

Arcadia Missa ÷

PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES PRESS

The Trembling Procession: An Interview with Phoebe Collings-James

by Nat Marcus // Nov. 28, 2023

This article is part of our feature topic [Myth](#).

In a 2014 essay, Paul B. Preciado writes: “Every word in our language contains, as if rolled in on itself, a ball of time made up of historical actions. While the prophet and the politician try to make words sacred by covering up their historicity, the profane task of restoring sacred words to daily usage falls to philosophy and poetry: undoing the knots of time, wrestling words away from the conquerors in order to restore them to public space, where they can be the object of a collective re-signification.” An invitation to this re-signifying process has often been issued by the works of Phoebe Collings-James. The media may vary—from interleaved sound works of poems and field recordings to ceramic chest-plates gouged with words and inscriptions of traditional pottery motifs—but the playful imperative remains. And much like Preciado’s thinking of language as a “ball of time,” Collings-James has referred to clay as a material with memory, returning to contours and forms that adhere to its prior shaping, even after being fired.

Her most recent exhibition of ceramics at Arcadia Missa, ‘bun babylon; a heretics anthology,’ is animated with a lineage of Caribbean spiritual and political resistance. Through six serial works bearing titles with the weight of mythic archetypes (The Infidel, The Cypher, The Preacher, etc.) a tradition is at once honored, respirationed and re-synthesised (and desecralised, made wavy in doing so).



Phoebe Collings-James: ‘bun babylon; a heretics anthology,’ installation view at Arcadia Missa, London // Photo by Josef Konczak, courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London

Nat Marcus: Your pieces called ‘The Infidel’—which were shown in the Arcadia Missa show—have a quality of being open-mouthed, and inasmuch as they are resonant and hollow vessels (one of them is even holding a bell), they seem capable of amplifying sound. With all that is going on in Palestine and Israel right now, it seems like people are starting to become infidels in the eyes of the art industry at the moment. In Germany, there is a growing issue in regard to which mouthpieces and voices are willing or allowed to say what. I know you’ve been involved in protesting for a ceasefire. What does this figure of ‘The Infidel’ mean to you right now?

Phoebe Colling-James: I think this moment is going to continue to reveal the ways that the art industry operates as a kind of vile satire. Museums and collectors will gobble up an artist's work that discusses decolonisation and liberation, so long as they don't have to do anything about it. I know galleries are getting calls on a daily basis from collectors who are furious about artists vocally supporting a ceasefire. And it seems like a sick joke, because three years ago everyone was posting a black square.

The show's title signals to Babylon and the idea of a heretic, an outsider, someone who speaks at or into a crumbling system. Maybe it's my way of processing the unrelenting violence, pressure and dystopia of this world. The final month of the show was throughout October, which was a chilling time to think about these works that articulate a spiritual position of resistance. 'The Infidel,' in particular, is speaking out, but it is still a spiritual figure—someone who has been displaced from a dogma, and not only a protestor or someone speaking truth to power. If someone doesn't follow suit with certain State-led ideas of spirituality, they are often bound to be cut out, or cut themselves out, of an acceptable mode of society. The rounded bodies of these pieces suggest that they could roll over, show different sides, be in movement as a mode of defying static, unyielding positions.

NM: The idea of movement carries in the layout of the show, as well. At your last solo in the Camden Arts Centre there was a mix of wall-mounted, hanging and grounded pieces, for instance, but this exhibition really feels like a procession. And there's a sense of kinetics there. Maybe because of 'The Guardian' horse figures, it reminds me of ancient Roman funerary rites. The line between mythic and mortal was very porous in these ritual choreographies.



Phoebe Collings-James: 'bun babylon; a heretics anthology,' installation view at Arcadia Missa, London // Photo by Josef Konczak, courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London

PCJ: There was always an intention for it to be a procession or parade, and for it to be seen in multiple ways. It could be a death march, a marching to war, a carnival procession. There is a sense of a gathering of characters, of entities, that are going to create something through the force of them being together. That's why it felt important to have these supporting characters like the pieces of torn tree bark, slate and cargo net—these things that could bind the ritual.

NM: Do you have a spiritual practice of your own?

PCJ: I do have a spiritual practice, but not a religious practice. And I'm often trying to find ways of articulating that within my work. I bring in many references to Rastafarian and Jamaican music—artists like Midnite and Ranking Ann and Barrington Levy (whose song 'Black Roses' figured into 'bun babylon'). This revolutionary music is deeply spiritual as well, which I've been thinking about in regard to myth-making. Even scriptural texts are meant to continue to grow with us, make themselves available for reference and reassessment. It comes back to the idea of movement, and how we work with a spiritual or unseen realm to create and understand ourselves through engaging with myth.

NM: It has to do somehow with these very charged, often-instrumentalised relations between history, myth and memory, and how certain structures of authority try to calcify their connections. You are often sampling, drawing in many different strands and fragments of discourse from various places, and then metabolising it all through an artistic process. To me, that is a way of refurbishing myths, keeping them limber or relevant for us to make sense of our lives. The works in 'bun babylon' are described in the press release as "imbued with the potential for dissent." When you work on these pieces, do they become imbued simply through your process, or is there a spiritual aspect of giving something over to them? Or are they one and the same thing?

PCJ: They're not necessarily one and the same. Maybe it's best to foreground by saying there are certain moments that I particularly connect with my work. Some days in the studio feel a bit administrative, but then there are these quieter moments when I retreat into myself, simultaneously connecting to the concepts and ideas of the work, the material and the firing process of the kiln. And what follows is a choreography—bringing these pieces together into relation—which reminds me of working with things like tarot.



Phoebe Collings-James: 'The subtle rules the dense,' 2021, glazed ceramic, 57 x 39 x 14 cm // Photo by Rob Harris, courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London

NM: There are multiple registers of alchemy going on, from the discursive and cultural to the physical firing of the ceramics. And, alchemically, the show at Arcadia Missa feels very tarot, as it stages this parade of archetypes.

PCJ: I'm often thinking about the way these archetypes shift. The horse, the preacher, the bell and the bow harp: like tarot cards, they can all have different faces, varied meanings in relation to your own life. The reading of the cards is what creates the myth or instruction. This consideration extends to my own life and the myths that run through it.



Phoebe Collings-James: 'The Guardian,'
2023, stoneware ceramic, 56.5 x 33 cm //
Photo by Josef Konczak, courtesy of the
artist and Arcadia Missa, London

A few weeks ago, my great aunt passed away and we recently had her funeral. My family is Jamaican, and they wear red or wrap red textiles around them for the ceremony, especially around babies, because that is understood to keep obeah away. It's a symbol of protection. I enjoy thinking about how the many symbolic meanings of something like a colour are collapsed and resurrected and shape-shift across cultures.

NM: You've sometimes spoken of a certain dichotomy between hardness and softness in your work, physically and sometimes emotionally. But then there is, of course, this discursive malleability that you are evoking through your work. It's akin to trembling thinking and archipelagic thinking, articulated by Glissant: there is a resistance to the stilling or hardening of meaning, an excitement with not necessarily the arbitrariness of these archetypes but the fact that their character only comes into being in relation to other things.

PCJ: I find that liberating, that you can build this whole world of meaning, and then take it apart and play with the pieces. It is why I speak about detritus, emotional and material detritus. I'm interested in the fragments and details of our lives. The mess. This gives us the potential for imagining and re-imagining what life could be, what being could be. And, materially, through exhibition-making, I work intuitively with restriction, to temper this mess and also evoke the kind of restraint that is necessary for my own survival. To take the figure of the horse: in relation to 'The Guardian' works, I was thinking a lot about the story of the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse, in the 'Book of Revelations.' And in considering what these riders were supposed to represent—war, famine, death and conquest—I started thinking about their horses as potentially unconsenting conduits for these huge ideas, which were also supposed to be spontaneous catastrophes. Those connections are vividly held within the material decisions for the form and surface of the works. However, in framing my language for the show, I choose to remove this reference—to simply call these horses 'Guardians'—and see where people's own imaginations and associative connections take them.

Vitrifying Freedom:

*Phoebe Collings-James
in conversation with Jareh Das*



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COLLAPSE & RESURRECTION

ARTIST
PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES

TEXT
JAREH DAS

Boy.Brother.Friend



Boy.Brother.Friend
Photography Rob Hann





Phoebe Collings-James: Jareh, I would like to hear you speak about the archive and opacity. I'm often suspicious of the idea of the archive, perhaps, because I often hear the phrase used with such certainty, and with the word "the" sounding so categoric and singular. However, with Ladi Kwali (1925-1984), the seminal Nigerian (Gwari) potter who created domestic and functional pots through traditional coiling, pinching and beating techniques and decorated them with distinct zoomorphic and geometric motifs, I find myself desperate for there to be more archive, particularly of her voice in all of this history. How do you feel about archives, especially in relation to your study of Kwali?

Jareh Das: Thank you, Phoebe. I really appreciate being asked this question. As you know, I've been working for a few years with Ladi Kwali's legacy and this formed the point of departure for my curated exhibition *Body Vessel Clay: Black Women Ceramics and Contemporary Art* which took place last year. There are several things about archives that bother me. There's this idea that the archive is some sort of god-of-all knowledge, as it were; that it must be representing truths because it's been collected and preserved in a certain way. But then we have to think about the kinds of archives that exist in terms of who created them, who they represent and what was the intention for preserving them? What kinds of

voices and histories have been included and left out for future generations. In relation to Ladi Kwali, the dominant archive for her contextualisation and historicization is Michael Cardew's archive, which, of course, comes with a colonial and patriarchal lens. So that's problematic in so many ways because you have this one voice that is telling you, "this is how it was", and "this is what matters," in terms of what he chose to document and what he felt was important to her narrative. These archives have now ended up in the V&A and Crafts Study Centre, which speak to specialist networks. On the flip side, I went to Nigeria earlier this year, and, for the last couple of years, I've been really trying to get a Nigerian perspective on Kwali's legacy. But this always directs me back to archives here in the UK, as not much is preserved or existing in her country of origin. I'm still on a long journey trying

"[R]esearch is all sorts of things. Research is oral traditions, research is lived experience, research is storytelling..."

to understand Kwali from a Nigerian perspective. And I feel that research is all sorts of things. Research is oral traditions, research is lived experience, research is storytelling, so these are ways I will also try to counter the issues

*The subtle rules of the house, 2021
Photography Rob Harris*



The middle rules the storm, 2021
Photography: Rob Harris

I have with working with archives and archives that have been lost. And this dominance of the archive as a sort of validation for research, can't be the only thing that we look at.

PCJ: It's so interesting to hear you speak about what is being preserved. Is archiving always a process of preserving something, an object or piece of knowledge or storytelling? What is the incomplete archive? What does that look like? What does it look like to reject an archive? And what about archive fever? Because I guess we already know that archives are always either a singular, or a group perspec-

"I've really been inspired by individuals and collectives creating spaces outside of institutions, particularly given that institutional reckoning never really happens and they usually remain the same"

tive reflecting a given moment, a time in history, or culture. The artists that I'm thinking about who are working with archives are ones who are trying to fill in holes or shift a perspective on a history that is already known from an archive or considering how their own work might be archived. And that definitely feels like it falls into the archive

fever framing. And I also wonder if what you said about the incomplete archive maybe also speaks to an idea of opacity. Especially thinking about Black artists in the UK, their relationship to the Black Atlantic and conversations around opacity and archive at the same time. I wonder about those tensions. And maybe some of these things you've brought up about things being incomplete and questioning what you're preserving? This is more a flurry of thoughts, and not necessarily a question!

JD: I'm also thinking about what you just said about archives representing a particular perspective, individual or collective, but

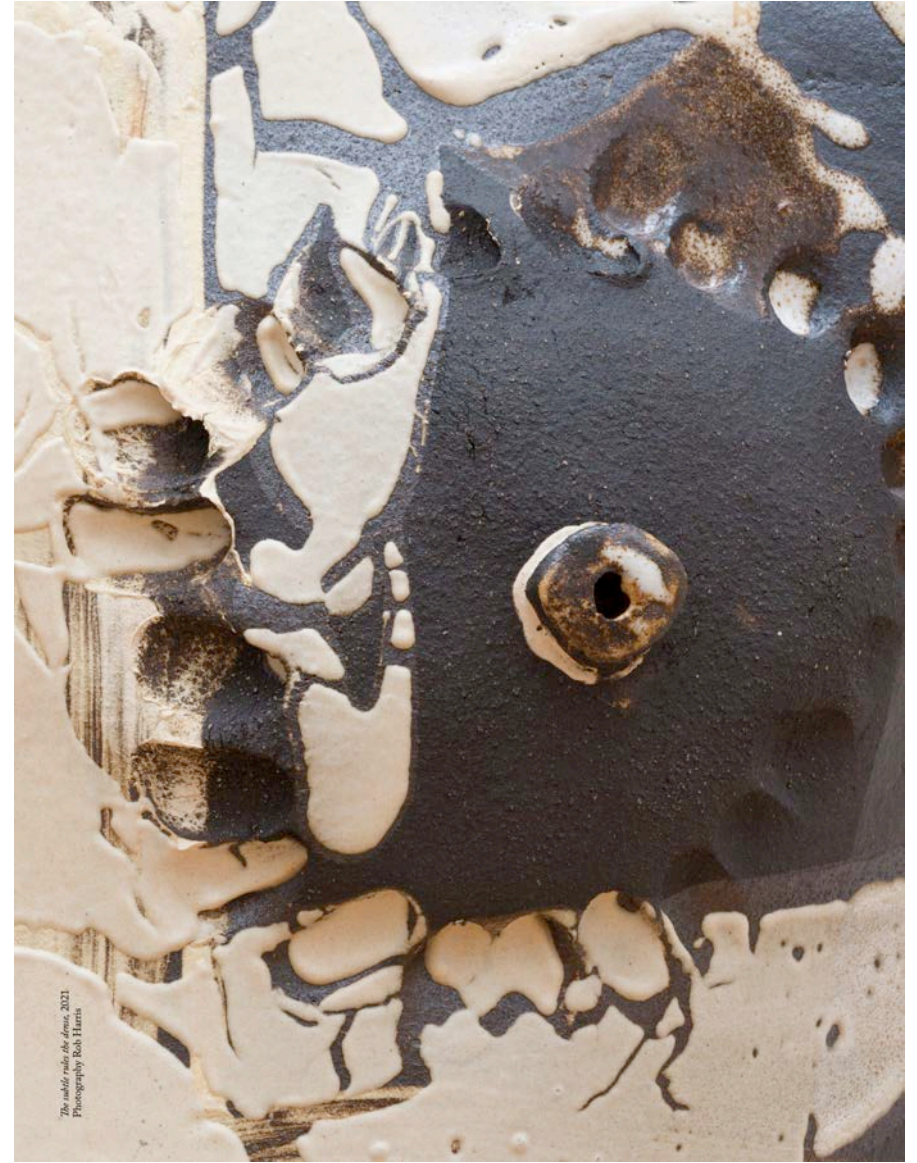
also how institutions play a critical role in deciding that these are important things to keep, and these are things that contribute to research. I think the more interesting artists who are working with archives like Onyeka Igwe, are sort of really untangling these tensions

of archives and speak to this notion of opacity within the archive. I think that their work is interesting as opposed to work that might be trying to validate its seriousness or importance by referencing such and such an archive, even though they might not be probing deep enough or asking the right questions. When you have an

archive like Ladi Kwali's, which isn't one per se, as she doesn't have one, but she's accounted for in Cardew's archive, it becomes fraught with difficulty, it's almost impossible as there are lots of gaps. How do you fill in those gaps? To counter this I am returning back to her hometown, Kwali, in Nigeria, and asking questions generations later to see if oral traditions can complete this quest to fully understand Ladi Kwali's legacy, from the people who knew her, from the people who perhaps have passed on a sense of who she was through familial lines.

I've just really been thinking about where we are at present, and just the events of the last couple of years, having this pandemic-limbo as well as a myriad of global upheavals. I've really been inspired by individuals and collectives creating spaces outside of institutions, particularly given that institutional reckoning never really happens and they usually remain the same. And there are more questions being asked about how – individually or collectively – we can think about the way practice feeds into communities; but also the realities of sustaining whatever it is you set up in this climate of uncertainty and financial precarity. So I was just thinking of how all of this sits with you in relation to Mudbelly and the ways you think about this community-led organisation building resilience and sustainability in uncertain times.

PCJ: I'm trying to remember the name of the artist who did all the Black Panther posters... Yes, it was Emory Douglas! The answer to your question really does start with Douglas and the Black Panther Party. With learning, many years ago now, about the 10 point program they created and the artwork that aided the understanding of their message. And more recently, something else that comes to mind, is the artist Simone Leigh's Free Peoples Medical Clinic. These projects and organising speak to Black resistance and they are key tenets of what has continued to influence me now for decades, but especially during times of uncertainty. I'm sure it's in one of Emory Douglas's famous posters for the Black Panther Party where there is a text along the lines of: "the state is not going to help us, we the people must fight for each other". It echoes Assatta Shakur saying we must love each other and support each other. I think this sentiment has been echoed by many and that's how I feel it needs to be at moments of resistance. Voting and participating in the political systems, like our local councils and party elections, are important, but I guess, in reality, the percentage of my time and energy that that takes up has to be minimal compared to community resistance. And when we say "community resistance," this could be, at times, something really intimate like caring for my family and friends or artistic peers, or the moments when I'm able to have the capacity to open that up in a wider way. The urgency for that, in the last few years just became even more important. And for some of those tenants



it really is about free education, free health care, and figuring out how to love and live with each other. Those are most important to me. And I think that being able to do the Mudbelly Teaches project was a huge part of that. I was thinking: How do I want to learn to be a better teacher, and hold space and facilitate this? And also, to

“Why is [it] that [...] this very sort of top-down version of history where [...] everything else that had to do with women in particular seems to be side-lined?”

be a better student of clay and ceramics. Who do I want to be learning with? Like, as my friend Elijah always says, who are you going to bring up with you? Who else you're going to help out? Also, obviously, Toni Morrison, saying, “this is not a grab bag candy game.” All of these vital words and thinking stay with me, and Mudbelly Teaches is a space for Black people, taught by Black ceramicists primarily in London, because that's my reach. But there will also be a couple of workshops in Leicester this year and potentially other places around the UK and maybe beyond. That's kind of my arm's reach, you know? I think not everything has to be sort of like this huge top down thing. I think some of the most successful organising and collective resistance we've seen

happens at the grassroots level, and I think that can translate to online spaces as well. In your speech at the opening of Body Vessel Clay in London, you shared that the beginning of your journey with Ladi Kwali's work started with your parents in Nigeria? I understand that was the beginning of the show experience and not the whole experience, but can you speak about the personal connections as part of academic research? I guess I'm thinking about the fact that sometimes academic research is produced and presented as if the author is invisible. But actually, I think about a sense of why the author finds it so urgent, without it being all about them, is actually quite important and interesting to know. And also, what it means to enter this work into academic and

art spaces in the UK, and how this question stretches across time?

JD: I was drawn to this research because it's a narrative on the extraordinary life of Ladi Kwali. As you know I'm Nigerian so it's also part of my heritage in some way. I guess also, because although I was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, I grew up in Nigeria, and came back to the UK as a teenager, there were lots of things that I came to later in life. In Nigerian secondary school, I wasn't taught about Kwali or about much art, history was mainly names and dates, and very fleeting. Then I had different experiences in the UK from doing my A-levels, to university,

or just talking to people. I began to find out things about Nigerian culture in a more expanded way from what I grew up with. I was asking myself, Why don't I know about this history? Why is it that just this very sort of top-down version of history where I was just learning mostly about important men, and the dates of when they did this, and everything else that had to do with women in particular seems to be sidelined. With Body Vessel Clay, coming to your question about bringing the personal and academic together, I don't really know how to be this sort of “good academic.” I'm just interested in doing research and presenting projects that are ethically responsible, sensitive to legacies of non-living artists and being very honest with the limitation of presenting a narrative based on limited information,

“[R]eal people, you know, real normal people need to be in spaces of academia to open it up and dismantle ivory towers”

and in this case the absence, of Ladi Kwali's voice. I wanted to honour her, not speak for her. I don't care if you're a professor or specialist in ceramics or art history, I want people who just come across the work and think, “okay, this is something that I'm interested in. I want to learn more.” I mean, I don't

know if it's always successful, but this is consciously at the back of my mind, actually. Because I feel like real people, you know, real normal people need to be in spaces of academia to open it up and dismantle ivory towers.

Pottery continues to be used by Black makers, in my view, as an art of resistance. We've seen it and it also speaks of their resilience within this field. There's examples from people like Magdalene Odundo, Simone Leigh, Doyle Lane, Bisila Noha, Shawanda Corbett, yourself and many more. I was just thinking that there seems to be this natural engagement between ceramics and contemporary art that we're seeing particularly in the last few years with major exhibitions in New York, London and the last Venice Biennale. I'm curious about the relationship that clay has with Black artists. Can we think more specifically about a category like Black Clay and the ownership of it?

PCJ: Yeah, I feel in this moment a greater understanding of why that category is necessary and as much as I might resist categorisation, Black Clay is quite accurate and emerging because collectively,

these connections that are being made across generations present a beautiful arc of time. I imagine being able to see the confluence of these practices over maybe a century of documented work through and outside of an anthropological or ethnographic lens as previously historicized.

How Black Clay has emerged, and, actually tracing some of these connections between us, I can actually see the value in this and I am both humbled and excited to be in dialogue with all of these artists in spaces where there is so much autonomy. And, of course simultaneously, there's also so much that doesn't connect us because we are speaking from different contexts and relations to the earth and aesthetics. When I look at Black people working with ceramics of past generations, outside of this White Cube sort of environment, their works were documented via a white colonial system that has taken and formed into books and museums and art archives. Some of these pots from the past were made for both function and devotion and, and fun, you know, and the pleasure and ancestral threads of knowledge being passed down are vital.

And so I think it just feels like a chance to speak to those objects, which were made with agency and ingenuity. So all of these things, it really feels like a moment of being in dialogue, not solely through books. To me, it's about being in dialogue with it through being able to touch clay, being able to understand, "oh that's why the walk around technique of coiling was created,"

because as a ceramicist myself, I know how it feels and I know what it's like for my fingers to become nimble and quick at flicking the clay in a specific way. And I feel connected, which is really beautiful and exciting. In terms of the intellectual

realm of thinking about clay, there's also a lot of potential in terms of this intergenerational exchange, which I also find ignites a fire, in terms of my practice, and the forms that are emerging and appearing.

JD: Thank you Phoebe for all your depth and generosity in your responses. So my final questions: How do you feel about the present moment in relation to the tension between freedom and resistance and Collapse and Resurrection?

PCJ: Yes, freedom and resistance, Collapse and Resurrection! They are definitely the tensions that are present in the materials and my work, and the more psychic space. It also makes me think about talking to a friend recently who said: "life is really... It's just very ride or die." But I think it's

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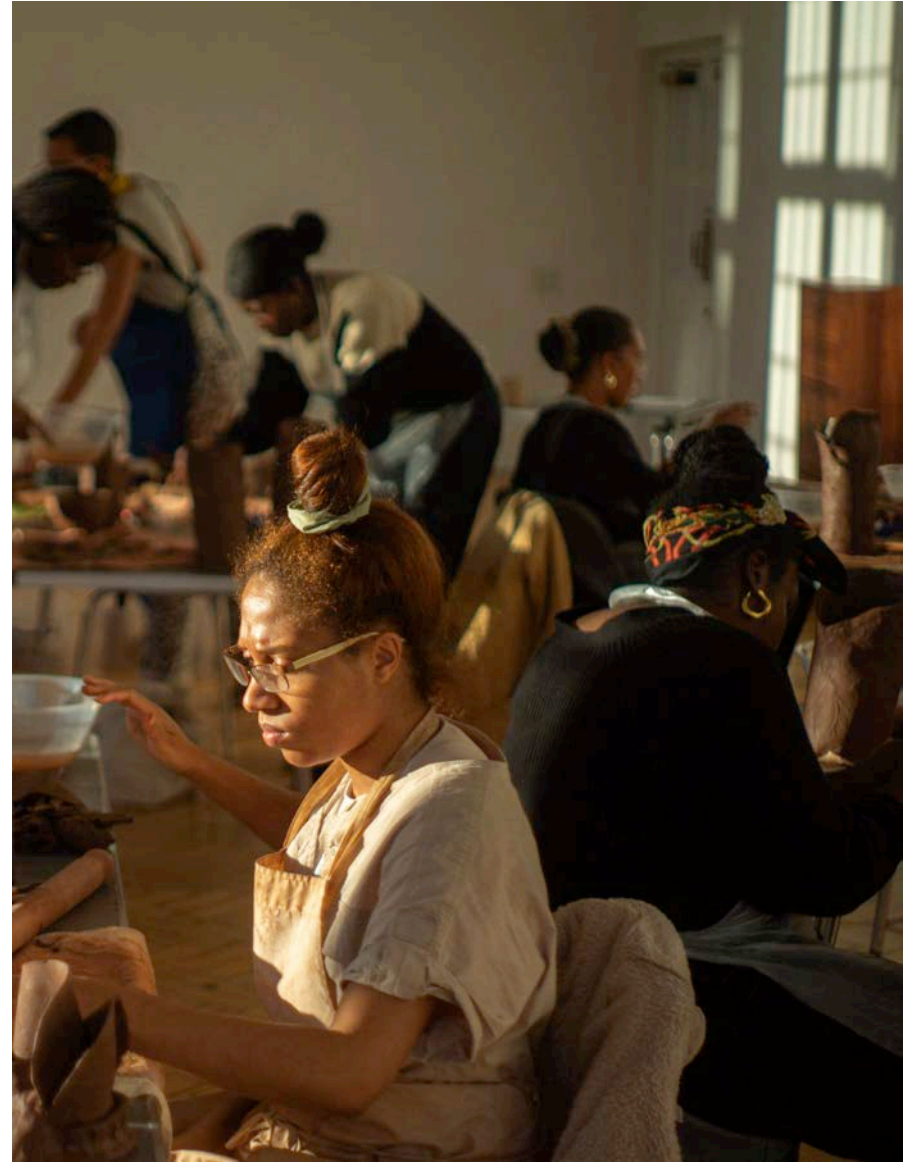
just ride and then die, and then ride and then die, and then ride and then die. And so, in that sense, I think the sculptures and my work more broadly are trying to embody that or untangle it or speak to it as a tension and as a reality. Clay tends

to have these processes of Collapse and Resurrection. And the possibilities of that, in creation, it's all quite epic and ever-present in the formation. The simple fact of being able to push the clay as far as you can, and then up until you fire it and vitrify it, you can just return it to Earth, essentially to soft plastic material. In terms of freedom and resistance, I guess I come back to thinking about Buddhist enlightenment, and this idea that you just continue every day to attempt to act skilfully towards one another and yourself and in your actions and thoughts and practices. And yet there is embedded a consciousness that you will probably fail every day, and that, at some point, you will probably achieve some successes. And I wonder about that, in terms of trying to get to grips with what is happening on Earth, and space, and how we can survive it and how we can live. Yeah, the collapse, resurrection and freedom, resistance seems just helpful in a way because there are so many questions. There are so many times when you can question what the point of all of this is, especially as the national and global politics crush people ever more ferociously. The fact is every time you do resist, there are moments of freedom and even though it might not be a constant, it can still be present. Movements like Black Panther Party are now too often seen or spoken about, in terms of the fact that it ended in some capacity, or there were issues and with its failures even though the impact and legacies of this movement still continue today, I also see some of the same rhetoric surrounding the Black Lives Matter

movement. A really important reminder by a friend a few years ago was that just because something ends doesn't mean it failed completely. And actually, if you look at most collective work, whether it's things that last five years or a few years, so often they end acrimoniously, someone fucks up, someone breaks up, someone commits harm to another person, and then all of a sudden something gets branded a failure. I think that this is a testament to the fact that freedom, resistance, Collapse and Resurrection are all interconnected and integral to our lives always.



Madebyreadies a ceramic workshop, 2021
Photography: Nithi Kuperan



The Guardian

Throwing muses: the Black female artists who create with clay

Exploring 70 years of ceramics in Black culture, Body Vessel Clay shatters the western myths of the potter's wheel



Ladi Kwali creating her designs. Photograph: W.A. Ismay/Image courtesy of York Museums Trust (York Art Gallery)

When Ladi Kwali met the British studio potter **Michael Cardew** in the early 1950s, her traditional hand-built water jars were already well known in Nigeria's Gwari region. Having spotted her work in the Emir of Abuja's home, Cardew swiftly invited her to join his local government-backed pottery training centre. There she added modern industry's wheel and kiln to her toolkit to create thrown tableware, and became a star turn within the touring demonstrations Cardew organised in Europe and America.

She was a phenomenal figure, "taking two cultures in her stride", explains Jareh Das, the Nigerian-British curator of Body Vessel Clay, the forthcoming exhibition teasing out lineages between Black female artists across three generations. Kwali provides the show's baseline, yet her place in ceramics history is far from straightforward.

Also in the exhibition is **Bisila Noha**, a ceramics artist whose work in Body Vessel Clay looks to pottery's unsung African mothers. For her, UK museum collections only tend to include Kwali "because of the connection with a white British man, rather than elevating her pieces in themselves".

Das wants the exhibition to bring Kwali out of western patriarchy's shadow, "to individualise her and where she's coming from, the stories the pots tell us about her life and culture". To do so, she draws attention not to Cardew, the British incomer, but to the matrilineal teaching crucial to global pottery traditions.

Kwali learned her skills from her aunt and went on to train others, such as Magdalene Odundo, the lauded Kenyan-born British artist known for her swan-necked, swollen-bellied pots. Although they didn't share a spoken language, Odundo has recalled how she learned from Kwali as a baby might – through touch, not words. "Craft is a language in itself that is universal," says Noha, who has studied with female potters in Mexico and Morocco. "We can all come together through it, regardless of our background."

At the same time, the exhibition is a reminder that clay can be as edgy and political as it is timeless. Of the younger artists, **Phoebe Collings-James**'s ceramic torso with body piercings and scarred skin conjures sweaty club nights, Roman armour, tribal markings and war wounds. "I wanted them to be charged with a queered eroticism," she says.

Shawanda Corbett, an artist born with one arm and without legs, creates motley-glazed pots fashioned from tilting spheres. They invite us to imagine what it's like to inhabit different vessels, different bodies.

Jade Montserrat, meanwhile, explores the raw material in its most natural state. In a mud pit on a shooting estate in her home county of Yorkshire, she massages clay over her skin and hair, a Black woman "unearthing and building identity", she says, as well as raising questions around land, belonging and ownership. It offers a radical conclusion to an exhibition that begins with traditional indigenous pottery. Montserrat's interest in clay could be the show's guiding principle.

"It's about making the circuits of energy evident," she reflects. "It's about potential."

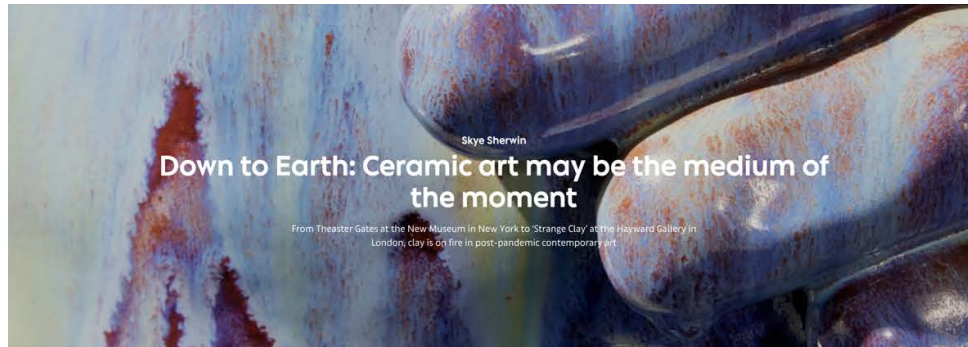


Phoebe Collings-James, *The subtle rules the dense* 2021. Photograph: Rob Harris/Courtesy of the artist and Camden Arts Centre

Phoebe Collings-James

While making her ceramic torsos, Phoebe Collings-James says that "Makonde and Yoruba ceremonial body masks featuring pregnant bodies and Roman armour with door knocker nipple rings were all recent memories". Her interests include "our clumsy signifiers of race, class, sexuality and genders, and how awkwardly or disobediently we may wear them".

Art | Basel



Down to Earth: Ceramic art may be the medium of the moment

From Theaster Gates at the New Museum in New York to 'Strange Clay' at the Hayward Gallery in London, clay is on fire in post-pandemic contemporary art.

Back in 2004, when Tate Liverpool staged an exhibition exploring ceramics in 20th-century art, it was dubbed 'A Secret History of Clay'. The title implied not only that little-known, avant-garde ceramics might be scattered throughout recent art history, but also that clay was something forward-looking artists worked on behind closed doors. At the time, nobody got too excited about the stuff of mantelpiece ornaments and tea sets, of handicraft over the big ideas that fine art is meant to have a monopoly on.

Yet, the past decade has seen a radical *volte-face*, with more artists awakening to this once-marginalized medium. While there is fresh appreciation for the pioneering figures who bridged contemporary art and ceramics – **Ron Nagle**, **Ken Price**, Peter Voulkos, and **Betty Woodman**, among others – current artworld superstars have incorporated ceramics as part of a wider art practice. **Sterling Ruby** has increasingly put his intensely physical, organic-looking ceramic sculptures center stage, as with his medium-specific exhibition organized by the Des Moines Art Center in 2019, while **Theaster Gates**'s 'Afro-Mingel' pottery is the bedrock of his socially engaged practice, now being surveyed at New York City's New Museum. Meanwhile, following sweeping exhibitions like 'Ceramix' at La Maison Rouge in Paris (2016) and tomes such as Phaidon's *Vitamin C: Clay and Ceramics in Contemporary Art* (2017), this fall's 'Strange Clay' exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery is the latest attempt to get a handle on the vast range of ceramic work now being produced by contemporary artists.

In autumn 2021, Phoebe Collings-James's hit debut solo show, 'A Scratch! A Scratch!', at Camden Arts Centre, London, explored themes of the body, violence, and eroticism across history using sound and ceramics, including huge pots and hanging bells of coiled clay, nude torsos, and painterly glazed tablets. 'I've worked backwards in terms of finding the material first,' she says. Drawn to clay as a 'responsive, reciprocal' medium, her journey began with learning hand-building on a residency in Nove, a town in northeast Italy noted for its ceramics. While living in New York five years ago, the artist discovered the work of African American ceramicist Doyle Lane. His delicate vessels, with their exquisitely tactile, gorgeously hued surfaces, suggested 'forms, colors, and a philosophical approach that made sense to me'. So, too, Magdalene Odundo's fat-bellied, swan-necked, open-mouthed pots drawing on global traditions, including those of Africa, China, Mexico, and Ancient Greece. In spring 2022, Collings-James's and Odundo's work was included in the group show 'Body, Vessel, Clay' at Two Temple Place in London, exploring the undersung legacy of Nigerian potter Ladi Kwali and her significance for Black women artists. Collings-James recently undertook a residency at the Archie Bray Foundation, the groundbreaking ceramic art center in the Colorado Rockies that Voulkos co-managed in the 1950s.

Even for seasoned art lovers, this language of ceramics – the various building techniques, firing processes, and glazes that artists use, as well as the forebears they reference – can be a little mystifying. Collings-James has noticed how people 'really respond to work: emotionally, wanting to touch. Yet, they're nervous talking about it and think, "I don't know how this works".' Angell hopes the surge of ceramic art in galleries will engender 'a more nuanced focus and understanding of the material within that'. Though he is careful to point out that 'it shouldn't be interesting because of its technicalities. It should still be good sculpture.'

'The thing that brings all of those artists together is having to understand the discipline of the medium,' says Lauson. 'It is so tricky, in terms of establishing an outcome, of being comfortable with the randomness that different processes throw up. That's why artists love it.'



Phoebe Collings-James, *the subtle rules the dense*, 2022. © Phoebe Collings-James. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.



Phoebe Collings-James *How many times can I surrender to you? (your living has taught me how not to die)*, 2021. © Phoebe Collings-James. Courtesy of the artist, Camden Art Centre, and Arcadia Missa, London. Photo by Rob Harris.

'Body Vessel Clay' explores the legacy of Black female ceramic artists

'Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, [Ceramics](#) & Contemporary Art' at London's Two Temple Place celebrates past and present pioneers of ceramic art



All images: installation view for 'Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics and Contemporary Art', Two Temple Place, until 24 April 2022. ©Two Temple Place. Photography by Amit Lennon

The body remembers, and so does clay. A new exhibition at Two Temple Place titled 'Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, [Ceramics](#) & Contemporary Art' looks back at 70 years to recover lost histories of work by Black, female [ceramic artists](#) and potters.

Curated by Jareh Das, the [London art exhibition](#) brings together eight artists and over 80 works of [ceramics](#), preparatory drawings, film and archival material, which explore post-colonialism, gender and class. Undoubtedly concerned with history, ethnography, lineage and legacy, the exhibition is rooted in the foundations of [modernism](#) in Nigeria and begins with one seminal and celebrated figure: Nigerian potter Ladi Kwali.

Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art



'I grew up in Nigeria in the 1990s', Das says, 'and was reintroduced to Ladi Kwali when the 20 naira note was redesigned to include her image at the throwing wheel on the reverse side.' Not formally trained as an artist, Kwali met pottery through matrilineal, familial lines and eventually made the transition from the domestic setting of Gwari traditional pottery to an international stage, with her work remaining amongst the most sought-after of pieces today.

Das curates a poetic, if unacknowledged, line from Kwali to some notable female ceramic artists of today. From the much-celebrated Magdalene Odundo – who studied directly under Kwali and her contemporaries at the Pottery Training Center in Abuja – to the work of Phoebe Collings-James, Shawanda Corbett, Chinasa Vivian Ezugha, Jade Montserrat, Bisila Noha and Julia Phillips.



Through her hand-built ceramic pieces, Noha is directly engaging with the lost histories of pottery by women from the Global South. Her work looks directly at Ladi Kwali and her Ivorian contemporary, Kouame Kakaha, to uncover and situate herself in a lineage of female makers and artists. Montserrat's film performance is also immersed in the act of remembering. Through repeated movements that re-enact and recall her own childhood in North Yorkshire, the artist uses her own body alongside clay to explore the relationship between the body and the earth.

Julia Phillips' film features an armless torso carrying an invisible weight. Both drudgery and fruits of labour are suggested through images of a growing mound of clay and bare feet in a deepening pit of mud. Chinasa Vivian Ezugha's backbreaking and commanding six-hour performance, *Uro*, is referenced in the exhibition through photography and a new conceptual [sculpture](#) made of clay from the original performance.



Presenting new work, Phoebe Collings-James continues her ongoing study of ceramic forms that explore tenderness, eroticism and tactility through a group of clay torsos that resemble Roman armour plates. Similarly, Shawanda Corbett plays with anthropomorphism in a series of sculptures called *The Hood*, which takes reductive stereotypes of Black identity and restores them with a dignity and humanity of the artist's own reimagining.

Showcasing functional and ceremonial ceramic forms alongside more open and conceptual ways of approaching clay, the exhibition interrogates wider questions about [ceramics](#) and looks at how these pieces move within the spaces of craft, [modernism](#) and contemporary art. 'Body Vessel Clay' not only challenges memory and history, it also contemplates the place of the object and the body through time, space and practice. ✨



Dr. Jareh Das's Latest Show Expands the International Canon of Contemporary Ceramics for Black Women

Inspired by matriarchs of Nigerian pottery, the London-based exhibition, "Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art" will run until end of April at Two Temple Place and then travel to the York Art Gallery from June to September.



A highly skilled curatorial drive based on research, art history, and a personal connection to an idea or place makes contemporary exhibitions have a lasting effect on the canon. The Lagos- and London-based multi-hyphenate curator, Dr. Jareh Das has brought together archives, her own inspiration from both countries, working living artists across the diaspora and major organizations—such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and York Museums Trust—in order to present a contemporary exhibition based off of a wave making Nigerian artist from the early 20th century, Ladi Kwali.

Ladi Kwali became the most recognizable woman in Nigeria—being honored with her image on the 20 Naira note—because she innovated the craft of ceramics and lifted the overlooked stigma of women in art. Kwali's participation in a ceramics apprenticeship drew on her family's matrilineal Nigerian traditions, and the British ceramicist Michael Cardew invited her to join after establishing the Pottery Training Centre in Abuja in 1954, in his role as senior potter officer employed under the direction of the Nigerian colonial government at the time.



Exhibition view of "Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art," Two Temple Place, London (29 January–24 April 2022). © Two Temple Place. Courtesy Two Temple Place.

"Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art" is a survey-like exhibition on ceramics and how they have been reimagined by Black women over the last 70 years. Over 80 works by eight female artists are on display, encompassing multiple media such as ceramics, preparatory drawings, film and archival material. Dr. Jareh Das has curated archival works by Ladi Kwali and Dame Magdalene Odundo, who learned her technique from Kwali in Abuja, along with a contemporary take on

ceramics by Phoebe Collings-James, Shawanda Corbett, Chinasa Vivian Ezugha, Jade Montserrat, Bisila Noha and Julia Phillips.



Exhibition view of "Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art," Two Temple Place, London (29 January–24 April 2022). © Two Temple Place. Courtesy Two Temple Place.

Storm Ascher: At this time in your curatorial practice, why is Ladi Kwali the starting point for this show?

Dr. Jareh Das: I grew up in Nigeria in the 1990s and was re-introduced to Ladi Kwali when the 20 Naira note was re-designed to include her image at the throwing wheel on the reverse side. Years later, an encounter with

Abuja Pottery at a UK museum spurred a return to Kwali and her astounding achievements as a leading figure existing in the worlds of Nigerian pottery and British Studio Pottery.

SA: What do you want the International community to learn from this project?

DJD: Body Vessel Clay begins with recognising the hybrid and radical practice of Ladi Kwali through to the contemporary generation of Black women artists reimagining the material in new ways; as a time-based medium with performative qualities. I'm inspired by clay and how its use continues to be reimagined by a younger generation of black women. This exhibition attends to clay's transformative, haptic, malleable and metaphoric potential, whilst situating ceramics as a continually expanding field.



Exhibition view of "Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art," Two Temple Place, London (29 January–24 April 2022). © Two Temple Place. Courtesy Two Temple Place.

SA: Do you consider contemporary Black women's ceramics practice as disruptive?

DJD: Countering western centric traditions, ceramics is both global and site specific. Different parts of the world have ceramics traditions that speak of cultures of places.

Dossier: Drawn from the earth and moulded by the hands, clay has traditionally been marginalized as a craft form. Artists HELEN CAMMOCK, PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES, THEASTER GATES, MAGDALENE ODUNDO and JULIA PHILLIPS reflect on what we might learn from centring ceramics, as well as its politics. They share what brought them to clay and how this medium, malleable and brittle, has shaped them

Black Clay

Opposite page
Theaster Gates, *Lady on Senufo Stool*, 2020, wood-fired brick, clay oxide, 53 x 38 x 53 cm. Courtesy: the artist and White Cube; photograph: Theo Christelis



Returning to the Vessel

Ahead of shows at Whitechapel Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Serpentine, THEASTER GATES speaks to *Allie Biswas* about the importance of clay to his artistic practice



David Drake, *Four Gallon Jar*, 1862, alkaline-glazed stoneware. Courtesy: C. Philip and Corbett Toussaint

A SENSE OF MAGNITUDE invariably dominates discussions of Theaster Gates's practice. Over the past 15 years, the Chicago-based artist has created a body of work that exists within ever-widening parameters. Gates makes paintings, sculptures, installations and films, though is perhaps most recognized for his purchase of abandoned buildings in Chicago's South Side, which he restores as spaces for community use. These social projects are cultivated through the artist's non-profit Rebuild Foundation, launched in 2009. Most recently, as part of this initiative, Gates spearheaded the revitalization of a 1.3-acre plot, which yielded a neighbourhood-led green space, Kenwood Gardens.

Gates is also known as a performer, leading an experimental music ensemble, the Black Monks, whose synthesis of jazz, gospel and spirituals often frames his exhibitions. The artist's commitment to preserving the legacies of Black American culture has also shaped his role as a collector and custodian, resulting in acquisitions from numerous defunct local landmarks in Chicago: whether records from the trailblazing music store Dr. Wax, the Johnson Publishing Company's back catalogue of images from *Ebony* magazine, the personal vinyl collection of the

legendary DJ Frankie Knuckles, or hundreds of titles from one of the country's last architecture bookstores, Prairie Avenue Bookshop, prior to its closure. The artist houses these materials within his most prominent building restoration, Stony Island Arts Bank, which functions as an open-access library and exhibition space.

In a 2013 article for *Chicago Magazine*, Gates was described by the curator Hamza Walker as 'nine things at once'. Yet, the artist does have an anchor. 'Clay made me and is forever the root of my artistic interest,' he told *Ceramics Monthly* magazine in February. 'I always find myself returning to the vessel.' In October 2020, Gates's first New York solo show opened at Gagosian. Conceived around his clay compositions, 'Black Vessel' pointed to qualities that were both concrete and otherworldly. The sculptures consisted of forms ranging from stately kettles and spiked spheres to biomorphic pots. The social component of the work – in one gallery, viewers were obliged to circumnavigate more than two dozen densely packed sculptures installed either directly on the floor or on low plinths – emphasized Gates's interest in ceramics as a means for social gathering.



Theaster Gates, *They believe, you breathe, they quake, you dance, they wet, you pray*, 2020, Johnson Publishing Company carpet, high-fired stoneware with glaze, carpet: 3.8 x 3 m; vessel: 46 x 71 x 71 cm

Who are the other African American potters?

Theaster Gates



Above
Theaster Gates,
Religious Alchemy,
2016-18, mixed media,
190 x 70 x 96 cm.
All images on this
spread courtesy:
the artist and White
Cube; photographs:
Theo Christelis

Left
Theaster Gates,
Afro-Ikebana,
2019, cast bronze,
clay, tatami mats,
1.9 x 2 x 1 m

Issues around cultural hybridity were likewise brought to the fore in 'Afro-Mingei', Gates's exhibition of ceramics at White Cube, London, in 2019, which explored the relationship the artist had been developing for some time between two important strands in his practice: Japanese aesthetics and Black identity. In one work, *Afro-Ikebana* (2019), Gates placed a globular pot containing a branch on stacked tatami mats, above which hung a bronze, mask-like sculpture, evoking formal rituals, such as Japanese flower arranging, as well as those based around totem practices. Earlier in his career, Gates participated in a ceramics residency in Tokoname, Japan, where he worked with a group of master potters for several months. One of his teachers, Koichi Ohara, remains a long-time collaborator.

Speaking with me weeks before the opening of a major survey themed around his pottery at London's Whitechapel Gallery, the artist reckoned with the unique value of clay. 'In other cases, I feel quite like a trickster; it doesn't matter if a person knows what my intention is,' he said. 'With clay, there aren't any gimmicks.' His exhibition, 'A Clay Sermon', features sculptures made over the past 20 years, outlining Gates's evolution, and a film about the artist's recent ceramics residency at the Archie Bray Foundation in Montana, which reveals, in his words, 'the ways in which I'm shaped by things, versus me shaping things'.

'A Clay Sermon' explores such multiplicities within craft through the inclusion of objects by other makers. Gates selected these pieces from the ceramics collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, during his fellowship at the V&A Research Institute in 2019, and will present a pair of new sculptures in the museum's ceramics galleries this winter. While Gates's counterparts in the Whitechapel Gallery show are an attempt to acknowledge his ceramic influences - from Michael Cardew and Shōji Hamada to Magdalene Odundo and Lucie Rie - they also explicitly reveal the dynamics of clay within the context of colonialism. One of the first objects encountered in the exhibition is an architectural fragment from a European-style palace built by Jesuits in Beijing. Commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor, who ruled China for most of the 18th century, this striking turquoise-glazed fragment signifies the country's receptivity to Western design, which was often considered exotic. Other items include the first anti-slavery medallion, manufactured in 1787 by British potter and abolitionist Josiah Wedgwood. Depicting a chained man under the words 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?', the medallion became one of the few well-known images of a Black person during the period. Gates likens aspects of the V&A's collection to 'a saga of power, where some leaders were benevolent and generous, and others were ruthless and concealing', adding that such narratives confirmed that 'other people's ways of being were critical to the formation of British identity'.

The monumental stoneware pots made by David Drake, which appear in 'A Clay Sermon', have arguably been the most vital influence in shaping Gates's ethos as a potter. While enslaved in South Carolina, Drake produced vessels that were later identified because he had inscribed his name, along with original lines of poetry, onto his creations. Described by Gates as one of his heroes, Drake signals 'one of the few moments where Blackness has shown up for me in craft, in a historical way'. During the initial stages of his clay-based making, Gates was conscious of asking



'who are the other African American potters?' in his quest to look to something that felt 'a little more like home'. The artist first explored Drake in 'To Speculate Darkly', a 2010 exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Museum, in which he embodied the potter through performance, 'to sing his name as if it were mine'. As well as highlighting the history of Black labour within the US, the presence of Drake provided Gates with the apparatus to think about his own identity as a Black maker. In a lecture that accompanied the show, Gates spoke of spending 12 years 'struggling to find a way in a world filled with white craft potters'.

Race continues to permeate Gates's practice, but the artist no longer needs to ask questions through an alternative guise. 'I'm invested in Japanese ceramics and the history of ceramic production relating to industrial slave labour, and now I can talk about those things in the first person, not the third,' he says. 'When I'm making a pot,' he concludes, 'I feel like I'm being my most conceptual, most contemporary self.' ●

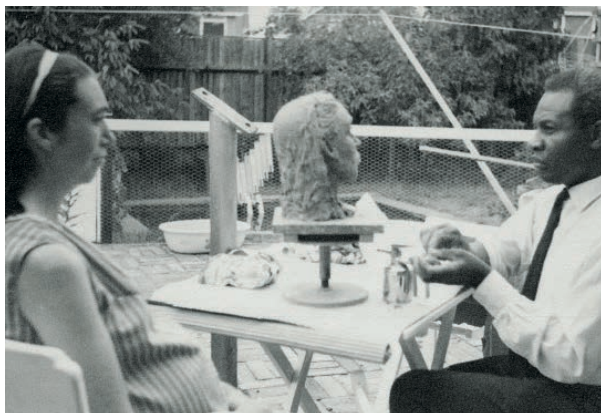
Allie Biswas is a writer and researcher. She co-edited *The Soul of a Nation Reader: Writings by and about Black American Artists, 1960-1980* (2021) with Mark Godfrey. She lives in London, UK.

Theaster Gates is an artist. His project *The Question of Clay* takes place across Whitechapel Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Serpentine, London, UK, in 2021-22. His solo exhibition 'A Clay Sermon' is on view at Whitechapel Gallery until 23 January 2022 and 'Slight Intervention #5' runs at the Victoria and Albert Museum until 9 January 2022. In 2022, he will be the first non-architect to design the Serpentine Pavilion. He lives in Chicago, USA.

Above
Theaster Gates,
Power Figure, 2019,
clay and wood,
90 x 89 x 27 cm

From the Mould

HELEN CAMMOCK on the obstacles faced by her father, a self-taught ceramicist in postwar Britain



Patricia and George, 1968. Courtesy: Helen Cammock

A CERAMIC PAINTING HANGS ON MY LIVING ROOM WALL – ethereal yet earthy, in my mind it has always been an abstract landscape, textured with the deep colour palette of the late 1960s. Our home was full of my father's ceramic works – displayed and used because my father wanted to see them and for them to be seen, but for him, there was seemingly nowhere else for this to happen. So, an Okapi pair was the centrepiece on a chest of drawers on our landing, his ceramic pots appeared in every room as plant holders, pen pots, pieces of art and wastepaper bins. They were multi-functional in our lives, but always bold, with a wondrous slippage in colour and glaze-cover and form. We drank from mugs he'd made for us and had tiles he'd designed next to our beds to hold glasses of night-time water. In the mid-1960s, my father had wooed my mother with small ceramic animals and other pieces that he brought to her each time her library van returned to the secondary modern school where he taught. In other words, we all *lived* my father's ceramics.

We all *lived* my father's ceramics.

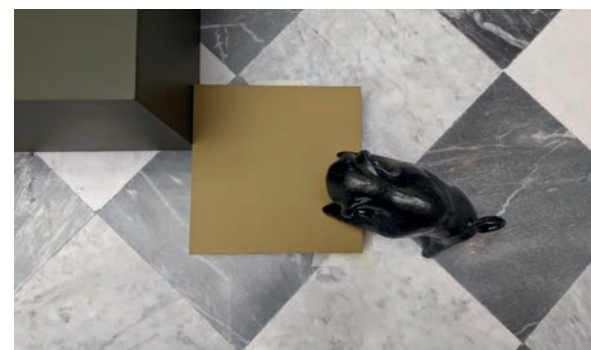
Helen Cammock

My father was 'voluntarily conscripted' into World War II, aged 18, only to be returned to Jamaica after the war, having been given a very short teacher training course. It was only after my father died, as I went through his house, that I found a letter he'd kept along with others of significance from his life, in which one course tutor had clearly written: *George Cammock is a very talented artist and I strongly recommend he be found a place at an art school.* This of course never happened because my father was repatriated to Jamaica with other servicemen, forced to leave behind his wife and small child. It took him a year of letters to the Home Office and working many different jobs to afford the passage back to the UK to be with his family. But then he had to work (not imagine art school) so he became a teacher – an art teacher. And this is where he honed his skills. Materials and kilns. Evenings at the wheel. Books he got from the library or bought. He experimented, I now know, with glazing and different ways of working the clay.

I found his moulds – still intact – in his damp garage. With the support of the team at the art school in Wolverhampton, the town in which he taught art for a decade, I have re-worked them, in order that they have a new face, a new conversation with a film I made in 2014: an imagined conversation with and around him – as father and as ceramicist. This is part of my offer for the touring British Art Show 9. The film, *Changing Room*, has his ceramic pieces as characters ghosting the screen and somehow engendering this conversation. When shown in an exhibition curated by Lubaina Himid at Hollybush Gardens in 2016, a ceramic Okapi formed part of an installation and sat in the gallery office for some time, before and after the show. It was a talking piece of the office, for curators and collectors alike, who appreciated something in his work that he knew was there all along. In these moments, he crossed from amateur to professional without even knowing – perhaps because of context, perhaps a re-configured gaze. But *he* always knew what he could do: his greatest sadness was feeling that others didn't ●



This page
Helen Cammock,
Changing Room, 2014,
film stills. Courtesy:
© Helen Cammock
and LUX



Helen Cammock is an artist. She was the joint recipient of the 2019 Turner Prize. Her solo exhibition at STUK, Leuven, Belgium, runs until 14 November and her new film, *Concrete Feather and Porcelain Tacks*, co-commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella, The Photographers' Gallery and Contemporary Art Society, is on view at The Photographers' Gallery, London, UK, and Touchstones Rochdale, UK, until February 2022. Her work is also included in the British Art Show 9, which tours various venues across the UK until 4 September 2022. She lives in London and Brighton, UK.



Opposite page
Magdalene Odundo,
'Untitled', 2016–21,
multifired terracotta,
dimensions variable.
All images courtesy:
the artist and Salon 94,
New York; photo-
graphs: Dan Bradica

A Twist of the Hand

MAGDALENE ODUNDO on how travel to Kenya and Nigeria transformed her understanding of ceramics and what it means to be an artist

MY CERAMIC PRACTICE has been defined by travel. It is through travel that I discovered ceramics. When I first came to Britain from Kenya in 1971, I was fully apprenticed in graphic design and commercial art. Had I not made that journey, my migration to another artistic discipline may never have happened.

As an undergraduate at Farnham School of Art [now University for the Creative Arts], I studied under Michael Cardew, who had taught ceramics in West Africa for 20 years. It was he who encouraged me to go to the Abuja Pottery in Nigeria. When I arrived there in 1974, I was tutored by Ladi Kwali, Lami Toto and other women ceramists. That is when I really fell in love with clay. I realized what an amazing material it was – expansive, seemingly without boundaries. It had a language: put in the hands of a willing person, it spoke for itself as a material.

Every time I made a piece, the tutors would touch it. That manifestation of their touch – Kwali's hand guiding my hand with the clay – was an amazing experience. There was a real sense of a more experienced person migrating their knowledge and transferring it onto a younger person. I imagine that is how Kwali would have learned from her aunt, and I was lucky to work within that tradition. As I didn't speak Hausa, I couldn't communicate with words: it was very much a visual communication, a conversation through making.

It was a conversation through activity, through body language, through a twist of the hand, a twist of the mind, a glance from the corner of your eye. It was a process of osmosis, seeping through the mind to the eyes. I observed first and then the mind registered. The process of hand building with clay is fused with sound and bodily movement. That leads to an awareness of the form and shape you are making. It's really a special way of learning.

After spending a year in Nigeria, I travelled back to Kenya and observed and worked with a couple of potters, not far from my own maternal and paternal homeland. It was astonishing. A woman called Anyango, which is coincidentally my middle name, sat with me. Starting from a seated position, with her legs in front of her, she worked sideways. Then, when she was making the neck, she knelt to reach, almost like she was praying. She worked in such close proximity to the clay, embracing it like you might your own child, that you could hardly distinguish material from human: they worked in tandem.

Thus, the finished work has this volume that feels like a built structure, like a nest or a house that contains what will sustain you as a person, or even as a community. It's this volume that is so generous, that is accommodating within the real and the visceral and the imagined.

I realized I had carried water pots like these as a child. I had gone to the river with one of my younger sisters and we had collected water in pots that were exactly the right size, because all the water carriers were different sizes for different age groups. Remembering this piece of beautiful pottery on my head, I realized I had taken it for granted – I had never considered it intellectually or as an academic exercise. It was only through my experiences at the Abuja Pottery and back home in Kenya, through the act of working with clay, that I realized how privileged I was to have been able to experience that.

I took this knowledge into my teaching, which was a very hands-on process – discussions would come afterwards. I wanted my students to appraise what they got from the process of making, what their experience was, rather than the other way round, where the thinking is academic and it's supposed to seep downwards into the work.

It is a wonderful thing to hear from past students because they will often say that they remember me telling them: 'It's not necessarily just about making work. Why don't you go and look at existing work?' That is exactly what I did in going to Nigeria and then coming back, looking at myself and wanting to find an identity within this place and a means to express it. It was a time, in the 1970s, when African countries were gaining independence, so there was a huge movement of students from across the continent coming together. Identity and the cultural evaluation of who you were was a crucial thing. Finding ceramics was a means of communicating that and a means of re-evaluating what was important to who I was as a human being ●

As told to Vanessa Peterson

Vanessa Peterson is associate editor of *frieze*. She lives in London, UK.

Dame Magdalene Odundo is an artist and educator. She is professor emerita at the University for the Creative Arts, where she taught from 1997 to 2014. She lives in Surrey, UK.

Fragile Earth

PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES and
JULIA PHILLIPS discuss the relationship between clay,
their bodies and the world with *Jareh Das*



JAREH DAS Both of you work with clay as part of your wider practice. What drew you to this material and how do you engage with its malleability and other physical properties, as well as its transformation during the making process?

PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES When I hear the word 'malleable' in relation to clay, I instantly think about the fact that it's reciprocal. From the moment I started working sculpturally with various types of clay, I was drawn to the fact that, unlike other materials such as plaster and resin, it wasn't a one-way conversation. You don't just have an idea, cast something, or allow something to set, and it keeps its form. With clay, there is this constant potential for movement – even after the firing process. Reciprocity also appears through sculpting and shaping: the clay then decides how it feels about its new form, potentially shifting, cracking or remembering the other configurations that it had before.

JULIA PHILLIPS I appreciate that thought, Phoebe. Clay has different stages, one of them is malleability. There's also another stage, fragility, which I am concerned with all the time, and I worry about breakage a lot once the work leaves my studio. The very malleable state when the clay comes out of the bag is where the work begins and the final pieces are influenced by the first manipulations

of the material. The casts really take shape when the clay becomes 'leather hard'. I make thin slabs that I press onto my body. When I'm taking a chest cast, I'm still breathing and moving around with the clay on my skin. I work in the studio without assistants, so I handle everything myself. I might even work on something else during the drying process. Depending on the air conditions, it can take a long time for the clay to get leather hard and while I'm moving, the clay is moving with me a little bit.

PC-J There is a deep connection between clay and the body, although I sometimes feel resistant to discuss embodiment in this way since it can feel like an essentialist cliché to talk about working with clay and the earth. The ways it resonates with flesh and bodily process or metaphorical registers are complex. Clay still can be a toxic material. I have asthma irritation because of working with silica dust. It's still mined. That's crucial to acknowledge.

JD Issues around sustainability and the environment I feel should be more prominent in conversations about working with clay and ceramics.

PC-J I have guilt about my impact on the environment because I've also been firing with a gas kiln. The specific way it transforms clay through the process of reduction – making it look like earth spawn or some sort of relic – is

This page
Phoebe Collings-James, 'A Scratch!', 2021, exhibition view, Courtesy: © Phoebe Collings-James and Camden Art Centre, London; photograph: Rob Harris

Opposite page
Julia Phillips, *Oppressor with Soul*, *In Treatment & Suppressor with Spirit*, *In Treatment*, 2020, ceramic, stainless steel, nylon hardware, dimensions variable. Courtesy: © Julia Phillips and Matthew Marks Gallery

hugely desirable. However, it feels scandalous, to be honest, to be still firing up a gas kiln at this moment. I'm also thinking about longevity and degradation, where these objects we make will live in the future, and where they will exist in relation to the environment. Clay is something that will survive us, unlike other materials. I enjoy thinking about my work returning to the ancient lineages of pottery rubble that exist in our soils, rivers and ditches across the world.

JP All the materials I work with – ceramic, metal, stone – have a sense of longevity. I wonder how I can make sure the work can still be shown when I'm no longer around. I don't really think about degradation, or how my pieces will go back into the earth, when they're shattered on some junkpile. But I do think about sustainability as well, working with multiple layers of glazes and firing an electric kiln. I imagine a renaissance of arte-povera aesthetics in the future, driven by the fact that the earth is becoming impoverished, while there is such a huge amount of waste.

JD How do drawing and the element of mark-making feature in both of your practices and the works that come out of them?

JP Drawing plays a key role in my practice, as I plan my sculptures through technical drawings. Once the ceramic parts are dry and fired, there is no editing of the shape, there is no give and take. Because of their inflexibility, the ceramic components must be fully accommodated by other materials that I use. To explain how I envision these connections and joints, I use technical drawings to work with fabricators.

PC-J I collect symbols, images and ideas by drawing them in ink on paper. These references then weave their way onto the surface of the clay. I think about the process sonically because it reminds me of how I approach sampling, taking audio from films and other tracks, as well as doing a lot of recording myself, to create a bank of sounds to work from. It's very similar to the way I work with clay. I think about drawing more in the sense of building a library of thoughts and visions that then get translated and fucked with a bit.

JD How does Black feminist thought inform your work?

PC-J Recently, my main dialogue has been with Alice Walker's book, *The Temple of My Familiar* [1989]. It took me a year to read, from the beginning of lockdown until a couple of months ago. I would find myself dipping in and out, whenever I had the capacity to engage with it. The stories and the density of spiritual texture that she weaves through each of the different characters really touched me. Every time I returned to it, I was able to reach a deeper understanding of myself and my practice or to find what I needed.

JP I am influenced by the same generation of Black feminist thinkers. My work is rooted in the idea that the body is the first ground of our experiences. It is precisely this thought that brings me to the bodily and mechanical metaphors that I use in my work. This idea derives from the artist and thinker Lorraine O'Grady, who explored it in the photomontage series 'BodyGround' [1991]. Her claim falls into an era of Black feminist thinkers that brought up the voices of Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins – an era that witnessed the majority of the last century, upon whose shoulders I now stand **END**

Working with clay
isn't a one-way conversation:
there is this constant
potential for movement.

Phoebe Collings-James



Dr Jareh Das is a researcher, writer and curator. She is curator of 'Body Vessel Clay: Women, Ceramics & Contemporary Art', which will be on view at Two Temple Place, London, UK, from 29 January to 24 April 2022. She lives in Nigeria and the UK.

Phoebe Collings-James is an artist and founder of Mudbelly ceramics studio, which includes a shop and teaching facility offering free ceramics courses for Black people in London, UK, taught by Black ceramicists. As the 2021 Freelands Ceramic Fellow, she has a solo exhibition at Camden Art Centre, London, 'A Scratch! A Scratch!', which runs until 23 December. She lives in London.

Julia Phillips is an artist. Her solo exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles, USA, is on view until 23 December. She lives in Chicago, USA, and Berlin, Germany.

The Black Potters Giving New Life to British Ceramics

A growing community of makers are creating work that reflects their identities and challenges the history of their art form in the U.K.

By Noor Brara

March 17, 2021

THERE ARE FEW objects as representative of traditional British design as Staffordshire dogs. Perched in pairs on mantelpieces across the nation by the end of the 19th century, these earthenware figurines depicting gold-collared spaniels and other dogs embody both a fantasy of rarefied country life — Queen Victoria’s beloved pet Dash was a Cavalier King Charles — and the population’s conformist tastes. Indeed, the pieces were among the most sought-after designs, along with delicate floral-patterned bone-china tea sets and intricate neo-Classical jasperware vases produced by the Potteries, the group of pioneering factories, eventually numbering in the hundreds, established in the 17th century in the coal-mining towns that form the present-day city of Stoke-on-Trent. With the rise of large-scale manufacturing in the 18th century, led by innovators like Josiah Wedgwood, ceramics — a practice that for millenniums had been the province of independent artisans working in small studios — transformed into a global industry.

But by the 1920s, the ubiquity of these ornaments had dulled their appeal. Modernist ceramists such as Bernard Leach and, later, the Austrian-born British potter Lucie Rie and the German-born Hans Coper, who started out as Rie’s assistant, made a case for expressive handmade vessels, a movement that was accelerated in the 1940s by nationwide restrictions, instituted to save resources for the war effort, on decorating mass-produced ceramics. Yet while the second half of the century saw a flowering of disparate styles, the craft remained uniform in Britain in one significant way: Its practitioners — with notable exceptions including Rie, Clarice Cliff, Gillian Lowndes, Alison Britton and the acclaimed Kenyan-born artist Magdalene Odundo — were predominantly male and almost exclusively white.

In recent years, though, a new generation of Black British potters — the majority of them women — have begun to breathe new life into ceramics. While their grandparents, many of whom immigrated to England in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s from the Caribbean, West and Central Africa and elsewhere in Europe, might have considered the arts too exclusionary or risky to pursue as a career, these younger makers are now redefining the medium through work that reckons with their own identities and, often, Britain’s.

IF THIS EMERGING community has a center, it is the artist Freya Bramble-Carter, 29, and her ceramist father, Chris Bramble, 63, who teach classes at their studio in London’s West Hampstead neighborhood, a lively space in a former Victorian factory. From the late ’80s until the early aughts, Bramble — who makes wheel-thrown porcelain pots in earth-tone glazes and hand-sculpted stoneware vases with delicately featured faces inspired by traditional Zimbabwean busts — recalls being one of only a handful of Black ceramic artists on the U.K. scene. But he says that’s changing now, as part of a wider generational shift. Among the talents he’s nurtured is Ronaldo Wiltshire, 32, who recently competed in the British television series “The Great Pottery Throw Down,” and whose pieces include matte black vases finished with swipes of blue and green that recall the shorelines of his native Barbados. “I didn’t know of any other Black ceramists in London until I met Chris,” says Wiltshire. “Now I’m pleased to see more practicing every year. I tell them that ceramics can be very healing.”



The ceramists (from left) Phoebe Collings-James, Bisila Noha and Ronaldo Wiltshire with a selection of their works, including one of Collings-James’s glazed stoneware tiles (bottom left), a pair of Noha’s two-legged vessels in black stoneware and terra cotta (far left) and one of Wiltshire’s stoneware face sculptures (top right). Photo by Ollie Adegboye. Set design by Alice Andrews.



The father and daughter ceramists Chris Bramble and Freya Bramble-Carter, surrounded by their pieces, including one of Bramble’s hand-shaped stoneware sculptures (top center) and several of Bramble-Carter’s stoneware amphorae (bottom left, top left — in collaboration with Studio Krokalia — and bottom right). Photo by Ollie Adegboye. Set design by Alice Andrews.

Bramble-Carter, who identifies as mixed race, also attributes her enduring interest in clay to spending time in her father’s studio. When she studied at the Chelsea College of Arts in London, she was often frustrated by expectations of what her work should be: “The figures I made were lumped into ‘all that Black art.’” Now, though, bolstered by the growing community around her and the development of her practice, she says, “I don’t care if the work has Blackness or whiteness in it.” Over the past seven years, her pieces — oversize dinner plates featuring variegated blue glazes with rutile, and striped stoneware amphorae in vivid Grecian- and Caribbean-influenced palettes that she sells through the design stores 8 Holland Street and the New Craftsmen — have resisted adhering to any single style. The very amorphousness of clay, she says, allows her to explore her multiple selves.

Similarly, the London-based Spanish ceramist Bisila Noha, 32, has begun to experiment with sculptural forms inspired by her interest in her Equatorial Guinean heritage and in ceramic traditions across Africa upheld primarily by women makers whose work has historically been ignored or belittled in the Western art canon. This “awakening of my Blackness,” as she describes it, has resulted in a new body of work — including unglazed vessels shaped like pregnant bellies and squat, two-legged vases resembling generous pairs of thighs — made partly from clay her parents bought for her on a trip to Baney, her father’s hometown in Equatorial Guinea. “In the same way that African pots are used in ceremonies to connect with ancestors,” she says, “making these pots using Baney clay, and in some cases mixing it with porcelain and English Draycott stoneware, was a key moment in my journey to connect with my roots and my Blackness.”

The potter Isatu Hyde, 31, who works out of a stone outbuilding on a 13th-century farm in Shropshire, also cites a desire to connect with African ceramic traditions. “I want to sit with other women and make pots in a fire pit and bring that back to the U.K.,” she says of her plans to visit Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Sierra Leone once travel restrictions lift. While her glossy stoneware cups and bowls are influenced by global preindustrial ceramics, and her elegant red-clay cookware (she recently shipped 20 of her dome-lidded bread cloches to the cafe and bakery Justa in Los Angeles) is inspired by European medieval pottery, she sees her use of generous curves, which have long been privileged in West African art, as an expression of her ancestry.

And then there’s Phoebe Collings-James, 33, a multidisciplinary London-based artist who has been making wheel-thrown pots accented with abstract slipware drawings and painted sgraffito marks since 2018 under the name Mudbelly. Among her recent works are a series of monumental wall hangings each made from dozens of slipware tiles adorned with compositions of symbols and patterns that seem to communicate fractured snippets of ancestral tales. A recurring figure is a thick-legged black spider inspired by Anansi, a character from West African narrative traditions that entered Caribbean and African-American folklore during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. His story, which is defined by his creativity and wit, “represents a mode of being that is linked to survival and resistance under colonial rule and capitalism,” says Collings-James, and it has resonated with her as she’s explored her own dual Jamaican-British identity. An exhibition featuring these pieces will open in September at the Camden Art Center in London. But before then, she plans to host a free eight-week ceramics course in East London led by Blahttp://arcadiamissa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ArcadiaMissa_HamishiFarah_Press.pdf teachers, in the hopes of enabling more young Black artists to find selfhood in the medium, as she has. “Clay’s dominant history in the U.K. may be white,” she says, “but that doesn’t reflect its wide cultural influences, the community that exists now or what working with clay can do for people. It’s about reckoning with every facet of being alive — joy and sorrow, politics and violence. It’s a form that ultimately helps us realize who we are.”

Photo assistant: Yomi Adewusi. Set assistant: Phoebe McElhatton.

A version of this article appears in print on , Page 76 of T Magazine with the headline: Breaking the Mold

Grounded: A Season of Screendance

Speaking in 2015 about her new work *The Concept of Dust, or How do you look when there's nothing left to move?*, experimental choreographer Yvonne Rainer defined dance as a unique artistic practice simply by virtue of its ephemerality: 'The instant you see a given movement, it's gone. And so it exists in the memory.' Because unrecorded movement ceases to exist once it is completed, the artist aims to mark a lasting impression of feeling, community and collective identity based on its present moment. When captured on camera, however, movement replayed becomes resurrected – it is embodied, politicised and awaits radical recontextualisation.

Coastal Currents' online screening programme 'Grounded: A Season of Screendance', which ran from 28 July to 9 August, was a collection of mostly recent artists' moving-image work rooted in traditions of collective bodily performance and choreography that had been reimagined to address the issues of confinement, loneliness and social inequality that have been thrown into stark relief by the Covid-19 pandemic. Divided into sections ('interior worlds/exterior lives', 'socialised', 'taking/care', '1+1=3/narratives') and concluding with lyrical filmmaker and performance art veteran Graeme Miller's newest work, *Wild Car*, 2020, the programme expansively engaged with the ways in which movement informs boundaries and societal place, with work dealing with issues that ranged from reactions to Brexit, embodiment of loss and the performance of bodies in lockdown.

The majority of the screenings commenced with older works. Heading the 'taking/care' section, which largely included works reflecting on personal loss and confinement, was Rainer's observant first film *Hand Movie*, 1966. On camera, she observes the movement of her injured hand while in hospital. It's a meditation on confinement, of movement, in composition and in form. Phoebe Collings-James's *Mother Tongue, Mother Master*, 2018, was the most visceral and emotive of the series, being a portrait of a woman in anguish, trapped in industrial-grade netting and held back from freedom despite aggressive flagellation. A new work by the formidable John Smith (Interview *AM355*), *A State of Grace*, 2019, also explores fear and isolation. Smith's examination of the fear of flying in existentialist terms draws new meaning from anxieties surrounding travel and death as he studies the safety card from budget airline Ryanair; feeling as if he is the 'recipient of religious instruction from the Catholic church', he imagines the moments before his death – 'brace, brace' turns into 'grace, grace'. It's a series of works which imagine embodied feelings of isolation and anxieties surrounding death or illness.

Aligned with the formal framework of 'screendance', a term coined by performance artist Doug Rosenberg to imagine a medium of cinema-specific bodily movement, 'Grounded: A Season of Screendance' stepped back from a modernist occupation of focusing on what the medium might expect the body to accomplish outside 'real' life, to instead move towards a methodology which aimed to understand real life in the current circumstances.

Just as Rainer's *Hand Movie* serves as a meditation of loss and confinement, Sally Potter's *Play*, 1970,

documents a busy suburban stretch of pavement while experimenting with expectations of how a body might move through space when restricted. Where we formally expect one's body to appear in one frame after the next, the work's form subverts these expectations – the focus is on the confused and chaotic nature of public observation. Ben Rivers's *The Coming Race*, 2006, covers movement through space and observation, but on the grand scale of mass pilgrimage. The films of Rivers, Rainer and Potter are the most meaningful examples of repurposed cinematic past reappropriated for the context of the present, and aptly kicked off the majority of the screenings. In these films, temporally dislocated bodies are given renewed meaning and context.

One of the pleasures of the screening series, in addition to its curatorial commitment to repurposing and re-contextualising older works, was its spotlight on the wide range of movements, putting into question what may be labelled as 'dance'. Holly Blakely's *Some Greater Class*, 2015, is a rhythmic dance film in every traditional sense of the word – bodies are choreographed to gyrate sensually in the dark in synchronicity. There's a pulsating soundtrack reminiscent of a club or rave, and its dancers erupt in movement to match it. It's a dance through and through as defined by Richard Lorber in 1977: 'the sum of all non-functional movement behaviours'. The season's screening series also brilliantly posited functional movement as dance – Gray Wielebinski & HRH's *Water BB*, 2019, subverts expectations of synchronised swimming behaviours as they are replaced with movements evocative of low-impact pool exercise at a public leisure centre in Deptford. Filmmaking itself was also presented as a choreographic practice – Miller's feature-length *Wild Car* is a lyrical edit of a train journey through Europe as an act of mourning what has been lost as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The logic that unified the programme was at times unregimented and fluid, perhaps because there often seemed to be no audience in mind for the series – at least no audience expressly named. This aptly seemed to serve the programme's intention to embrace the heterogeneity of the artistic practices it featured in its 31 works as well as to demonstrate certain universal sufferings or experiences in 2020. 'Grounded' focused on presenting a universality to isolation and lockdown through various movements on screen, but, as the outbreak of Covid-19 has demonstrated, there is little universality in experiences across the globe outside of forced isolation. For some this isolation is a retreat, for others it can mean death.

The programme served as an accomplished approach to re-contextualising screendance works from the past 50-odd years in order to better understand abstract

feelings of health, imagination and confinement – politicising them to nurture a humane social fabric. Working towards programming works on the experiences of at-risk workers, disabled bodies, protesters, renters, dismantling of statues or propaganda, or re-contextualising old works with this in mind – explicitly rather than inferred – might best highlight new and current questions around community, solidarity, our futures and alternative models of care.

Coastal Currents' online screening programme 'Grounded: A Season of Screendance' ran from 28 July to 9 August.

Laura Jacobs is a programmer and critic based in London. She is winner of the Film and Video Umbrella and *Art Monthly* Michael O'Pray Prize 2019.

Sound

Shenece Oretha: Called to Respond

Cell Project Space inaugurates Cellular, its new experimental Live Art and Media-based programme, with Shenece Oretha's *Called to Respond*, 2020. Produced during two months of isolated residency at the gallery, the London-based multidisciplinary artist introduces a two-part project comprising an interactive space on Cell's website and a multidimensional gallery installation where sound, sculpture, lyricism and occult-like performance are the passage to a hauntological experience of race and memory.

After initially entering a sealed-glass welcoming chamber, the observer is fed audio instructions (pre-recorded by the artist) for the time-based experience to follow. After advancing to the event space, the spectator is given free disposal to sit alone or in one's Covid-19 isolation bubble, unobserved for the 12-minute duration of the work. Moving between the four foldaway chairs that sit facing each other, one skirts around a blood-red shadowed room of incarceration: Oretha's chthonic lair. Two bulbous black cuboid speakers noticeably adorn the exposed and raw cement ground of the gallery space, on which a large black circle is coarsely drawn in oil.

In this otherwise incarceration-like scenario, the application of mystic symbolism by Oretha is given further totemic force by one speaker placed centrally in this circle. Facing upwards, the speaker's sounds climb in frequency and volume. Oretha's soundscape of breaths and gasps is in turn visualised by a cluster of chicken-sized dry bones which rest on the speaker's diaphragm and are repeatedly rattled and thrust into the air. As if remnants of a creature's meal, a sense of carnivalesque revelry is imbued, driving the work to an otherworldly arena where the percussive sound embodies a beast hungry for earthly souls and mortal matter. The reverberation serves a heady mix of how power and consumption are one and the same.

The second block-shaped speaker sits outside the circle, as if an onlooker to this realm of mysticism. Embellished with three rows of gold cymbals, it similarly rattles and hisses with each vibration of sound, a resounding fetish of coins and embellishment upon this body of noise. Polyvocal ghost-like sounds envelope the spectator, while a subdued woman's voice chants words such as 'remember', 'feeling', 'beat'. Detached from



Phoebe Collings-James, *Mother Tongue, Mother Master*, 2018, video

176 PORTRAIT PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES

TEXT BY
RINDON JOHNSON

PORTRAIT BY
BRAD OGBONNA



Don't Knock Twice I Will Eat You, 2018 (p. 178) *Mother Tongue*, *Mother Master*, 2018 (film stills)
Photo: Tim Bowditch (p. 179) Courtesy: the artist and Arcadia Missa, London

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Collings-James works along the vast planes that separate the forms of geological time manifest in her ceramics and the fleeting fugitive pace of her performances. With these two poles as anchors she proceeds in a long stretch of possibility creating objects, paintings, videos and live works which simultaneously offer, refuse, cultivate and spoil; she leaves a lot in the hands of her viewers, she sends us elsewhere only to find that we remain somehow near our origin. Through a myriad of mediums she allows fixed forms of representation and power to fold in on themselves. For Collings-James boundaries offer a falsely porous membrane, seemingly still pliable but actually impenetrable, and in this virtual space she constructs the possibility of another form of opening, one that floats like gauze through the viewer's mind, Glissant's opacity made manifest.

This gauze of opacity shrouds Collings-James's collaborative live work with Last Yearz Interesting Negro (Jamila Johnson-Small), *Sounds 4 Survival*. The two say of the collaboration, "[l]ife grows between the cracks of this current flesh." Premiering in 2018 at the Wysing Polyphonic Festival, *Sounds 4 Survival* is performance as anti-assimilation. Inbuilt to their initial desire of seeking refuge, the artists begin to undo the environment from which they flee, in that they are constructing a space for black people to heal, reorienting themselves through actions, performance, workshops, readings, healing sessions, otherwise; they make space to engage with bodies through intimate, contemplative, movements and acts. The questions that the artists tease out are filled with care and in that movement towards the calm elsewhere many limits are touched, embodied and relocated. How do we destabilize the system while still existing and desiring within it? How do we heal the wounds on the bodies of our ancestors, especially those that we cannot name?

The works that Collings-James presents on her own all seem to be thinking of the body, but not what it looks like, rather the other way that the body is familiar—catching a chill on your neck or the sun shining only on your bare shoulder—the impossible insides of being alive. As though she is throwing out the entire emotion, not an effigy or a proposition.

Her sculptural interest isn't figuring the body as much as it is figuring within the body. Or looking from within the tongue instead of upon it. To be the sinewy muscle pushing aside the hand which might attempt to enter, forming letters, somersaulting, demanding and determining a definitive uncertainty, free from anybody because the tongue is its own body. This very muscle is rendered in its full unruly shine in 2014 glazed ceramic, *Creep*, part of her exhibition *Choke on Your Tongue* at the Italian Cultural Institute. *Creep*'s baby-red-orange tongue protrudes from a soft pink encasing, parabola shaped, flattening out as it moves downward. Somehow heavy and animate, *Creep*'s tongue is mid sentence. Parabola sides dotted with some sort of sickened chartreuse, collecting light to form mirrors; viewing *Creep* from the side you might see the outline of a body falling forward either in anguish or the preparation of some quasi-familiar ecstasy. She'll do this again, in more sculptures playing with questions of dominance, hierarchy and in particular setting up a line of inquiry around voids. Who makes an opening, with what tools and languages? How does restraint map itself onto the body (for whom and why)? From what orifices are secreted those things that fracture our being and who was it that did the fracturing?

As Collings-James continues her long relationship with ceramics, she also maintains within her forms and color an urgent sense of transformation, a sense that manifests itself in both the "finished" works and in her process. She reminds me again on the phone that her ceramics "still pop when they come out of the kiln." Somehow they're still breathing themselves into being. Her sculptures in their finished state begin a dialogue with beings whose sense of time and space do not so readily match with our own—beings like rocks and mountains, quarries and beaches. In *And Know That Any Softness Is Strategic* (2018), Collings-James places four glazed ceramics on two white corner shelves, one above the other; on the higher shelf she revisits a familiar shape, the balanced cross or the four seasons or the peaceful cross or the four winds. Time and language are pushed in and out of their ideal form into something more. On the lower

shelf of *And Know That Any Softness Is Strategic* there are three gobstoppers, closed orbs, evidence of Collings-James going against the desires of the wheel upon which these works were rendered. The wheel would prefer to make a bowl, Collings-James would prefer something internal, closed, or closing, altogether slippery and multifaceted.

Over the phone, Collings-James says to me: "What does it look like to take control of precarity?" What does it mean either by nature of being black, or being poor or being something which is seemingly "unstable" and to then attempt to harness it as something that will never really bend to a harness. Precarity struggles to be held in the hand or mind, it moves through the body. Its subjects and dominion are in a state of errant destruction, a round object balancing on another round object or the long tremors of bodies past that dwell within us all.

Collings-James mends this sentiment to her film *Mother Tongue*, *Mother Master* (2018). Filmed from her shoulders up, the artist wears identical little bells tied to the red plastic of a bag to hold some sort of citrus. The bag lightly pushes her face inward, her neck balancing, she shakes her head and it becomes clear that there is a parallax between the soundtrack and her movements, yet somehow they feel completely connected. As she moves her head back and forth, forward and backward, moving the bells swinging in unsealed union, it becomes hard to tell if she is drowning out the soundtrack or if it is drowning out her. She continues to let the bells move freely, opening and closing her mouth, feeling the weight of the bells and then suddenly, as the soundtrack wanes so too does Collings-James, until she takes off the instrument.

Whales communicate and find their way through the sea via echolocation. They send out a sound and it comes back to them, moving through a large mass in their heads. We know now that actually they possess a spare scent which is a form of emotional mapping. The sound that they send outward to receive or the sounds that they hear arrive in their bodies as a complete emotion: no translation. If someone calls your name you can feel the calling in toes, thighs, fingers and nose. They might say, "I call you, be in relation to me."

YOU FEEL ME_ / FACT LIVERPOOL

Write-up-review and photos by Krystle Amoo

“Everything you can imagine is real.” Pablo Picasso

I had the privilege of attending the pre-launch of the you feel me_ exhibition at FACT Liverpool, yesterday. Two captivating visual rooms that are previewing an alternative world where social constructs are dismantled. The cleverly curated exhibition by Helen Starr, you feel me_ explores and deconstructs power, in a way that allows the viewers to question who are the implementors and where does accountability lie. In parallel to this, we also get to see the perspective of how the oppressed navigate through these structures and find healing through one's imagination. The gallery space is reflective of coming together, a world where everyone's story has room to be heard without drowning out another. The bells of Phoebe Collings-James's installation, in harmony with Rebecca Allen's digital video sound – housed in the dark evokes calmness and the restoration of peace within. A contradiction to the world I had just stepped out of upon entering FACT. Being a black woman, I wanted to reflect on the daily social prejudice I face before I entered, and the three main perpetrating systems that cause friction in my growth are Racism, Sexism and Colonialism. Therefore, I found myself deeply connected to these artists, in particular, Phoebe Collings-James, Salma Noor and Brandon Covington Sam-Sumana. Although all installations were equally as powerful, these three artist got me thinking and feeling.

Throughout the exhibition, Salma Noor's delicate contribution of deconstructed images guides us. The images comprised of her family and other historical people of colour. Being a part of the diaspora, I have found it very difficult to belong and feel at home. Especially when it comes to visual representation, the west hasn't been inclusive in documenting our contribution. Seeing the images on the wall was empowering and brought new meaning to what it means to be African and dispersed.

Continuing through the exhibition, the hypnotic bells chiming while stood amongst the hoods resonated with me. The motion of Phoebe's head with her restless hands and expressions I witnessed on the digital screen, was symbolic of black women's struggle. Daily we are asked to perform in a white world; we have to battle social norms that are designed, so that we fall short each time – an exhausting process and yet through rituals (like the bells ringing) and resilience we repair and heal to reclaim our liberation.

Brandon's work organically follows Phoebe's collection, which I felt was fitting as Covington Sam-Sumana explores accountability and the importance of ownership. For me, this is an area that is normally cloaked in fragility. Society's oppressors are not very forthcoming in taking responsibility, for censoring and revising stories that could rebirth a new world perspective. Tools such as religion, curriculum and even Art, have been used as a method of control and power. Brandon's installation Life is...Grand II: Anatomy of Apology, uses Mesh's book Jus Wanna leave This Ni**a to get this point across wittily. It's a story about a woman who is struggling in her marriage to an abusive womaniser. Showing that true liberation is achieved when we can tell and write our own stories and bring into fruition a world that allows us to present ourselves the way we want to be seen. The beauty in this work for me was the opportunity for reparation, the hope for forgiveness and bringing light to how powerful an apology can be. It's not in the way of highlighting the wrong, but to educate. Brandon concludes with a boldly placed document on the wall with a suggestive list of ways to apologise.

you feel me_ is a must-see, a safe space for people yearning change and new world order. Through different forms of creativity, collectively, this exhibition encourages healing and critical thinking, both of which are needed to revolt systemic prejudices that uphold power and abuse.

<https://www.femzinelondon.com/you-feel-me-fact-liverpool>

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Phoebe Collings-James on Strength, Shame and Precarity

– May 4, 2018 –

The Brooklyn-based artist talks us through her anti-assimilationist practice, as a new exhibition opens in London's Arcadia Missa



Mother Tongue, Mother Master

Artwork by Phoebe Collings-James, Photography by Tom Bowditch. Courtesy the artist and Arcadia Missa

Originally from London and now living in Brooklyn, Phoebe Collings-James is a British-Jamaican artist who describes her practice as “intentionally messy and sprawling”. Deftly moving between drawing, video, sculpture, text and sound, she questions the relations between subject and object in a process of “symbolic layering” which aims to explore post-colonial anxieties and the problems posed by traditional Western aesthetics.

Her upcoming show, *Relative Strength*, at Arcadia Missa's new space in Soho, will interrogate ancient and ingrained signs and symbols – from the equal-sided cross of neutrality and aid to the brass bells associated with shame and warning. As part of what she terms an “anti-assimilationist practice” she aims to give her objects – fragile, beautiful things, informed by centuries of craft – agency, removing them from the plinth and allowing them to disrupt the space they inhabit.

On madness...

“I’m interested in things being on the brink of something. I’ve been working with these ceramic objects that are mostly orb or bowl-type shapes and [in the show] some of them will be resting somewhat precariously full of water, while the crosses will be suspended by straps. They’re in a balance, but it’s precarious, especially when they have water in them. I think a lot about this feeling of vertigo, and being on the brink, and that’s something that relates to being black, being paranoid, and feeling conscious of being close to madness and losing control – and wanting to lose control also. But also wanting to be held.”

On the crosses in her work...

“I’ve been thinking about the cross a lot in terms of devotional objects and... how we feel in relation to them being sites for emotion. There are certain things that are allowed exclusively in that space that might not be allowed in other areas. I’m interrogating this shape of the even-sided cross and the Geneva Convention and the things that evokes for me – the confusion of the ethics of war.”

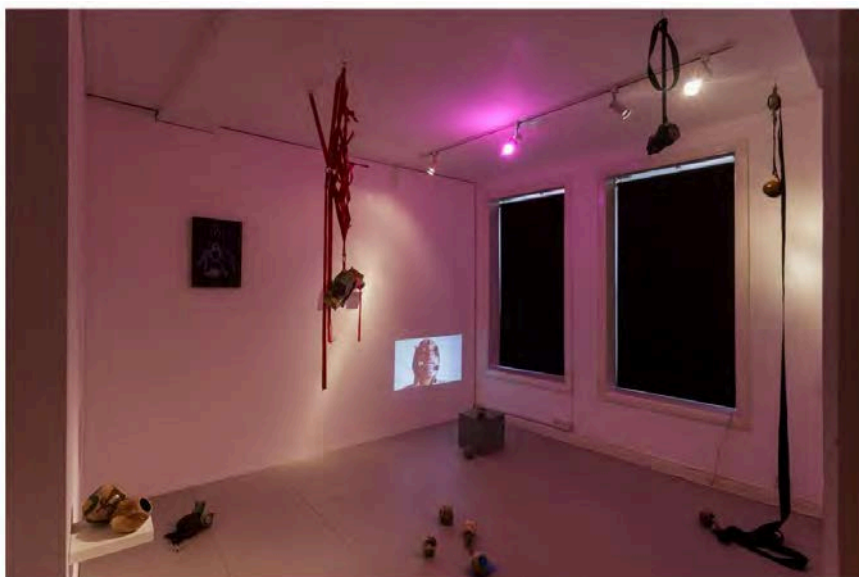
On using ceramics...

“In terms of the aesthetic of the sculptures, my aim was to make them look and feel extremely beautiful, and to play with the thing that is most desirable about them – which is actually not really what’s going on as a theme in ceramics at the moment, even though it’s having a resurgence. I think people are definitely trying to use garish colours, and make things look quite shit on purpose. And so I think my reason for wanting to use what could either seem like rip offs of Japanese or [Bernard] Leach kinds of techniques, is that those techniques are based in care and skill and an obvious connection to the materials.”

On the object and the gaze...

“Something that Jamila [Johnson-Small] and I have been talking about is what does an anti-assimilationist practice look like, what does anti-assimilationist work look, or feel, or sound like? I think that somehow ties in to not just thinking about the objects as only having an objecthood that is relational to representation and a gaze. I’ve also been thinking about that kind of mode of regarding the object as being a very Western thing, and how that isn’t the way that objects are considered in all places. For example, in Africa... there is a history of regarding objects and art objects as having a subjecthood and having a life.”

Relative Strength runs until May 31, 2018, at Arcadia Missa, London.



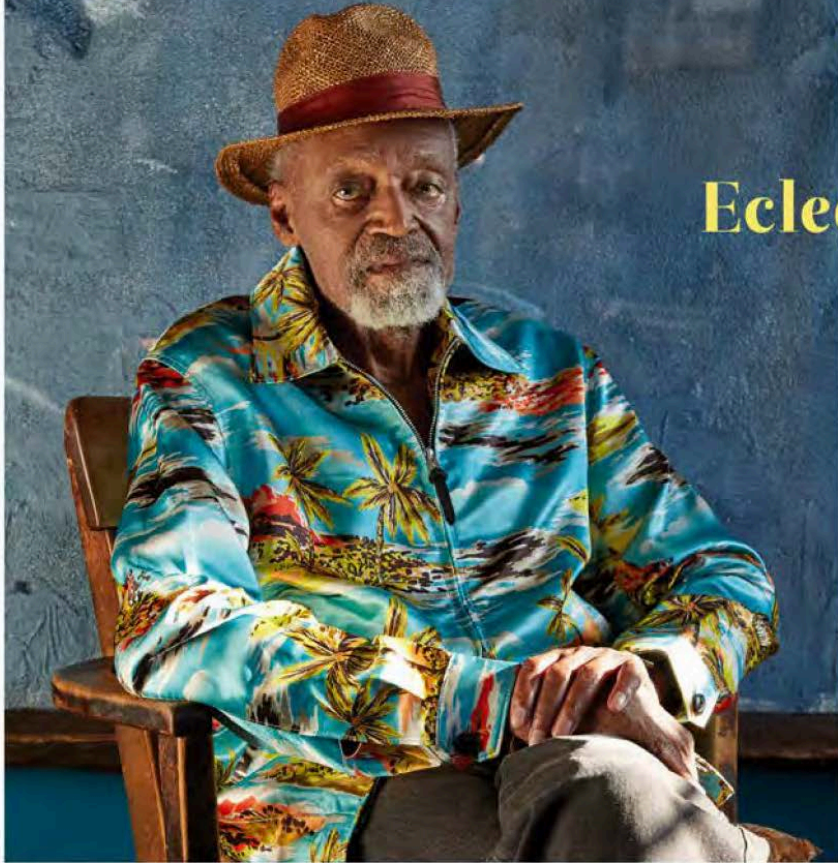
Installation View

Artwork by Phoebe Collings-James, Photography by Tom Bowditch. Courtesy the artist and Arcadia Missa

UBIKWIST

#6

Eclectic



Melvin Van Peebles • Judy Blame • Amma Asante
Isaach De Bankolé • The Jack Moves • Indya Moore
Dread Scott • Georgie Badiel • Andre Walker
Phoebe Collings-James • Pascale Kutner

UBIKWIST

OTHER THAN ANOTHER

Phoebe Collings-James by Masha Calloway
Photograph Brad Ogbonna

Thinker, tinkerer, womanist. The multidisciplinary artist, Phoebe Collings-James carries the surnames of both her parents, a Jamaican man and a British woman. Her artifacts are about vessels and voyages, the body, identity, and oppression, how folks come together and are parted. She is part of a lineage of Black artists communicating their experiences in a world dominated by White structure. She is also a model and an insomniac with a sweet tooth.

One of her influences, Ursula Le Guin, said of being called a science fiction writer, "Don't shove me into your damn pigeonhole, where I don't fit, because I'm all over. My tentacles are coming out of the pigeonhole in all directions." (the Paris Review)

In conversation, what comes across is a kind of 24-hour vigilance – an openness to be spoken to by the world, a sense that rather than having control over her concepts, Phoebe Collings-James allows them to reach out, metamorphosize, have a life of their own. Phoebe's ideas constantly accompany her – to the market, on the subway, in conversation, and during intimate moments with friends and lovers.

Books and corners are places ripe for encountering possibility and breakthroughs. Discarded items on the street become remnants of shipwrecks – warnings that you, too, can be cast aside, broken. Remnants hold a history, a spirit. Carried in PC-J's hands they become talismans, holding what was for what could be.

The sensual, tactile aspects of artmaking resonate with this artist: plaster, clay, paint, and wood. Voices as well as detritus represent how we live, survive, decay, or die. Phoebe has an interest in the morbid and in the mythological, especially those creatures which are composed of different body parts. They represent the extraordinary and illusion. They eat people and spit them out from all four of their heads.

"Most of it is instinctual," she says. "Creativity is a way of expressing myself and also a way of processing the world, a way of gaining greater understanding of the world and of myself. There's a material world, a spiritual world, and my own kind of inner world."

"I think about the act of noticing and contemplating our surroundings. Objects and what we are surrounded by daily have life, have an eloquence to them. I think about what it means to highlight those moments and sort of interrogate them a little further and push them further. There are layers of reference that don't fully connect, but they're there. It's like the idea of something making sense or working; there's a layer of gibberish to it. Gibberish and maybe even nonsense."





SENTIENT SAC, 2016

Choke On Your Tongue (Nuove ceramic residency, founded by curator Geraldine Blais in Bassano del Grappa, Italy. Works are exhibited here at the site of the residency in Italy and the Italian Institute, London) Parked on flat surfaces, these ceramic pieces of elegant lustrous color look like sea creatures or volcanoes – lonely, violent, still yet active. There are phalluses and pink eraser-hued tongues – amputated, discarded, or captive? Silent or screaming? An examination of the power of vocality – what do we gain or lose in speaking up or not?

ATROPHILIA (‘atrəˈfiliə: desire for collapse or stasis) is a collaboration between Collings-James and artist Jesse Darling. It explores the historical importance of containers (boats and bags) to stimulate trade/exchange – the vessel carries the body (object), the body as vessel, the body during times of unrest. Using colors and shape which represent the Red Cross, it is the futility of humanitarian aid, the excesses of war, the impact of the Middle Passage taking humans/things from Africa to distant regions, the cost of global trade. Sacks are ripped open and hang as mementos – lost

onions, lost land, lost life. They reference hope or lost faith, in regards to what was left behind. (The concept draws from a conversation between James Baldwin and anthropologist Margaret Mead in “Rap on Race” and references Ursula Le Guin’s essay regarding “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,” 1986, a response to feminist Elizabeth Fisher’s “The Carrier Bag Theory” of human evolution covered in *Women’s Creation*, McGraw-Hill, 1975)

Calapso Chevalois: Another collaboration with Jesse Darling presents a photo of a 5-gallon bucket that contains a length of broken construction lumber wrapped haphazardly by “danger” tape and 9:25 minutes of sound: a musical heartbeat, shrieks, from jungle tempest to thunderstorm, a shipwreck, a parade? a building collapse? The dancehall beat, drip drop drip drop, an incantation, a spell? A body that is located elsewhere, at another time. Evidence that he/she exists as sound connects to this place where the art is installed... to bodies listening, walking now.

oKoKok (2013): These white plaster cones were born from the chemical reaction of powder and water which produces heat. First hung to dry upside down in clear plastic bags, when released, they became ghosts, their simple shape perfect for myth making. They might be bleached out bent thorns or the horns of rhinos, commodities for poachers who themselves are hunted by rangers. The cones also resemble capirotes that penitents wear hiding their sinner faces during Holy Week in Spain. Although these cones have a graceful fragility to them, they also remind one of hoods and hangings, the American Ku Klux Klan. Collings-James took into account the “ruin value” of monumental architecture, a theory held by Hitler’s favorite architect, Albert Speer. As an extension of Nazi death cult philosophy, “ruin value” is the continuing beauty of structures as they naturally decay, commemorating the soulless power of the Third Reich long after its dead have been buried. “I have urges to smash them, kick in the holes or topple them over. The origin of this work was a material desire for the plaster to fall, catching the mix in motion, to freeze its cascading form.”

People have different experiences of oppression and varying awareness of others’ oppression. Through perception, oppression can be everywhere yet nowhere. The oppressed often adapt to and assimilate into the vertical structure of colonialism. “These are the hierarchies among Caribbean, West African, Pakistani, a Bangladeshi kid, having to behave in ways depending on the environment one was in... experiencing the weight of how little was expected of me. That, as a teenager, was quite prevalent for me and my friends. Anything that I did achieve was kind of good for a Black person. That kind of thing was definitely the lot of my school life. The main dangers were the more insipid kinds of oppression, the kind of top-down thing where it forces the violence to be happening between the people who were oppressed rather than from White people directly.”

Does she think that the idea of making sense, that one imposes, that it has to have some kind of structure?

“Yeah, I think so. I think, especially as a Black artist, Black writer, thinker... I guess sometimes it feels that being messy is all we’ve got because we can’t... The structures are there, and we can try to break them down. We can try to break them down within our own community, but the overarching structures will not be broken down until they are either completely smashed down – which would require an almost unthinkable uprising and death – or we have completely given ourselves over to revolution. By saying we’re not going to sit here idly, we’re gonna tear the walls down, and we’re gonna take our lives back. In lieu of that, there is us being messy. Us saying, ‘Ok, well, this is what’s going on. These are the structures we live under.’ We’re gonna try and both kind of conceptualize ourselves out of some of the mental oppression that are weighted on us and also, at the same time, be creative.”

Young Phoebe “noticed and was interested in other cultures, even as a kid. These other places that we were all from but so few of us ever went to.” Her exploration of identity is as historical as it is personal. A feeling of distance and disembodiment throughout her work relates to the present day and the ancestral.

Collings-James’ scenarios offer the audience an opportunity to devise and answer questions on their own. She doesn’t provide answers; she provides a platform for discourse. An installation is concrete yet ephemeral due to her use of sound and found objects (particularly the trappings of cargo and commerce). It’s a navigation between object and subject, an immersion, a form of collaboration. There is a relationship. Sound brings unification across borders, across time. Migration and its paraphernalia are our heritage. We are the ancestors of others.

Expensive Shit/ Primordial Soup (315 Gallery in NYC, 2017): Blowing mylar curtains, speakers rigged up by cargo straps to plywood boxes emitting music, conversation.

“I was at work thinking about roots and home and diaspora... and sort of like what we learn ancestrally. It was important to have elders speaking. Also, the way both of them speak – my White grandmother is from East London and has a very, very thick Cockney accent. There was my great aunt who was recorded in Jamaica. Still, after 50 years of living in the UK, she has this really thick Jamaican accent. I was just interested in both how similar Cockney is to a Jamaican accent in the melody of it, the way language is used, and the way this expressive kind of what could sound a bit rough and brash was also very beautiful to me... knowing that through me and my siblings both of those accents somewhat are gonna be lost. We’ve got just generic London accents, not quite one of anything.”

“I was interested in capturing their voices. Also, I was interested in gossip and the storytelling that happens among women and among generations of women. Most of the conversations were recorded when we were sitting around. One was in one of my

other aunt’s houses near Kingston, Jamaica, that was in the sun. You can kind of hear the fan on in the background and the other one (recording) was in the sitting room in my grandmother’s house. Neither of them knew that I was recording. It was just something I wanted to capture, to add to the layers that happened in that sound work.”

“There is witnessing, but there is also being actively a participant. I left my voice in a tiny little bit – asking questions. I don’t want to remove myself from being part of that. It felt like holding hands or something to leave that in, to be present. It’s almost like witnessing them and also like witnessing us together... looking at myself, looking at us together.”

EXPENSIVE SHIT - PRIMORDIAL SOUP, 2017



“I often think about sensory overload and how to engage the different parts of the senses, to think about the corporeal and have you speak about my body... and what it is to have a body in this world and to have this very fragile connection with it. I like there to be some tension and to speak historically to the position of the Black body as often a spectacle.”

The **Ivory Black** and **Tar Baby#** paintings were made by Phoebe’s feet, covered in ivory black oil paint, dancing about on linen. As an undocumented endeavor, she offers “the traces of that solitary performance for the viewer, for the audience to then explore for themselves, being able to get the rhythm from the marks that I’ve made.”

“**Murder by Chocolate**” is almost a full 20 minutes of reading dessert menus collected from all over New York (available on Soundcloud). The immigrant voices partner beautifully. From Belize, Mario’s silky smooth tone plus Phoebe’s British accent recite a description of desserts and their prices. There is some stumbling over unfamiliar words. It’s hypnotic and tantalizing. Desire and fascination transforms into ridiculousness and disgust. Before the end comes, you want to vomit from the “ooey gooey” poem of gluttony.

"I think I've always been interested in a kind of balance of the erotic/violence in my work and the personal experiences with family and episodes growing up that I've known and how they intertwine to make an essence of what it is to be alive... navigating those two things. Our sexuality and desires are the most potent elements of ourselves that we try to navigate, or not. What happens when you completely suppress those elements of yourself? What becomes of us then?"

"In the way that racism functions erotically, there's also like this deep hate for Black people. At the same time, there is a jealousy and admiration and sort of fetishization of Black beauty and Black ability." Phoebe is also aware of how questions of race affected her mother. "I guess, especially in situations where our Black and mixed race beauty was being fawned over, I was aware that she felt incredibly protective and uncomfortable in those moments, and it was never to the detriment of how beautiful she thought we were. She encouraged us to feel proud of every element of ourselves, and confident... She just wanted to make it clear that the superficial idea of what beauty is is not important."

PC-J explains that when she started modeling at age 13 or 14, skin color preferences were written out on casting sheets whereas discrimination is "happening more insidiously now." Although the modeling world seems to be embracing an expression of diversity, its system still favors pale skin.

Coined by civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, "intersectionality" is the study and recognition of where experiences according to class, race, sexual orientation, disability, and gender overlap within the social structure. Feminism is primarily discussed as a female/male concern; however, imbalance exists as an intersectional issue. Subjugation to White male supremacy in the form of social inequality, income disparity, sexual harassment/violence are even more pronounced for communities of color and many people outside of mainstream sexual orientation or gender identity. Alice Walker's term "womanist" is partially explained here as a Black feminist or feminist of color, as someone who loves women (sexually and nonsexually) and loves women's culture, who is a universalist committed to wholeness and survival for people entirely... loving herself, loving spirit and struggle. "A womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." (extracted from Alice Walker's definition of a "womanist" from her book *In*

Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, 1983.)

"Womanism is far closer to something that I hold close to me. I feel like feminism as a sort of term and ideology is something that's been increasingly kind of cut off for me, cut off for Black women, cut off from true intersectionality. I don't know if intersectional feminism is enough as a term – if it, in action, is strong enough. I don't know if it's living up to its meaning in reality. Especially, if White feminists are really willing to live by it rather than stick it on the end of a sentence."

"Also for me, most critique now has to include the fall of capitalism and colonialism. And if it doesn't, then I don't want to see women rise in the same structures where some are gonna be at the top and some are gonna be without anything – where the 1% is at the top, and everyone else is without anything. Unless there is a feminism that truly encompasses those ideals, I don't want equality with men under this situation."

"I was speaking with a friend recently about the idea of becoming. We were talking about it in the context of Stuart Hall, and how he speaks about identity. About identity being something that is a state of becoming. We were talking about the idea that maybe even though Stuart Hall's theory resonates

with the Diaspora and identity, especially in the Caribbean, that becoming should still feel like it has a kind of end point... that you become something, you know. And, that maybe the identity of being an artist, of being a Black woman, of being a Jamaican British woman – it's something that's more in flux. I think about that a lot, being an artist and what that means at different points in my life."

"At the moment, it feels very much like I'm in or on the periphery of a very odd career-like living, the rat race that is the art world. And, tentatively, do I want to be involved in this? Do I not? I have a gallery; I do shows. I'm part of this strange institution, but I don't know if that will be the way that I'll always be an artist. And I don't even know if it's the way I've always been an artist."

"Letting go of the work, letting it live and do what it has to do." Phoebe is learning to throw clay on a wheel and "likes being in the sun. That's always been a dream for me – to be naked in the sun somewhere, reading. That would be my hobby. If only I could have it for my life."

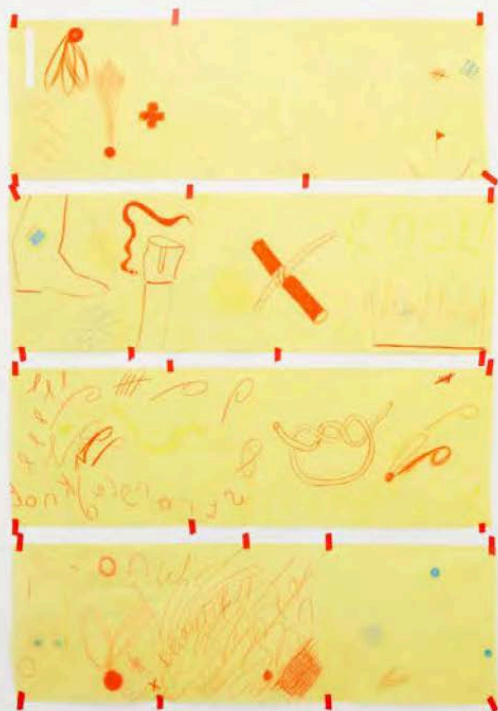
www.phoebecollingsjames.com



I often think about sensory overload and how to engage the different parts of the senses.



WHAT IT IS, 2016



ATROPHILLIA, 2016



OUT OF MANY ONE PEOPLE, 2016
PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

TFW..., 2016

Our sexuality and
desires are the most
potent elements
of ourselves

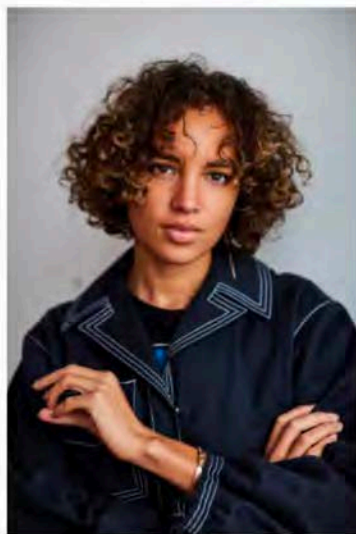




REFINERY29

Phoebe Collings-James On Life As An Artist

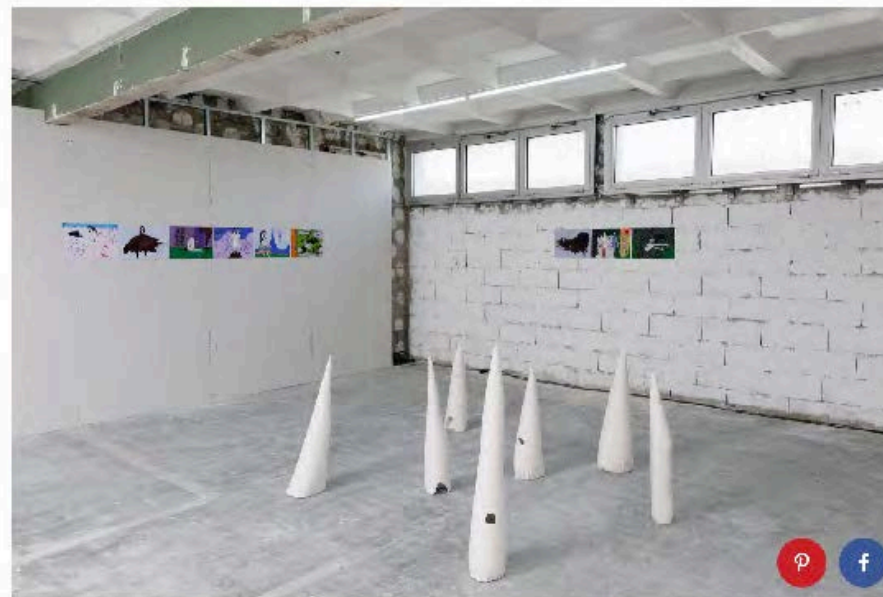
PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES
4 JANUARY 2018, 07:15



Art as a profession runs in tandem for me with several other things I call jobs – a balancing act to carve out the time and space to be an artist. The career of art exists with such precarity that I choose to separate it mentally from the act of being an artist. That is something I know I will always have with me, a life's work.

It is funny to think about art as a job as it could be a bleak career choice! In the job of an artist, you should expect long hours for little or no pay; when you do get a gig, doing a panel, workshop or teaching, you are too often expected to labour for free – something we have to stand up against, and resistance to which falls disproportionately on the most marginalised people. Working in art is competitive, with few sustainable positions – unless you make it to a position of art establishment, which then opens up a new web of problems in itself. I'm still trying to work out how a person can possibly be anti-establishment while living in the belly of the beast. So perhaps it is better to talk less about what it is as a job and instead focus on what being an artist means to me, which is a position I feel I can be more certain about as the decades roll on.

I make work firstly and foremost for myself; its sustenance feeds my soul and eases an often rabid mind. The most rewarding aspect of being an artist is that my work continues to teach me new things, allowing me to follow my intuition by interrogating the things I create on impulse but have yet to reckon with intellectually. In this sense it feels as though the work is always a few steps ahead of me – the act of making is a constant process of learning and listening.



oKoKoK, Paris Internationale, 2017

Only after that do I begin to think about how it might affect others when it enters into public space. These new relationships that are built between me and the people experiencing the work are important and I always hope that they allow the work to grow beyond my hands, allowing us to feel mutually seen. "Primordial Soup", an immersive sound installation I created in New York last year, revealed the richness of connecting in this way – with some people coming to experience the work several times, it felt like a huge achievement; the work was being heard and understood in the wave-like form I had wanted it to unfold.

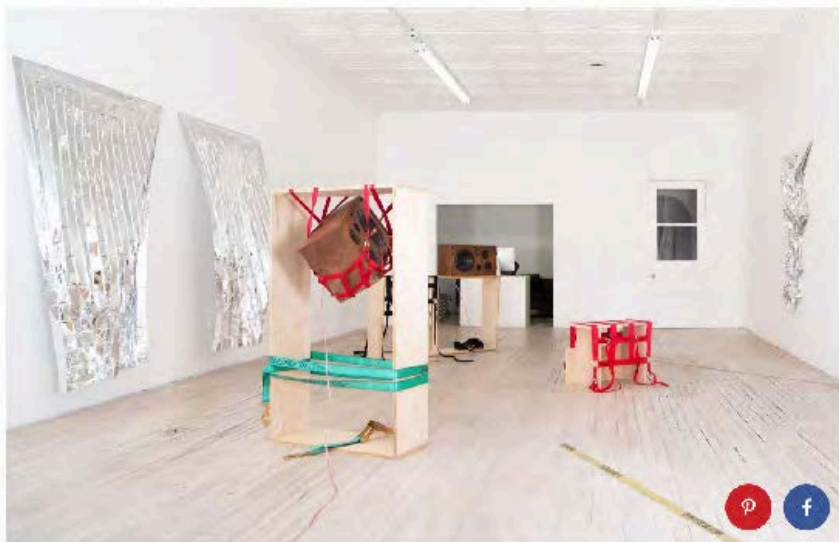
Day to day I aspire to a disciplined routine. A close friend of mine once told me that I would never make a good housewife because I lack discipline and consistency, an opinion that I have both cherished and resented ever since. The truth in their statement reveals itself in my weekly routines, which are started with best intentions and slowly unravel to a sleep-deprived chaos. A recent typical day would usually start at around 9.30 with emails, then a Spanish lesson over Skype, sometimes I do yoga at home or at a class before travelling to my studio. Once there, if I don't have anything immediate to get on with, I try to read or make drawings as a way of getting into a mood.

I like Mondays because it always feels to me like a new start and a chance to try things again! My best working hours are at night, which I try to give space for as much as possible. Case in point: I am writing this line at a civilised 6.45am but I have been up since midnight.

Sculpture defines the approach I have to making things; I like to build even when I am working on a flatter surface like paper or canvas. I enjoy discovering new ways to engage with old materials and getting dirty, especially paint, plaster and clay, which are all malleable and somewhat magic. In other processes I also attempt to transform the codes of everyday found or used stuff, working with the fabrics that have been relegated to waste, teasing out new potentials in their objecthood. Most recently this has included fruit nets and plastic postal sacking that were



Primordial Soup, 2017



Expensive Shit, 2017

destined for a new ecosystem in landfill or an ocean. I do this work in order to tell the stories of black and brown people like me who share ancestral connections to these trade routes.

A highlight this year has been working with the Studio Museum in Harlem, a self-described nexus for artists of African descent. I was honoured to be part of their Harlem Postcards project. It was a unique opportunity for me, being from the UK where black arts have historically been marginalised – to show work not only in a black arts space but to a majority black crowd was especially poignant.

I had always dreamed of doing something artistic 'when I grew up', whether that be dance, music or designing clothes. There was a determined moment in my teens when I wanted to be a lawyer – some particularly tough family stuff was happening and I thought that I would be able to save people who had been failed by the state like we had – but I quickly realised that I may not be suited to uniquely demanding, and bureaucratic work. That said, I can definitely see myself having other jobs in the future, possibly pursuing the ways in which art can have a more tangible effect socially through therapy or teaching.

I am a little suspicious of the idea of responsibility as an artist, knowing it can often get confused with a respectability politic that I stand against. On the flip side, I have a great appreciation for the potential to create dialogue and make people feel good. I value the freedom I have to express myself in my work and I would like to think I could go some way in helping others make space for themselves, too. I have the words Angela Davis [an American political activist] shared from her mother ringing in my ears: "Just because this is the way things are now does not mean that it's the way things should be, or will always be."



Bodiest, 2016

<http://www.refinery29.uk/2018/01/184698/working-as-an-artist-phoebe-collings-james>

ArtReview

The Yellow Wallpaper

Ginerva Gambino, Cologne

10 November–16 December, 2017

These days there is no shortage of exhibitions focusing on the body in general and the female body in particular. Yet this is to be expected, since the exploration of this issue is as urgent and topical as ever. Even so, this group show offers a different approach, connecting the works through references (some obvious, some not) to the eponymous 1892 short story by feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman – a tale that obviously hasn't lost importance for female artists since it was first deployed in Feminist Art Program's Womanhouse exhibition in Los Angeles in 1972.

In brief, Gilman's story tells of a female character confined to a room to recover from 'nervous exhaustion'. There she discovers a woman imprisoned inside the pattern of the room's wallpaper, which she begins to rip off, eventually hallucinating that the woman is herself, descending into insanity along the way. If the story is dominated by techniques for the pathologising of womanhood, the works here, by the five female artists, focus instead on the leitmotif of the madness-inducing incompatibility between self-image, the image of women and an actual woman. For example, in her sombre all-over paintings *Tar Baby #7* and *Tar Baby #8* (both 2015), Phoebe Collings-James has applied a wildly patterned black colour using the sole of her foot.

The extent to which she uses this Carolee Schneeman-inspired painting technique to create counterimages of female corporality becomes clear when contrasted with *Cunt* (2014). This insult is repeatedly written, in baby blue, on a dirty cleaning rag, summarising a misogynistic view of women as contemptible domestic workers.



Phoebe Collings-James, *Cunt*, 2014, oil on cloth, 50 x 53 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Ginerva Gambino, Cologne

A more humorous path is taken by Ebecho Muslimova, whose satirical ink drawings show her alter ego Fatebe, a naked pop-eyed corpulent, who variously uses her body and its orifices for her entertainment, for example as a human curtain clip in *Fatebe window curtain* (2016), wherein the curtain goes into her mouth and emerges again somewhere below her waistline. The raw activism of this cartoon character almost functions as an antithesis to the woman in Gilman's story, who is compelled to lie still as part of a resting cure, because medical science at the time related physical stimuli to female hysteria.

Movements of female flesh are also central to Vanessa Conte's *Polished Out* (2017). Constructed in panels like pages of a graphic novel, the drawing shows how a woman's dead tooth is violently extracted from her mouth. The flapping of cheeks after a slap to the face or the intrusion of fingers into the oral cavity are all exaggerated in the kind of pro-violence fashion we associate with, say, Quentin Tarantino's films. This really is an orgy of demeaning brutality. Initially the combination of American pulp and sexualised violence seems highly problematic. Yet this concern largely disappears as soon as one flicks through Conte's short-story collection *Cures for Pouting Girls* (2016), also on display. These tales, inspired by the genre of corporal-punishment fiction (well known via *Fifty Shades of Grey*, 2011), also show female caricatures with enormous breasts and water-melon-size bums being sexually humiliated by angry men, as a punishment for... nothing much really. By means of this unrestrained, ultra-graphic amplification of casual sexism, in stories with titles such as 'Going Down' or 'Pamela's Hard Day', Conte forges a clever connection with Gilman's portrayal of a cure that was aimed at women's minds but intended for their bodies.

The dark, at times cynical humour in most works, especially in those by Conte and Muslimova, manages to remove the sour taste of moralism from this bitter topic. Nonetheless, it's a damning indictment of how women are viewed in our times that Gilman's story continues to be a reference point for young female artists – even if, as here, it's wittily mobilised.

- Moritz Scheper

Translated from the German by Kevin Kennedy

just enough violence: phoebe collings-james and the failure of representation

In a new exhibition of watercolour works by the young artist, the paintings' aesthetic grace is often a way to deal with the violence that surrounds us. Beautiful work that deals with ugly subjects.

CULTURE | By Felix Petty | 25 January 2016, 1:25pm



Alongside A.L. Steiner at Arcadia Missa in Peckham as part of the London-wide exhibition CONDO, Phoebe's work continues to revolve around absence, with a series of watercolour paintings of symbol-heavy animals; horses, she-wolves, a magical chimera that is part medusa and part Pegasus, a hydra, all of which stand in for human bodies, revealing and revelling again in their absence.

"A lot of the animals are sort of representations of ourselves," Phoebe explains, "they embody some of that violence in them. Like the first image I drew, the she wolf on its hind legs, coming towards you. I wanted to just make these images become a bit more human."

The title of these works, *Just Enough Violence*, hints at that violence that inescapably lurks all around us, contrasted here with the watercolour's lightness of touch and colour. One of the most powerful pieces, and the only in the exhibition to actually feature a human body, finds a Klansman atop a horse, a speech bubble appearing from out of shot, "Hey Buster, I ain't afraid of no ghost". That clash, between watercolour and subject reveals most about the themes the work circle around; how we communicate (who's speaking) and the politicised violence of the world around us.

The exhibition is called *Just Enough Violence*, what does that mean to you?

It came from something I heard on the radio when I was working in the studio. The way I was working at the time was by drawing and writing ideas, research, one liners, all that kind of thing, all over these huge pieces of paper. I don't even know what it was in relation to, the whole phrase was 'just enough violence for the whole family' said in quite a gleeful voice. I thought that it was quite poignant really, in terms of our relationship with violence and how thirsty we are for it whilst also being such a negative part of our lives, and how unconscious we seem to be of the reality of violence.

Most of the works are done in watercolour, are you interested in it as an idea, or as a material?

I guess initially it started off as a conceptual idea, wanting to move away from using oil paints in my works because of the inherent value of it. When I started making those paintings they became quite popular and I was selling quite a few of them, but they weren't about that, they were about a certain relationship with performance art and instead they had become valuable abstract paintings and became part of a different art history. I was a bit conflicted about including two of those older oil paintings in the show actually. So the watercolours were kind of returning to trying out something more figurative, more accessible through drawing, using a material less valuable and less toxic.

I like there's that this relationship in the works between the material of watercolour and the idea of watercolour, which I guess relates to the representation of the images, and what these figures represent.

Yeah and I guess obviously the history of watercolour is something that seems exceptionally dull and twee.

Do you you feel labelled, you know, as the model who's also an artist? Do you think it means you have to justify yourself in your work in a way that most male artists would never have to?

I think just as a woman I have to justify my work in a way that male artists would never have to. Like, how many mediocre male artists are there? The moment that I really realised that I stopped giving a fuck.

I feel very very privileged to be able to model, even though it's not particularly stimulating and it has loads of issues. You know like this morning I earned enough money to pay my rent for the next seven months or something, and that's a privilege I just wouldn't get anywhere else. It's also not like I hate fashion, I think there are elements of it that are wonderful, especially having lived in London for so long, with great designers like Martine Rose and Simone Rocha and Claire Barrow.

So is it annoying being called and artist and model? Yes and no. I don't know if I mind as much anymore and I also don't ever want to be seen as being a victim, like this is some dirty little secret that I have. I wouldn't be doing modelling if I had money, but still sometimes it's relevant to not have it as a secret, because it might be important for the conversation.

Your last exhibition was called *Choke On Your Tongue*. I'm wondering if that feeling and theme still comes up in the work, it's so loaded with the problems of communication...

Am I still feeling choked or restrained?

Yeah.

When I first started making those choking drawings I was very young, about 20, I was going out with a photographer and not... I don't know, I just hated him so much and didn't know how to express myself properly with him, with the world, and I started quite obsessively drawing these animals that were choking on their tongues.

I think that's what kind of happens a lot, these things that might come out of something that's personal then actually transcend that into something that's far more about how all of us are communicating, about what's happening in the media or in the world. I think those concerns are pretty constant. So to answer the question, I do still feel like that, yes, but not all the time.

In your work I really like that relationship though, between how it communicates the idea of the difficulty of communication.

It's something that never really goes away. It's like that dream where you can't talk or can't scream. These feelings are triggered by going to a Rise Up march in New York and feeling like we're standing together, we are real, our bodies are real, life is real, and then Tamir Rice not getting justice and sitting my living room with my parents crying. But also, at the same time, sitting in the living room with my parents just feeling very lucky to be alive. One of the drawings deals with that actually, the horse saying 'can I live'. These things always hang in the balance.

Much of the work, even obliquely, deals with race. It's maybe less overt here though, than the last exhibition, which featured the KKK-esque hood sculptures.

I think that race kind of relates to everything I've been rambling on about, in that it's something that's constantly in my consciousness. Even when I was making these paintings you know, the starting point might've been my use of watercolours, and I'd been doing a lot of research into classical myths, but then when I was actually making the work a lot of it is quite automatic, drawing out of my imagination, and it was the same with those pieces. It's almost just like the materials matching up with the ideas you're thinking about.

When I started making those sculptures, I was really interested in the material and wanted to make something really beautiful and moving that was somehow representational of the feeling of falling, of vertigo and something being in flux. So I was using this huge icing bag to mould the plaster, and I made holes in it, and then after I'd turned the first one upside down it's form as a hood became apparent. It's not an accident, but it's almost like all my intentions at the beginning for the material only then kind of came through I guess.

It's not really related I guess, but it was something else I was thinking about recently, and just how much of a problem with race the art world has.
It's horrible.

Something as simple as how few black artists there are shows how endemic the problem is.

It's only really been in the last year or two that I feel like I'm having more and more contact with the art world and it's a space in which I don't really feel comfortable. It doesn't reflect other aspects of my life, I think a lot of people feel like that. It's very much one class, mainly heterosexual.. we're in a difficult position at the moment because actually to be somehow Other is what people want at the moment. So it's this real toss up, it's not the same conversation anymore, that people aren't interested in black artists, people aren't interested in queer artists -- that's what they want, Otherness has such a high currency at the moment.

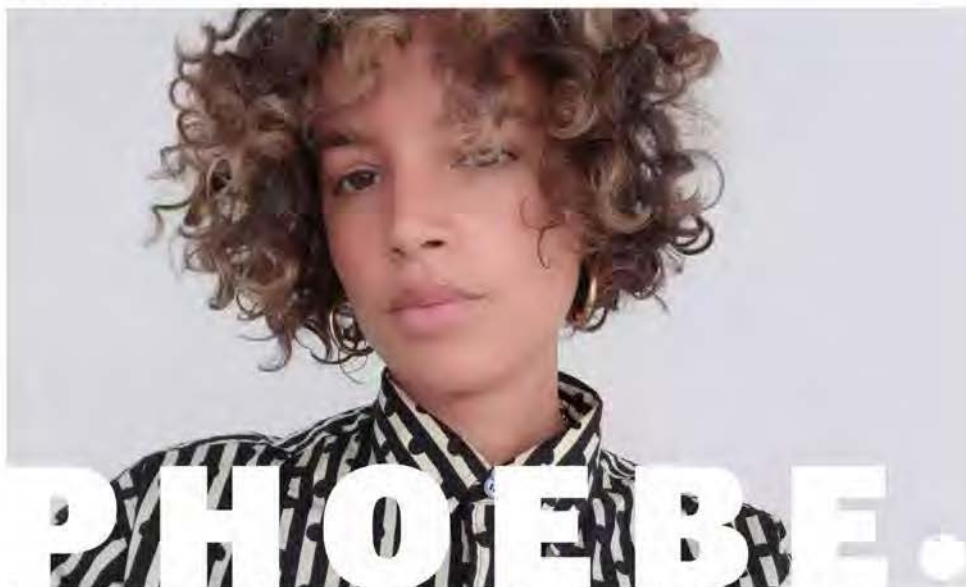
The problem in the art world is systemic and it is sort of exceptionalist in that there is probably room for one black artist at a time, or like, one per gallery. At art world parties we'll go into a space which will predominantly be middle-class, predominantly white, predominantly male, and the problem gets worse the higher up in the gallery world you go. It's not a space I really want to be in, and something I think a lot of artists don't feel comfortable with. The worst thing is that it doesn't really seem to changing.

Text Felix Petty
Photography Lucie McLaughlin, courtesy of Arcadia Missa
x

Phoebe Collings-James: the artist and model taking on tokenism

The British artist's paintings, video and sculpture explore desire, sexuality and violence. She's the second link in . Scroll down to see images from her day

Ellen Burney



British artist Phoebe Collings-James grew up a poster girl for teen-zine, mixed-race models. But rather than being the break-out star, she broke out of the industry. She was 18 and increasingly uncomfortable with the casting process and lingerie shows under the male

gaze. "As a model, I have often felt very conflicted as a reluctant acceptable face of blackness," the Hackney-born, Goldsmiths graduate in fine art told Nylon magazine last year. "I have been used as a token black woman purely because I am 'not too dark!'"

Now 29, and based in New York, the half-Jamaican artist is a bold new face in the art world. Her past experiences of discrimination and objectification energise her eye-catching work that has been exhibited from Beirut to Brooklyn. Exploring themes of "blackness" and gender through illustration, sculpture, poetry, painting and mixed media installation, there have been ceramic tongues, painted nooses and works of chewing gum art.



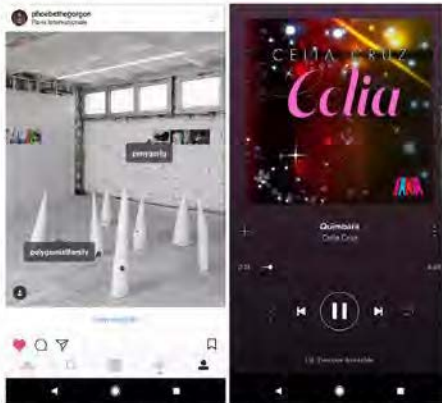
Still-life with fishing net; lilac toes.

Her 2014 exhibition, Ivory Black, featured floor-to-ceiling paintings using the blackest and thickest possible paint she could find, and was a follow-up show to Flesh Tint, which dissected the meaningless words often used to describe skin tones. Last year she released a series of watercolour paintings of animals (such as she-wolfs and part-Medusa, part-Pegasus creatures) titled Just Enough Violence.



Regulation mirror selfie.

It explores the connections between birthplace, workplace and sites of heritage and features storytelling by her grandmother and great aunt, through audio installations. Earlier this year, *Bust Wide Open* was her contribution to *Harlem Postcards* – a New York-based show that invites contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds to reflect on Harlem. She captured an image of a black, faceless mannequin wearing a Black Lives Matter merchandise hoodie and hat on 125th Street.



Post from Phoebe's Instagram feed of her Paris exhibition; current playlist.

Born in Homerton, east London, Collings-James's first art exhibit was "orange juice pond" made in her aunt's bed, aged six. Later, influenced by her father, who photographed bands by night, she went on to study arts and textiles at 16. In 2009, she graduated in fine art from Goldsmiths University, before working for a photographer's agent who represented Helmut Newton and Corinne Day.



Gal-dem magazine.

She launched a feminist blog in 2013 and was a contributor to the *Being Mixed Race* live event at Southbank's Women of the World festival. She returned to the runway – for a stint at the *Sibling By Sister AW14* show in London and a collaboration with Dior – but most recently she is the face of British designer Amanda Wakeley, in an advertising campaign that has previously featured equally accomplished women such as ballerina Kate Byrne and Kathryn Parsons, cofounder of Decoded.

Feminism and Fashion? Artist Phoebe Collings-James Makes the Case



Photographed by Lily Bertrand-Webb

The fashion industry's fascination with the art world is nothing new. "It's a mutual admiration for the other's craft, and at their best, they work together," says Phoebe Collings-James, the 26-year-old Brit who occupies a not insignificant space in both spheres. The half-Jamaican beauty started modeling at age thirteen, but growing up in that spotlight didn't really suit her sense of self ("I was probably a bit too precocious . . .") and she switched gears to study fine art at Goldsmiths in London, graduating in 2009. Her latest exhibition, which opened in Antwerp on Saturday, is titled "Ivory Black," named after the pigments used in her floor-to-ceiling paintings (it's the continuation of a previous show called "Flesh Tint"). "The idea was to think about how [skin tones] are described, and that they don't actually describe anyone perhaps," she said.

It's a thought that very well could have stemmed from her early modeling days. "This is nearly ten years ago, but being a mixed-race model, especially in London, was very difficult," she says. "There would be castings just for black girls but I'm very fair-skinned. Back then, any time a black model was used it was in a very exotic way—I wasn't exotic-looking enough, but I also wasn't white." As she continued to observe her role within fashion, the problems of the industry became too apparent to ignore. "I was starting to form ideas on what I thought feminism was, and what being was, and it really seemed to conflict with everything I was experiencing as a model," she says, remembering one time when she booked a lingerie catwalk gig in Brighton and was ogled by men ten or fifteen years her senior. "This was not a good thing."

And therein lies the Venn diagram of Collings-James's life: Part-time model, internationally exhibited artist, full-time feminist. Somehow, she exists in the center of these three overlapping circles. After appearing in a 2012 profile in *British Vogue*, she reentered the fashion game, walking in the fall 2014 *Sibling* show and sitting front row at Simone Rocha—but this time on her own terms. "I think when you're younger you can be pushed into doing things," Collings-James says. "But now, for example, I wouldn't work with certain photographers, ever. And there are certain designers who don't use any black models and I don't wear those people's clothes." Of course, these convictions aren't always apparent to her colleagues in the art world. "A small handful of comments have gotten back to me," she says, unbothered. "[Art] is still a bit of a boys club and anyone who is female and young and at all desirable-looking to a male gaze is going to be immediately passed over for potentially not being serious. I think you have to let the work prove people wrong." It certainly seems to be doing just that, considering her paintings, sculptures, and performance pieces (which often explore sexuality, desire, and violence) have been on view in such far-flung locals as Mexico City, Brooklyn, and Beirut.

For anyone still unclear on her principles, there's *Cunt Today*, the feminist blog she started to publish original writing and collate stories and ideas from across the web. "One thing I really want to encourage is the fact that anyone can be [a feminist]," she says. "I think, unfortunately—and even someone like Miuccia Prada has mentioned this—it can be really hard to be brave enough to be the first person. You know, I'm not a feminist artist, I'm just an artist. I would rather talk about my paintings and sculptures, but somebody has to speak out about it. I think it's too much of an easy way out not to confront those things."

Phoebe Collings-James Wants To Change The Face Of The Art World with more color in the picture

BY SYDNEY GORE FEBRUARY 16, 2016



In celebration of Black History Month, NYLON is running a spotlight series called Black Girl Power... The Future Is Bright. Every day, phenomenal black women from different industries will be featured to tell their stories—revealing how they became who they are, showing what they have accomplished, and pinpointing how they navigated their careers. Black women deserve to be celebrated 365 days of the year, and we hope that this series will inspire everyone to believe in the power of #blackgirlmagic.

Phoebe Collings-James is an artist from London currently based in New York. Breaking out into the art world can be challenging enough as a woman, but the 28-year-old has been exposed to even more realities as the product of an English and Jamaican family. Collings-James' latest work at the CONDO exhibition consisted of a series of watercolour paintings of animals titled Just Enough Violence. (Her previous series was called Choke On Your Tongue.)

"My work relies on a hypersensitivity to the situations and people surrounding me. Perhaps that broadly describes many artists, but it is true. I think it's about bearing witness," she told us in an email. "That gets scrambled with my research and desires to make physical things, to use my hands to turn materials from one

form to another. I love art. I feel like I always forget to say that and it's the most obvious answer really. I got into it because I love it. I find it inspiring because it can open up your imagination, which is something that is essential if we are to live and not merely survive."

Collings-James started modeling as a teenager and then got back into it a few years ago as a means to support her artistic practice. Her approach toward fashion and art has always been one of great ambivalence. "I think clothes are vitally important, even more so to people who are overlooked or marginalised in society," she added. "For many it is one of the few ways of expressing your creativity. To show the world who you are, what you are into, and what you believe in."

This reasoning is why Collings-James thinks that cultural appropriation has become a more divisive subject today. "Whether it's designers appropriating 'work wear' or Kylie Jenner wearing her hair in cornrows, our style is something very precious," she explained.

Get more familiar with Collings-James and her work in the interview, below!

How do you maneuver your respective industry as a black woman?

Firstly, there has to be a disclaimer that the art worlds I am talking about and have experienced are in the U.K., U.S.A. and a bit of western Europe, which is not the whole world or the whole art world despite us lazily thinking that it is. As an artist it's the most hot thing at the moment to be black or queer or female; the trendiness and commodification of those identities is dangerous and terrifying. So your otherness is suddenly simultaneously keeping you in the minority while also having a very high currency placed on it. I have found it helpful trying wherever possible to work with curators and galleries who are sensitive to that, which mostly means not working with galleries where there are all white males. It might seem extreme but it's actually about self preservation. There is no way a gallery with an all cis, all white male team is going to be able to represent my work well.

Could you describe a moment where you felt like you defied the odds or broke a barrier?

Being the exception is really not a broken barrier, it is a smoke screen that gives a completely false sense of progress. I have been able to slip very easily with my "light skin" into situations where my dad, for example, as a black man, or even my sister who has darker skin than me, would not have experienced in the same way. As a model, I have often felt very conflicted as a reluctant acceptable face of blackness; I have been used as a token black woman purely because I am "not too dark."

Black and brown exceptionalism is so real now that the next huge barrier that will be broken will be when we are allowed to be mediocre. When we can just live. That is something I have really noticed in the art world, hundreds of cripplingly mediocre white male artists emerging each year, but for all those who do not fit into that you have to shine the brightest. You have to really prove yourself in a way that white men do not. I remember when I passed my A-levels with A grades and I was eligible for some sort of prize money as a black student who got exceptional grades. Often the seemingly defied odds are simply because as a non-white person less is expected of you. It seems crazy now.

How did you grow into your black identity? (Or, if you're multiracial, how did you grow into your identity as such?)

I feel like I'm only just figuring that out to be honest. When I see younger women like Amandla Stenberg speak so eloquently and vehemently about their identities I'm so happy that they exist now. As I feel like I was looking for that kind of inspiration as a kid and didn't find it until much later. A lot of my relationships with my identity have been through the lens of relationships with men who, both black and white, have projected their own complicated relationships with race onto my body and mind. It's only in the last year I have started to feel more whole. As black people, we often are seen as just skin. Light skin, dark skin, golden skin—ooh that beautiful blue-black skin. We don't get to be whole. We don't get to be nuanced or chameleon-like.

I have been reading Grace Jones' autobiography and she is giving me life each day. Coming from Jamaica like my father's family, she describes her relationship with a world that would rather she stayed small, or fitted neatly in a box, and she continues at age 66 to smash all conventions. I especially like the way she describes each of the glossy photos that line the gutter of the book. "At the edge of the Caribbean Sea." "A one-man show. A red curtain, an accordion, a minimal staircase, one leg up. Voila - theatre!" "Acting natural in a 1970's disco setting." "Using a New York rooftop as a stage, totally believing in myself." When people say gender and race are constructs, Grace knows that innately. She lives that performance of identities. She is my hero/ine!

Growing up, where did you look for inspiration? Who or what inspires you now?

I looked to the same places as everyone else! Magazines, TV, friends. It was very sad and disheartening how few black women were in the spaces I was interested in, but when I did find them I really held on tight. I found most of my inspiration in music: Aaliyah, Missy Elliot, Motown, and Destiny's Child were my whole world at that age and I wanted to copy everything about them. I also loved art and fashion before I knew that they were nemeses! Dressing up, making art, and making dance routines was standard. When I first started studying art I was 16 and I remember visiting the Louvre in Paris for the first time and being horrified, thinking this is art?

To me, Missy Elliot's music videos were art, the girls giving attitude posing in *The Face* and in *i-D* were art, the fabrics of the fancy clothes I used to dream of when I walked down Bond Street in London were art, my anger and excitement at the world was also art. These rubbish old oil paintings of white men were not. It wasn't until a teacher introduced me to the work of Shirin Neshat, Ghada Amer, Adrian Piper, and Sonia Boyce that I finally felt at home. I could sew or write or dance or swear and it could be art. That might sound very basic but it was a huge revelation to be exposed to those women speaking about their worlds in new ways. Adrian Piper's "Funk Lessons" is still one of the richest expressions of what it means to be black, to appropriate, to express a physical vernacular, that I have ever seen in an art work. Her works that spoke about her light skin and the racism that she was privy to as a woman who could "pass" as white resonated deeply.

Ghada Amer's hectic erotic embroidery was another exciting discovery to a horny 17-year-old me, thinking about my own gender and sexuality through the imagination of an Egyptian-born American artist was extremely important. Now it is more of the same! I am lucky to be inspired now by many of the artists I get to work with which is amazing. I've been reading a lot of sci-fi recently which has been a good way of thinking about race and gender politics in a way that allows space for the imagination as opposed to theory-heavy texts, whilst also being equally as informative and powerful. Especially when thinking about how the hell we are ever going to ever move out of this mess and deal with the legacy of pain we have been handed. I watched *black Orpheus* this week which I think has fast become my favourite film. The tailored styles in the heat, the music, the light and cinematography, the sex and laughter are all so infectious and mesmerising.

PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES' 'EVERYONE FOREVER'

Artist Phoebe Collings-James creates artwork in partnership with charity organisation, Water for People, which provides fresh water to more than 100,000 people.



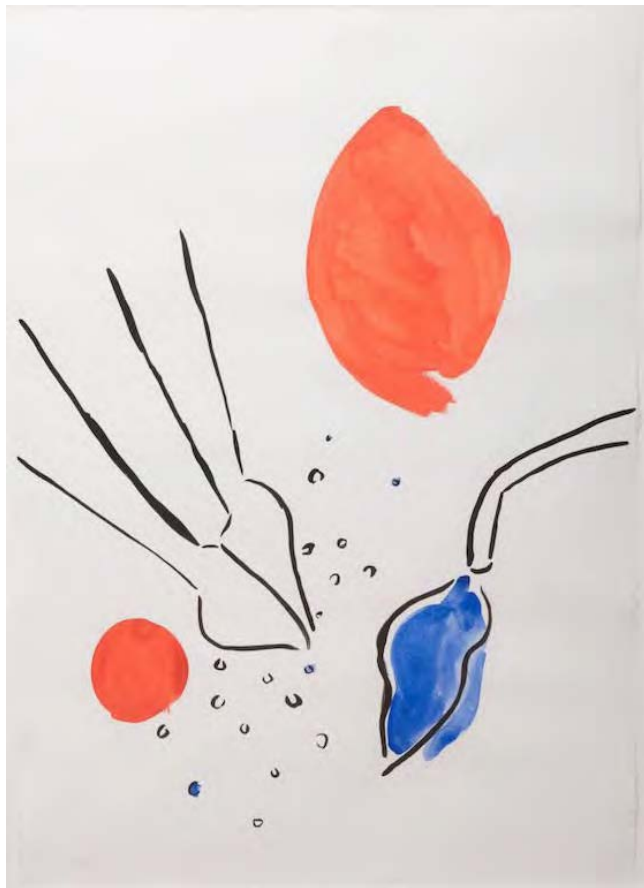
Artist Phoebe Collings-James partners with Water for People and Absolut Elyx for a stimulating cause that reflects humanitarian achievements and sustainable growth and development.

On Wednesday she hosted a dinner at Bistrottheque for a cause that celebrates a five-year partnership with Absolut Elyx. Three artworks were created especially for the joint project, which were inspired by providing clean water.

Phoebe is known for her feminist ideologies, positioning herself as a strong female artist working and supporting causes that are meaningful and representative of her beliefs. Phoebe's blog, Cunt Today, talks

about gender and sexuality discrimination, and female empowerment.

She has now developed a reputation of being an audacious supporter of feminists, an activist for women and continues to project her political views and opinions vehemently.

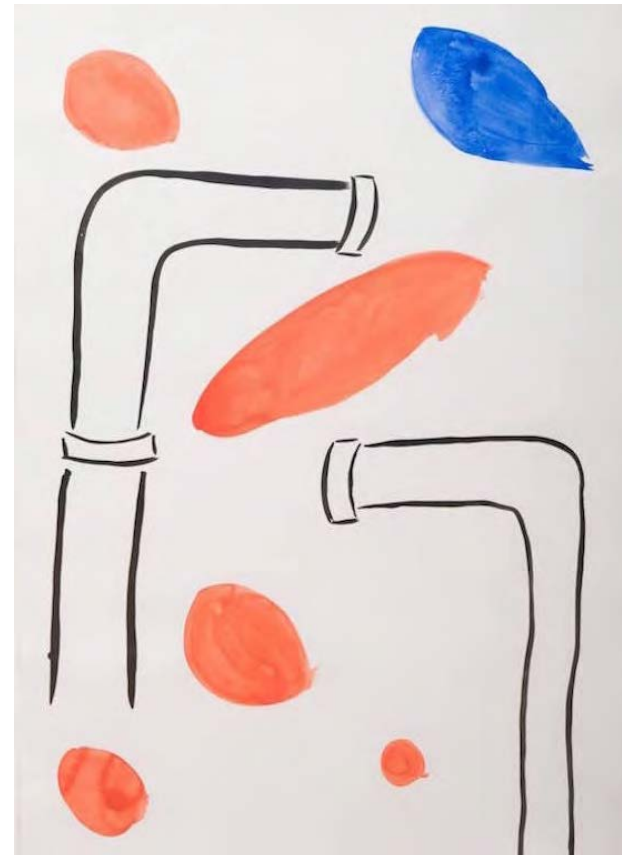


Everyone Forever paintings are more than just art pieces; they emulate and instigate a humanitarian appeal, giving a voice to the millions of people who struggle to access the basic necessities of fresh water. "I was also thinking of the spirit of Emory Douglas' incredible Black Panther posters, that aimed to educate through images as a way of being both accessible to all, inspirational and motivational."

And what does Water for People achieve? It's a charity that provides sanitary water to over 100,000 people in India, Uganda, Peru and Bolivia. "Water For People is a charity with a focus on a long-term plan for not only infrastructure that allows access to safe water, but putting the services and systems in place to keep water flowing forever," Phoebe explained. "They are committed to improving the lives of women and children globally and I am pleased to be able to contribute in my small way to their big idea."

Marriage of Elyx and Water for People derives from one commonality: the focus on water. Absolut Elyx is a vodka, made from 50% water. Drinks manufacturing doesn't have to be entirely self-serving. Giving back to communities should be an integral component to any capitalist entity. Adam Boita, Head of Marketing at Absolut Elyx, explains, "We don't just fill our own glasses, but help fill the glasses of those in need with the most important drink in the world."

Perhaps other corporations can reflect and repeat Absolut Elyx and Phoebe's humanitarian proclivities.



<http://garagemag.com/phoebe-collings-james-everyone-forever/>

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