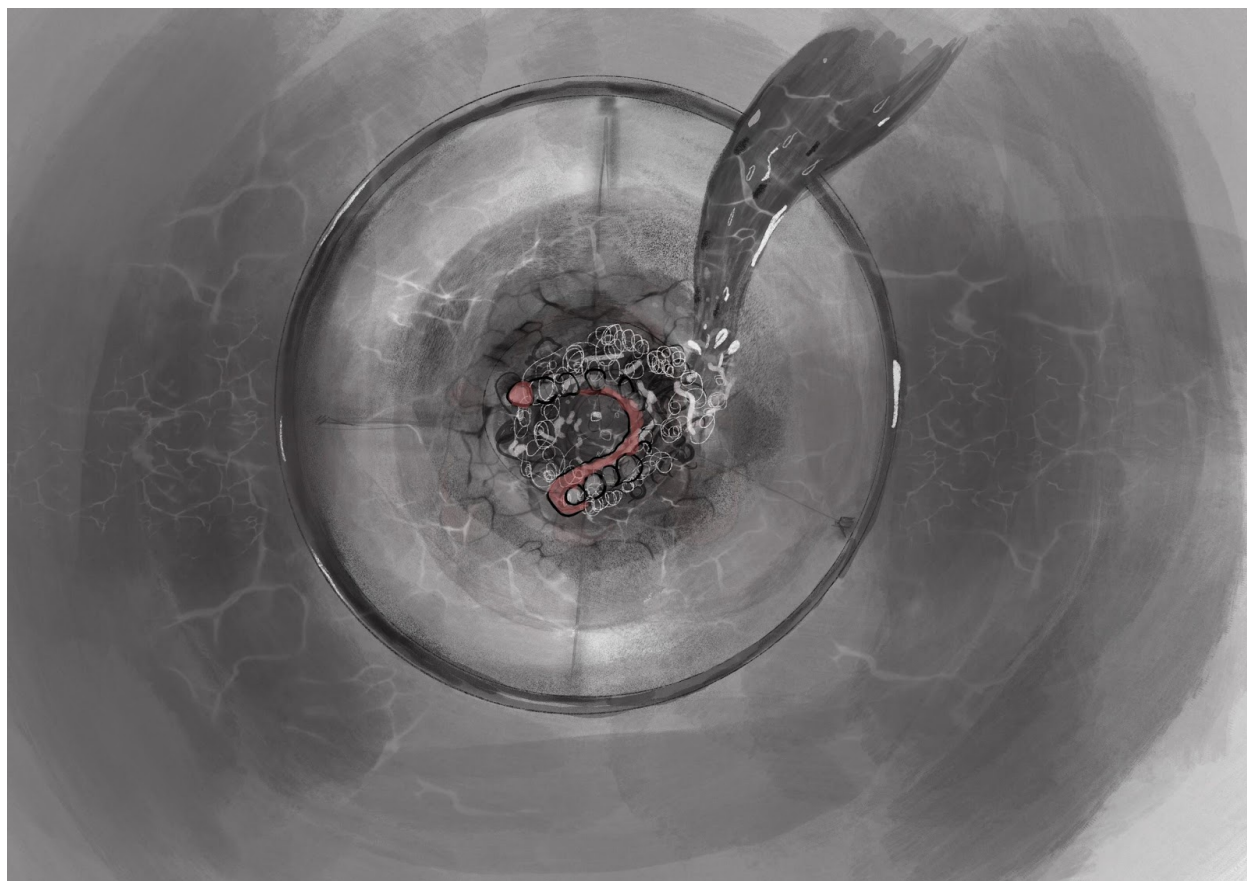


Video *Untitled*, 2020

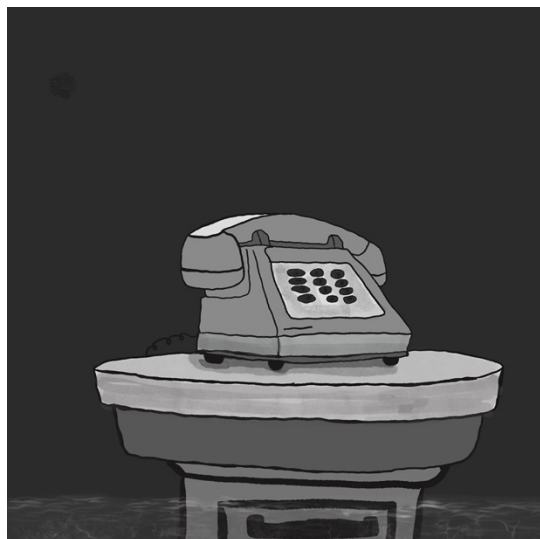
In the video work *Untitled*, I created fragmented animations that accompanied my own oral storytelling actions. I used my voice to speak from a place of specificity and intimacy. In the video, there are frequent moments of pure blackness which allows the viewer to focus on the words being spoken. Visual fragments stitched together images related to themes of the everyday, strangeness, a sense of memory, time, precarity, uncanny, spaces, and also specific moments.

In the video, I am trying to speak to the temporality and intangibility of memory. The video was projected roughly over 6 ft in an enclosed space to allow the viewer to feel immersed in the visuals.





*Video Untitled, 2020*



*Video Untitled, 2020*



*Video Untitled, 2020*



Video *Untitled*, 2020

***Archive III:***

*New Haven, Memories keep us afloat, Rain neva yet fall a one man door*

*New Haven*

Natural disasters and their destructive forces are not without historical parallels. Hurricanes are a natural part of life, although considered to be the "formidable enemy" and "principal dread" of colonists."<sup>6</sup> The Caribbean region has had an impactful history with tropical storms and hurricanes and their influence has shaped the perception of the physical environment. The hurricanes create a shared common experience that connects the region. As a result, I became curious about specific sites. The United States as a site, Virginia as a site, Richmond as a

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<sup>6</sup> Mulcahy, Matthew. Essay. In *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783*, 11–11. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.



site. I was then intrigued to think about the Caribbean as a site, Jamaica as a site. Is there an equivalent to the Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps in the Caribbean?<sup>7</sup> Is there something synonymous? I found what is called stratification. Social Stratification in the contemporary system of inherited inequality is originated from historical colonial and plantation slavery.<sup>8</sup>

The racial-color stratification system in the Caribbean exists to distinguish and rank individuals based on various categories. The first was ranked by ascriptive color/ physical criteria, the second being a person's objective economic status, occupation, lifestyle, and education. Lastly, the "closer the individual is to being white, the higher the social status"<sup>9</sup>. June Eyton speaks about how the social hierarchy is stratified into three strata: Upper class, Middle class, and lower class. Historically, "the three-tier system consisted of whites, coloured, and negroes" respectively.<sup>10</sup> Poverty and racial disparities are results of cumulative institutionalized neglect and structures that have been inherited from slavery and colonial systems.

This disparity is visible through precarity. Water in my case becomes the producer of precarity, it made the disparity between my family and everyone else more visible. It highlighted the ways

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<sup>7</sup> PhD., Bruce Mitchell. "HOLC 'Redlining' Maps: The Persistent Structure of Segregation and Economic Inequality " NCRC." NCRC, December 18, 2018. <https://nrc.org/holc/>.

<sup>8</sup> Eyton, June E. "Social Stratification in Jamaica: a Historical Perspective (1655-1970)." *Carleton University Research Virtual Environment*, 1892. <https://curve.carleton.ca/67f0a7af-5506-4326-aadf-c97de9bea817>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

the system was set up to fail families like mine. Water made me see clearly what my family's economic status. It made me see how precarious our lives were.

Precarity resembled boarded up windows caused by water damage we weren't able to fix, lack of roads, months without electricity because there wasn't any money to pay the electric bill, feeling ashamed to have friends come over because of the area I lived in. Precarity looked like talking to my mother on the phone for years, not knowing what she looked like on the other end of the phone. Precarity, for my family, looked a lot different from my sister's friends, or even my friends. It made us aware of our displacement and stagnation.

Natural disasters affect everyone, however, if anything, they reveal inequality. One of the main visual contributing factors is the lack of maintenance of critical public services and infrastructures. Whether it's the levees in New Orleans, the gullies and drainage systems in Jamaica, or the black low-income communities on the peripheral in almost every city across the world, the public services are "usually viewed as expenses that need to be minimized rather than essential investments"<sup>11</sup> In *New Haven*, the metaphor for flooding is being acted out physically in the printing process. Through oversaturating the Xerox paper with acetone and gamsol, adding weight and pressure to the paper in order to create an impression. During a flood, the body is capable of surviving, resilient, similar to the paper. Paper can be molded, put under immeasurable pressure, and still maintain its material integrity.

Aesthetically, the prints reflect trauma, the tears, the tapes, watermarks, the process of how it's made. The transfer print technique uses the grid to accumulate an image, the presence,

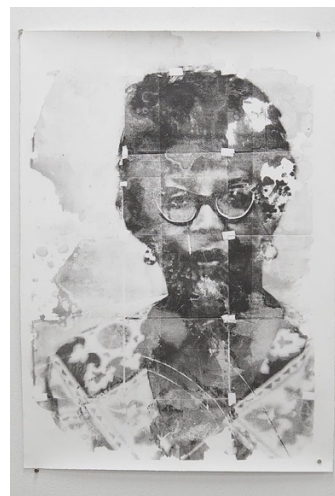
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<sup>11</sup> Hartman, Chester W., and Gregory D. Squires. Essay. In *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, 5–5. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

and absence, different kinds of erasure. The materiality is an echo of the flood-damaged family photographs I have in my possession. Little drips, pooling, the way things are compressed, produces material and aesthetic quality that is embedded in the process of the printing that gets at navigating through memory. Interruptions.



*Yvonne*, New Haven Series, 2020,  
solvent transfer on archival paper, 30" x 44".



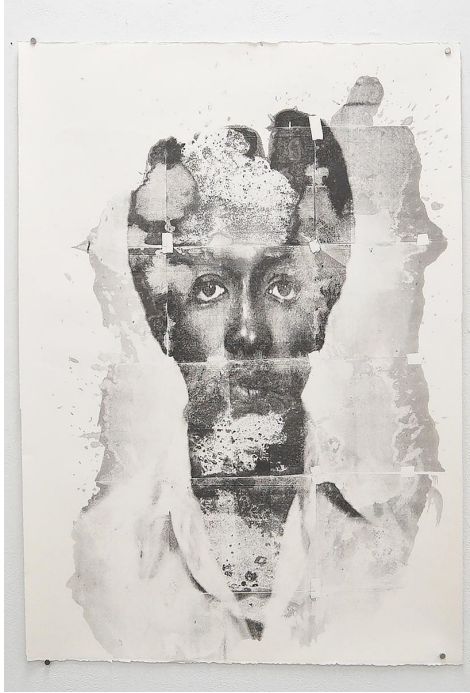
*G*, New Haven Series, 2020, solvent transfer on archival  
paper, 30" x 44"



*Jockey*, New Haven, 2020,  
solvent transfer on archival paper," 30 x 44".



*Frass*, New Haven, 2020,  
solvent transfer on archival 30" x 44" paper, 30" x 44"



*Wayne, New Haven, 2020,*  
archival solvent transfer on archival paper, 30 x44



*Merna, New Haven, 2020,* solvent transfer on  
paper, 30" x 44"

*Memories keep us afloat*

In *The Wake: Being and Blackness* Christina Sharpe writes that "They, we, inhabit knowledge that the Black body is the sign of immi/a/nent death". She introduces accounts of destruction, violence, and trauma on black bodies.

"In New Orleans, Louisiana, the Black displaced of Hurricane Katrina held in deplorable conditions in the Superdome, continue to be in a holding pattern, unable "Superdome, continue to be in a holding pattern, unable to return, unable to "move on," as the city remakes itself without them." <sup>12</sup>

These accounts are not unique to the context of the United States. I am reminded of numerous accounts of similar narratives I've heard and seen after hurricanes and storms in the

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<sup>12</sup> Sharpe, Christina. Essay. In *the Wake on Blackness and Being*, 138–39. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2016.

Caribbean. I see these similarities in circumstances as results of colonial legacies and systems that surpass geographic locations. In my work I question the social hierarchy of postcolonial spaces, working-class cultures, sadness, and the employment of storytelling as a tool to elevate those who have been deemed invisible/un-visible as a result of inherited colonial social structures. I am reminded of the words of Edouard Glissant

"What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the belly of the boat. For, in your poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, a boat does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. "It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under the sentence of death."<sup>13</sup>

I use the refrigerator in several works - as a motif, pointing to a kind of floatation device. In *Memories keeps us afloat* I use the refrigerator as a precarious floatation device tethered to an echo of itself by a rope. This reference originated from a memory of seeing two black men during a flood transforming an old, rusted refrigerator into a raft. I'm interested in the material not only as a metaphor for survival, mobility, and refuge but also as an iconic, intimate object that has familiar resonance. Sound also plays a key part in the composition, as it is the only piece that has audio emitting from it. The instability, spontaneity and uncertainty of the functionality of the refrigerator created dissonance with the sound coming from its motor.

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<sup>13</sup> Sharpe, Christina. Essay. In *the Wake on Blackness and Being*, 141. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2016.



*Memories keep us afloat*, 2020, mixed media installation, variable dimensions



*Memories keep us afloat*, 2020, mixed media installation, variable dimensions





*Memories keep us afloat*, 2020, mixed media installation, variable dimensions

The unpredictable nature of the sound going from a jarring whirring to a low hum transforms the viewer's experience. It creates a kind of spatial awareness. Flashbacks are often triggered by the senses. This feature functions as an auditory sensation that is tethered to flashbacks. With the installation, I try to create a moment for the viewer to participate on a deeper level.

*Rain neva yet fall a one man's door*

In Jamaica, *Rain neva fall a one man door* is a popular proverb that describes the empathy around an individual's situation.<sup>14</sup> Throughout my life, I've spent a lot of time in communities that exist on the peripheral. These communities, along with the residents who live there, are already predisposed to socio-spatial vulnerability. In *The Wake: Being and Blackness*, Christina Sharpe discusses how trauma on black bodies, especially women and children has continuously and consistently been a part of the visual public archive through its circulation. This is inherited from slavery.

"Black women and children continue to be cast as less-than-human victims and agents of "natural" disasters, whether in the aftermath of the 2010 Haitian earthquake, a boat sinking during a perilous journey, or Hurricane Katrina. On October 29, 2012, on Staten Island, New York, Glenda Moore looked for and was refused shelter during Hurricane Sandy." <sup>15</sup>

Sharpe goes on to assert the ways representation of "blackness, death and multiple "commonsense" representations of Black maternity conflates with the black childhood and violence." Flood victim interviews point to this inquiry in my works. During my investigation, I have found that these videos and images, which depict people of color or individuals from working-class communities, are circulated through the media in their most vulnerable moments despite geographics.

*Rain neva yet fall a one man's door* is a mixed media installation that consists of decorative grills, cinder blocks, a shelf with small pieces of jewelry, and a TV playing a collaged

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<sup>14</sup> "Rain neva yet fall a one man's door"- a Jamaican proverb that essentially translates to whatever happens to someone else can also happen to you. This philosophy fuels the research and the way I think about empathy and the stories of disenfranchised black people.

<sup>15</sup> Sharpe, Christina. Essay. In *the Wake on Blackness and Being*, 152. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2016.



video. I am pulling scenes from Lisa Harewood's film *Auntie* - a short film that explores the effect of migration on those who leave their home countries and those who are left behind, along with found footage from interviews, social media posts, and animated internet news.



*Rain neva yet fall a one man door*, 2020, mixed media installation

The installation utilizes various strategies such as collecting, collaging, delaying movement, and the strategic removal/placement of audio. I examine the dynamics and problematics around how we consume images, especially those that show black bodies' trauma and vulnerability. I am also interested in how desensitizing them through parodies, humor, and a digital simulation is also an act of violence and exploitation. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in the Nineteenth-Century America* Sadiya Hartman speak about the spectacle of black terror and how we are called to witness these exhibitions and the frequency of

their iteration. She uses Fredrick Douglas's traumatic witnessing of his Aunt's beating as the subject for her argument.

"I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated. The casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body...Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity-the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances-and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering".<sup>16</sup>

In the same way, I am interested in setting the stage for similar questions: How do we participate in witnessing acts? Who is witnessing? What does it mean for those who have been seen as systematically powerless to employ the tool of storytelling to perform their value? I'm interested in the notion of space, more specifically, personal space. By collaging both fictional and non-fictional digital archives, I am creating a space for internationalization, a point of reflection. The reality of the person and them being vulnerable to the gaze of the camera and the avatar that's fake, is a strategy used by the media outlet as a kind of ethical solution to that vulnerability.

I use the decorative grills to speak to the significance of place. The grills are a part of the verandah architecture of residential houses in the Caribbean. A verandah is a " place for surveillance, for keeping a watch on the changing landscape and on the people who come and go".<sup>17</sup> I am reminded of walking the streets of my community seeing neighbors sitting on their verandah conversing, playing dominoes, and engaging in other leisure activities.

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<sup>16</sup> Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection, Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Hudson, Brian J. 2006. "The Caribbean Veranda: A study of its function as revealed in Jamaican Literature." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*.

The architecture of the grills function like the structures of the solvent transfer prints creating a kind of grid and transparency. I am interested in vulnerability and navigating the paradox of the inside/outside.



*Rain neva yet fall a one man door*, 2020, mixed media installation

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*Archive IV: Untitled- boy a big balla, Two Generations, Soul System: I say a little prayer, Wall:*

*False sense of Security*

*Untitled - boy a big balla*

I have been using acetone to make solvent transfer prints in several works. In *New Haven* I began incorporating gamsol as an additive solvent, which when mixed with the toner and acetone, creates a distortion of the image. I observed how the distortion of the images began to echo a water damaged aesthetic, and how they start to lose and blur their features and overall identity. The borders of the paper juxtaposed with the fluidity of the image and textures felt restrictive. I began reflecting on the nature of images and its relationship to sites and I felt the next gesture was to go beyond the paper directly onto the wall.



*Untitled - boy a big balla* , 2021, solvent transfer on archival paper, variable dimension





*Untitled - boy a big balla* , 2021,  
solvent transfer on archival paper, variable dimension



*Untitled - boy a big balla* , 2021,  
solvent transfer on archival paper, variable dimension

As soon as the print is broken free of the border of the paper it becomes something more expansive. After it was fixed to the wall, I began thinking about Sandra Brewster's work and how she explores the effects of migration and movement. I am specifically thinking about her *Blur* series and her decision to blur the images as a way of representing individuals as layered and complex.

"*Blur* plays with and was inspired by all of the interpretations I mentioned: [how the works] explored movement and referenced migration and how the effects of migration may influence and inspire the formation of one's identity here—whether the person was born elsewhere or is the child of a person born somewhere else. The intention of the blur is also to represent individuals as layered and complex: to not see people solely in one dimension; [and to be] aware that a person is made up of [both] who they are tangibly, and so many other intangible things, which includes their experiences with time and location—whether they access this on their own or through generational storytelling."<sup>18</sup>



Sandra Brewster, *Blur*, gel transfer prints, 2020, Art Gallery of Ontario

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<sup>18</sup> Price, Neil, View recent articles by Neil Price, Christina Sharpe, Yaniya Lee, Lillian O'Brien Davis, Adrienne Huard, and Megan MacLaurin. "The Legacy of Presence." Canadian Art. Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://canadianart.ca/interviews/the-legacy-of-presence/>.

The complexity of identity and storytelling as a tool for creating an archive of those experiences influences the way I think about my own archive and the labour intensive printing process the prints undergo beyond the way they are presented to the viewer. The printing process remained the same, printing the image as 8.5 x 11 inch Xerox prints and reconstructing using cellophane tape. The scale of this final print expanded the previous transfers in an attempt to create a more immersive experience for the viewer. I began playing with the idea of blurring or erasing using an electric sander, I erased sections of the image on the wall, making it more and more blurred and obscured. Sanding the print on the drywall created different kinds of textures, both as a result of the fibers of the paper but also the layers of paint that the sander exposed beneath the current layer of white paint on the wall.



Installation shot of *Two Generations*, solvent transfer on paper mounted on the wall.

I began contemplating the concept of color and how I may use that as a background for the prints on the wall. It reminded me of how Jamaicans engaged in the process of uplifting the facade of our houses during the Christmas season. The most popular paint brand is Berger Paint. Berger paint created a line of paint which is more economically friendly for its consumers.

"A value for money, matte, water-based latex emulsion paint with a perfectly flat, smooth finish that will give beauty and protection to interior and exterior walls in shaded areas. Magicote Flat Emulsion is extremely easy to use and its tropical formulation does have fungal and algal properties. Ideal for rentals, short-term use and the budget conscious shopper." <sup>19</sup>

"Morning glory", "mango squash", "teenage pink", and "green grotto", are the names of some of the paint colors in Berger Paint's Magicote Flat Emulsion palette. Affordable, easy to use, are some of the descriptors used to market the line of paint. These colors can be seen on walls, grills, and fences in many low-income communities in Jamaica. In my Observation, the colors available are visually seen as a signifier of class and social status.



Image showing the exterior of a house located in Duhaney Park, Kingston, Jamaica.

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<sup>19</sup> "Berger Magicote Flat Emulsion", 2014.

<https://www.bergerpaintscaribbean.com/barbados/product-details?pid=373>.





## BERGER PAINTS IN THE CARIBBEAN



### BERGER PAINTS JAMAICA LIMITED

Map showing the regions in the Caribbean where Berger paint is located.



Berger Paint Jamaica Ltd Magicote Flat Emulsion Palette chart



Image showing the exterior of a house located in Duhaney Park, Kingston, Jamaica.



Image showing the exterior of a house located in Denham Town, Kingston, Jamaica



Images of buildings on W. Marshall St & W. Broad Street, Richmond, VA.

I observed spaces in Richmond, and they are unlike spaces in the Caribbean. The color palette of the buildings is often monochromatic in values and hue. I view the paint color disparity in the Caribbean as a signifier of a particular socio-economic class standing. This visibility influenced my decision to incorporate some of the colors from the Berger Magicote palette with the wall prints I make. Colors also create an opportunity for layering, and also a marker of difference in spaces. This difference acts as an indicator of unfamiliar space in the gallery depending on the spectator and their familiarity of Caribbean spaces and architecture.



*Soul System: I Say a Little Prayer*

The impulse of using quotidian objects is tied to my upbringing in Jamaica where resources were not always accessible and that was reflected through the reuse of objects and materials. I have used the refrigerator in several works. Initially, I was interested in the form the refrigerator had taken as a floatation device. This form compelled me to recreate it however, as the process and the research develops, so has my interests and intentions. In *Soul System*, I am engaging in the act of repurposing with an objective and purpose by transforming a quotidian object into a sound sculpture that references the ubiquitous sound systems that originated in Jamaica.

I began thinking about the street as a site. The sound system and the street go hand in hand for me. In almost every low-income community, lies a "sound man" who on a Friday night will "string up a sound" to play for the night. I have memories of sitting on the verandah with my sister and grandparents, talking, sharing stories while watching the neighbor "string up the sound" getting ready for the dance that he's expecting to happen later that evening.



Image of a sound system in a yard in Jamaica

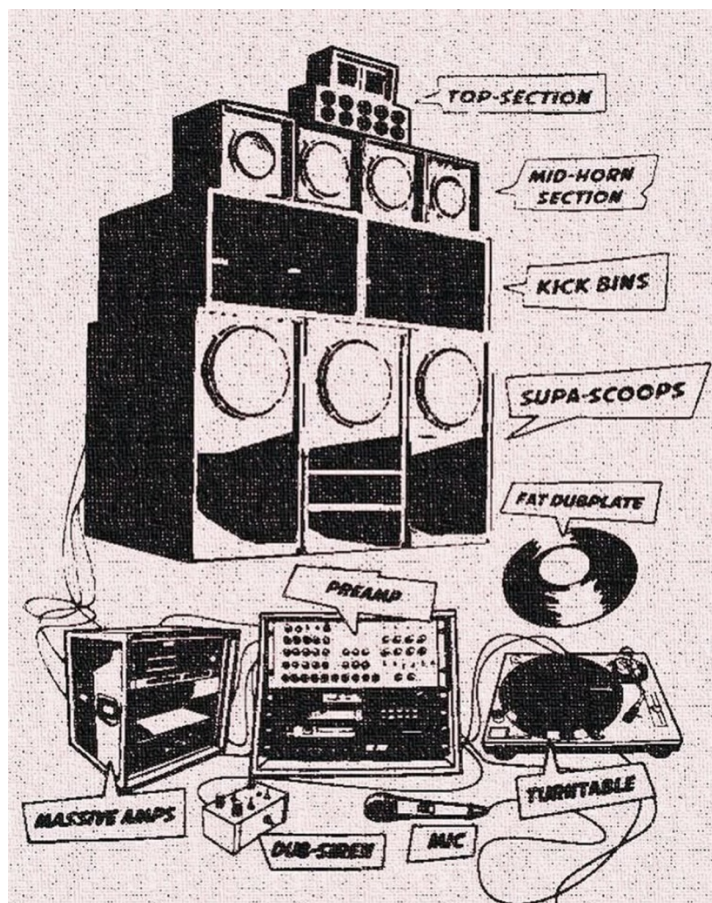


Illustration of the sound system components

According to Louis Chude Sokei, the word sound in the Jamaican context has a multiplicity of meanings.

"To describe a "sound" via a sound system, is to define sound by way of what I would call a cultural appa-ratus--in this case, one that requires, deejays, selectors, engineers, producers, people who build up the sound and disseminate it through speakers or across record shop counters; and of course, people who follow, criticize and consume the product of that "sound." Sound in Jamaica means process, community, strategy and product. It functions as an aesthetic space within which the members of the national or transnational Jamaican community imagine themselves. This is an imagined community which, unlike the one mapped out by Benedict Anderson's influential Imagined Communities, operates not by the technologies of literacy, but through the cultural economy of sound and its technological apparatus which is distinctly oral."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ryyänen, Max. "louis chude-sokei, dr. satan's echo chamber: reggae, technology and the diaspora process." popular inquiry. popular inquiry, october 28, 2018.



Sokei makes visible the nature of the sound system as a place for expression and community.

The idea of sound and community influenced me to create my version of sound system from the refrigerator -repurposed material. I am interested in the use of everyday resonant objects as a means of embodying my relationship with the world. The use of everyday objects have influenced the visual vocabulary of a number of artists such as Nari Ward, who uses these materials to explore his relationship to the natural and material world. Ward's practice and processes have influenced the ways I am thinking about materials, archives and histories.

In the process of making, I am thinking about objects that have already had a history and visually have traces of use. I am also pulling from the testimonies of black people in the United States and in the Caribbean - victims of systematic abuse and neglect. This allows me to use the inherent histories as an entry point for the viewer.



**Studio image**

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<https://www.popularinquiry.com/blog/2018/9/12/louis-chude-sokei-dr-satans-echo-chamber-reggae-technology-and-the-diaspora-process>.



### Studio image

Based on the research and the process of repurposing these refrigerators into speakers, I am reminded of other sounds and vibrations that affect spaces and objects in close proximities; a memory of being at my grandparents' house in Kingston. The neighbor had set up their sound system, playing music for the community and the vibration caused all of my grandmother's most valuable plates and precious trinkets in the breakfront to rattle. This vibration reminds me of what William Henry describes in the text *While nuff ah right and rahbit; we write and arrange'*:

*deejay lyricism and the transcendental use of the voice in alternative public spaces in the UK, as a sonic space of bass and beats.*<sup>21</sup>



Installation images of *Soul System: I Say a Little Prayer*

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<sup>21</sup> Webb, Jack, Rod Westmaas, Kaladeen Maria del Pilar, and William Tantam. Essay. In *Memory, Migration and (De)Colonisation in the Caribbean and Beyond*, 58–58. London: Institute for Latin American Studies, 2020.

In *Soul System: I Say a Little Prayer* I used old refrigerators, and household plates, which I painted using selected colors from the Berger Magicote palette, as a part of the composition. In doing so I try to make a visual connection between class and value while expanding the original memory and associations of the plates. The sculpture is also accompanied by a collaged soundtrack. I contemplate the transcendental nature of reggae music and sounds systems. I returned to the video archive of Flood victim interviews I collected and found them quite unnerving. One of the videos depict a white, female journalist interviewing a Black mother with her young daughter. The interview took place at the Houston Convention Centre in Houston, Texas after Hurricane Harvey. The mother was documented expressing her anger, towards the journalist describing the unthoughtful and inappropriate behavior lacking empathy for her vulnerable circumstances.

I am reminded of the words of Christina Sharpe's *In the wake: Blackness and Being*. "Where is the breaking point, the breath, the pause, where the circulation, production, and reception of images of Black suffering and, importantly, the pleasure in them are concerned?" Sharpe offers a solution on how to make Black life visible. She writes about Black annotation and Black redaction.

"Black annotation and Black redaction are ways to make Black life visible, if only momentarily, through the optic of the door. Black annotation and reduction meet the Black anagrammatical and the failure of words and concepts to hold in and on Black flesh."<sup>22</sup>

I try to participate in the act of Black annotation and Black redaction through the act of deconstructing and amplifying the voices and testimonies of the disenfranchised Black lives in

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<sup>22</sup> Sharpe, Christina. Essay. In *the Wake on Blackness and Being*, 227. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2016.



those interviews. This amplification compounded with the sound system not only creates a deeper sense of togetherness but also demonstrates the shared disparate realities.



### Studio Image

While listening to these fragmented testimonies, I began to feel depressed because of the emotional outcry of these people. I asked myself how can I bring this into another emotional space? I am reminded of my earliest memory of my mother playing her Aretha Franklin cassettes on Sunday mornings. I remember the joy that radiated from the house and decided to include this into the soundtrack. The testimonies, various atmospheric sounds along with Aretha Franklin's *I say a little prayer* is played in a randomized sequence from the sound system. I am interested in transcending a sense of sorrow.



*Wall: False Sense of Security*

I grew up in a community that was considered a flood-prone area. It was historically neglected by the government and results in frequent floods annually. This increases the vulnerability and socio-spatial inequalities of the community and its residents. The poor service infrastructure offers limited protection during hurricanes, storms, or even heavy rainfall. As a result, during the Atlantic Hurricane season, June 1st - November 30th, residents in the community would go through a period of preparation. This often included: purchasing sandbags, cinder blocks to mount the furniture on, and stacking up on kerosene oil. I reference these actions of preparation in the ways I construct the work.



**Studio Image:** *Wall: False Sense of Security*



Installation Image: *Wall: False Sense of Security*

Scale is important as a way of immersing the viewer, inviting them to physically move around engaging in the act of seeing in many ways. I am reminded of Karyn Olivier's installation *Fortified* that was showcased in the exhibition , *Everything That's Alive Moves*, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia.





Karyn Olivier, *Fortified*, Bricks, used clothing and steel, 15 ft x 30 ft x 30 inches; 457.2 x 914.4 x 76.2 cm, 2018-2020

I am interested in the way she is manipulating materials and the physical relationship between the quotidian and history. In an article titled *Karyn Olivier Subverts the Formal Seriousness of Monuments* published in the *Hyperallergic*, Erica Cardwell writes:

"History insists that we understand walls as evidence of ideas of separation, as racist and xenophobic protections against those deemed outsiders. To that end, Olivier is clear: "Fortified" is not a typical wall. To experience the work is to ponder life — its spaciousness and its liminality — via bright layers of protruding sleeves and socks. Like many of her works, it is an analysis of monuments, and a sharp contrast to traditional conceptions of these objects."<sup>23</sup>

Olivier uses the gesture of laying the clothing between the bricks. I am interested in this gesture and applied this similar gesture to my own work. However, in *Wall: False Sense of Security*

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<sup>23</sup> Cardwell, Erica. "Karyn Olivier Subverts the Formal Seriousness of Monuments." *Hyperallergic*, May 6, 2020. <https://hyperallergic.com/562001/karyn-olivier-subverts-the-formal-seriousness-of-monuments/>.

I used the clothing to establish the relationship between the body. The sculpture also consists of cinder blocks and used children's toys sitting at the base of the wall and some tucked inside some of the cinder blocks. I am using familiar strategies of using cinder blocks as a material because of its resonant nature with this sense of protection and security. I am interested in the use of raw cinder blocks and the ways they become symbols of class.

### *Conclusion*

I offer different ways of thinking about archives and the significance of creating my own archive to contend with my position in the world. I make works that acknowledge and offer space to contemplate the reality of disenfranchised Black people. Derek Walcott writes about the function and contributions of poetry in his essay *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*:

Poetry, which is perfection's sweat but which must seem as fresh as the raindrops on a statue's brow, combines the natural and the marmoreal; it conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and the present, if the past is the sculpture and the present the beads of dew or rain on the forehead of the past. There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery.

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Walcott articulates how poetry allows for creating new perspectives from the fragments, pain, history to establish self-discovery. I am interested in this notion of creating new language and perspectives from past trauma and hardships. The archive is that place where lessons can be learnt, identities preserved, and new identities formed. This act of preservation is important especially when an archive has been destroyed or does not exist. In my work I try to use those

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<sup>24</sup> Walcott, Derek. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1992." NobelPrize.org, December 7, 1997. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/lecture/>.

gaps between fragments of memory to create new language, envisioning a future where Black people have transcended disenfranchisement and systematic inequality.



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