

05.03.17-06.25.17

NEW MUSEUM

RAGGA

A large, abstract sculpture made of dark, textured material, possibly fur or wool, with a white, shaggy base, set against a pink background. The sculpture has a complex, organic form with many small, rounded protrusions and a rough, uneven surface. The white base is also made of a similar textured material, creating a stark contrast with the dark upper part. The background is a solid, light pink color.

ALL THE THREATENED AND DELICIOUS THINGS JOINING ONE ANOTHER

BECAUSE THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY WAS TOO OFTEN WIPE OUT, THE CARIBBEAN WRITER MUST "DIG DEEP" INTO THIS MEMORY FOLLOWING THE LATENT SIGNS THAT HE HAS PICKED UP IN THE EVERYDAY WORLD... BECAUSE THE CARIBBEAN CONSCIOUSNESS WAS BROKEN UP BY STERILE BARRIERS, THE WRITER MUST BE ABLE TO GIVE EXPRESSION TO ALL THOSE OCCASIONS WHEN THESE BARRIERS WERE PARTIALLY BROKEN. —ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

MISSION

RAGGA NYC is a hybrid of ideas that began as late-night conversations about familial island roots, current social politics, empanadas vs. beef patties, pum pum shorts, scamming, and a longing for an authentic dancehall party that would also provide a safe space for queer Caribbeans and their kin. It is RAGGA's mission to grow, congregate, educate, and highlight the queer Caribbean community and our allies through interviews and events curated by me, Christopher Udemezue (Neon Christina). With a focus on the arts, politics, and culture, RAGGA brings you exhibitions, publications, media coverage, and of course bashments. RAGGA NYC: all things cunt and Caribbean.

For me, my road to self-love and pride has been rooted in knowing where I come from. Looking into Caribbean history, spirituality, and my people as a whole has fast-tracked a sense of self-worth and strength—especially given the current state of the country and the world. White Americans take for granted that their history and religions are the mainstream in this country and abroad. People of color at large, and Caribbean people living here in the US, are often disconnected from their own story. The image of the sad slave is all I knew. All the heroes on TV are white; all the heroes in the history books are white. Where do I find my reflection? I can't find her. To this day, queer

and POC history is often relegated to the backs of the history books, if it's included at all. Vodou, for example—a religion with roots in non-gender-binary practice, which liberated Haiti from French control—is demonized in contemporary media and pop culture. And as Maya Monès mentions in her interview, "Like most Dominican families, mine refrained from exploring our roots, leaving me with a cloudy sense of pride in a sort of racial limbo. It felt like I was facing a foggy mirror, with a deep yearning to see and embrace the person who stood opposite me." From the Haitian Revolution's religious spark; from the irony of William Thomas Beckford, the largest plantation owner in Jamaica, fleeing his family in England because he was gay; from the origins of witchcraft in West Africa—the more I looked back, the more I garnered strength, yet still yearned to see myself. Where is my queer self? What are the stories of my trans sisters during the fight for freedom in Trinidad and Tobago? What are the stories of my femme brothers in Puerto Rico's rebellions against the Spaniards? We were there too. We have always been here. I want to see myself. This exhibit is the seed of all these questions, which I hope we will grow and build together.

—Christopher Udemezue (Neon Christina)

RAGGA

Cover Photo: Jason Rodgers

The New Museum's Department of Education and Public Engagement presents the exhibition and residency "RAGGA NYC: All the threatened and delicious things joining one another." RAGGA NYC, a platform founded by Christopher Udemezue, connects a community of queer Caribbean artists and allies working across a wide range of disciplines—including visual art, fashion, and poetry—to explore how race, sexuality, gender, heritage, and history inform their work and their lives. RAGGA fosters a network and an extended family that make space for solidarity, celebration, and expression, with deep commitments to education and grassroots organizing. The exhibition and public programming during RAGGA's residency explore Afro-Caribbean Diasporic traditions with a group of artists and activists who take up Édouard Glissant's claim that "the language of the Caribbean artist does not originate in the obsession with celebrating his inner self; this inner self is inseparable from the future evolution of his community [in which] he is his own ethnologist, historian, [and] linguist." The exhibition title quotes Glissant's description of a world in which beings can come together under a veil of opacity and preserve difference in a new model of relation.

Udemezue started RAGGA in 2015 after having thrown queer Caribbean parties in New York City for several years. Hoping to create a platform that would allow for greater reflection and collaboration within his community, he began interviewing queer Caribbean artists whom he admired, asking how their backgrounds affected their work and lives. Through these conversations, partially reproduced in this publication, commonalities emerge among members' stories and aspirations: to heal, to reconnect to ancestral histories, to cultivate a distinctly queer Caribbean community, to imagine new models of kinship.

The exhibition includes sculptures from Renée Stout's *Roots and Charms* series, which nod to the hand-painted signs advertising elixirs and healing on the storefronts of root medicine shops in New Orleans and Washington, DC, and to the symbolic objects found within them. Drawing on a practice that treats physical health as deeply connected to economic and psychological well-being, the series explores the spiritual and commercial dimensions of these signs' calls for protection, relief, and recovery.

Sculptures in Tau Lewis's *foraged, ain't free* series reference historical busts, perhaps most overtly in *Georgia marble marks slave burial sites across America* (2016), in which the face and torso of a

figure are centered on cinder blocks. Marbled wisps of bluish grey and black mark the figure's glossy surface. The work's title alludes to a variety of stone commonly known as "creole marble," which came from Pickens County, Georgia, and could be purchased during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in three tones: light creole, medium creole, and dark creole. The stone quarry originally belonged to the Cherokee Nation but, after the passage of Andrew Jackson's 1830 Indian Removal Act, John Darnell assumed control of the land and founded the Georgia Marble Company on it. During the Civil War, Darnell flew a Union flag over his property despite its location in a Confederate zone, and after the war, Georgia Marble was used to construct most government monuments, including the Lincoln Memorial. Despite its title, Lewis's sculpture is in fact not made of this marble; rather, she uses plaster, cement, and acrylic paint. While some works in the series include casts of the artist's face or the faces of her friends, others refuse overt representation, instead presenting cacti as oblique stand-ins for a figure. As plants transplanted to radically different climates where they nevertheless thrive, the cacti serve as a metaphor for the diasporic condition.

Works in Paul Anthony Smith's *Grey Area* series layer grainy silkscreened images of male acquaintances—whom Smith encountered while back in his hometown in Jamaica for his uncle's funeral—alongside images of a cemetery burial ground, suggesting a complex relationship to an island he left as a child. *Grey Area*, the works' title, describes a liminal state between two mutually exclusive categories: a zone where two things intersect and well-known distinctions become troubled, a configuration from which something new might emerge.

Christopher Udemezue's photographs return to the legend of Queen Nanny, the eighteenth-century Obeah woman who escaped slavery with her brothers and became leader of the Jamaican Maroons, and to the Vodou ceremony at Bois Caïman, led by Mambo Cécile Fatiman, which sparked the Haitian Revolution—the only successful national slave rebellion in history. Drawing on the tradition of spirit photography, the works layer past and present to pursue a distinctly queer, matriarchal lineage and inheritance.

Beneath the floor of the exhibition, Carolyn Lazard and Bleue Liverpool present *Chaos-monde* (2017), five totems arranged as an astrological map tracing cosmological positions on two seminal dates in Caribbean history: January 1, 1804, the day independence

was declared in Haiti, and October 27, 1979, the day St. Vincent gained independence. The positions of the stars on the evening of the Haitian Revolution are legendary, and were cited by the Vodou practitioners who led the rebellion. The largest totem, representing the sun, is partially visible through a Plexiglas trapdoor, encircled by smaller totems that represent Venus, Mercury, Jupiter, and Mars. Each consists of a wooden base supporting an assemblage that combines personal items and materials native to the Caribbean. In this installation, Lazard and Liverpool have inverted ground and sky, placing a celestial landscape beneath our feet.

The title of Lazard and Liverpool's piece derives from Glissant, who writes, "I call *Chaos-monde* the current shock of so many cultures that flare up, repel themselves, disappear, still subsist, fall asleep, or transform, slowly or at breakneck speed: these bursts... we cannot predict." Glissant advocated for the right to opacity, a protective barrier to resist the reductiveness of humanism, which he argued was deeply tied to the colonial enterprise. In this installation, Lazard and Liverpool investigate syncretism, the assimilation of religious practices often described as a natural merging of disparate beliefs and customs, a definition that obscures the great violence of the Christianization of the colonies. In reality, syncretism was a method of survival and a strategic way of hiding of one practice within the guise of another. By burying sacred objects and pieces of recording technology beneath the gallery floor, *Chaos-monde* uses concealment as a protective measure and an expansive gesture against the transparent performance of Caribbean identity.

Poetry forms a foundation for the residency. Shanekia McIntosh presents "Touched" (2017), a new poem in the exhibition recounting her grandmother's hair-braiding and tales of Queen Nanny, weaving together their stories. Joey De Jesus's handwritten poems, titled "Astrolabe / Curse 1, 2 & 3" (2017), form rich cosmologies through words and shape. Jahmal B. Golden's printed poem *Memoir* (2017) testifies to spiritual and personal transformations, and is flanked on the right and left by photographs of vibrantly colored hands performing rituals tied to self-excavation. Maya Monès's audio series *Ciencias Sociales* [Social Sciences] (2017) explores Afro-Latinx identity through the recovery of unspoken family history, a process of working to become closer to her roots. "Mami," a haunting song in this series that Monès recorded with conga drums, resounds throughout the

exhibition space, serving as a vibrant call for reflection and to rise.

At its core, RAGGA is committed to fostering conversations between queer Caribbean artists and allies. These often start with interviews that Udemezue conducts with RAGGA members about how their backgrounds have affected their work and lives, and continue during small dinner parties RAGGA hosts every few months. During the residency, RAGGA will host a private dinner focused on wellness and roots, organized by cofounder of Enroot Collective DeVonn Francis, horticultural therapist Pamela Koch, and urban herbalist Antonia Estela Pérez. In addition, the Resource Center will include publications and manuals from writers, herbalists, activists, and DJs involved with RAGGA, providing a wider view of work produced by members of this loose, rapidly growing collective.

FEATURES

BEARCAT

Island: Jamaica
Craft: Artist



My relationship to Jamaica is ancestral; I have never been. My father, from that side, I didn't meet until he was released from prison for international drug runs. The man I eventually met at sixteen was a beautiful artist, but I cannot deny or ignore the fact that he has severe mental health challenges. I've seen it play out with my own eyes; it's frightening and it's the reason my mother had no choice but to escape him, and ultimately the reason I decided not to pursue a relationship with him after we met.

So I was raised by my white mother who ultimately couldn't handle and didn't know what to do with me and my blackness. I am geographically thankful to have grown up in Brixton, surrounded by other black and brown people, where I went to predominantly black schools and could begin to start learning things about myself—but that didn't come without harsh lessons on colorism, leading to extreme violence and bullying, which I later learned to understand as tools of the oppressor.

In school, when parties were thrown for Christmas or charity, dancehall music would be played and I would literally lose myself—I felt the music like nothing else before. Now, as an adult and as a DJ, I get to play these same songs to so many different audiences, which is incredibly empowering because it wasn't so easy to access or enjoy or this style as a child. For example, I was caught a couple of times dancing in the mirror at home to some bashment and was punished for this with a beating. I grew up in an environment where I was told "not to give black looks" or "not to talk black." I still don't know what that means, and there are things

Excerpts from features with members of the RAGGA community are reprinted here. For full interviews, please visit ragganyc.com. As the RAGGA community continues to grow, additional interviews will be added to the website.

about my childhood I will process for the rest of my life, but I survived it, and music helps heal those wounds.

DEVONN FRANCIS

Island: First Generation Jamaican-American
Craft: Chef, Writer



My work involves empowering folks to educate themselves about food through communal gatherings. To understand the power of food culture is to understand the power that eating and taste have over an individual's body and within a larger community context. When people eat and learn together, I often see barriers being broken down and bridges being formed where they had not existed prior. This understanding came to me in the form of time spent with my parents in the kitchen and at the little Jamaican restaurant my dad opened when I was young. The kitchen became my safe space and I wanted to share myself with the world through food.

My mother and father—both Jamaican-born—are radical in the ways in which they have taught me how to love myself and to give love to others. Typically that gift was through meals. However, when I first came out to them as gay, they were terrified. Despite their lack of understanding, I still did the best I could to

persevere and learn as much as possible about my craft, as queer folk must often do. Regardless of this, they have always encouraged me to take pride in my identity and supported me in all of my creative pursuits. I'm forever grateful for their love and caretaking in my life, and food, for me, extends that gift of caretaking to other folks who are looking to build a supportive community or a family in their lives. Jamaican cuisine, which shares its many flavors and ingredients with places like Africa, Latin America, Spain, India, and even China, is inspiring to me because it is the perfect story of diasporic expression. We are connected via our hearts, but also very strongly connected by our guts. The fact of the matter is food history connects people over great distances, and perhaps envisioning collective recovery from systemic traumas and supporting marginalized communities does not have to look and feel so unreachable. All oppression is in some way connected. We can make space for one another and heal together.

JAHMAL B. GOLDEN

Island: Trinidad and Tobago
Craft: Obeah, etc.



I'm inspired by my context—growing up with an eye for hyper-symbolic cognition, among other things. It started with my grandmother's Christianity, which I rejected shortly after grounding myself in Afro-Caribbean folk religion. I aspire to create and rearrange stories/histories in a way that honors the tradition of oral storytelling and the scriptures I read and continue to cite.

Currently, I'm investigating a practice of self-examination that attempts to undo years of self-evaluation.

FRANKIE DECAIZA HUTCHINSON

Island: Of Jamaican descent but have never been
Craft: Cofounder of Discwoman



Growing up in the Caribbean Diaspora in London, I learned very quickly what whiteness was and that whiteness was "right," desirable, and beautiful. For a long time I considered myself ugly and stupid, and believed I couldn't accomplish much more than high school. It took one teacher to broaden my horizons, which is cheesy lol but literally she said, "You're a great writer, you should apply for Oxford," and I was like, *What the fuck are you talking about?* Completely blew my mind. Not even because she said Oxford but that someone actually thought I was smart and capable of doing more. I thought higher education was just for other people, not my black self. I really do reflect and cry when I think about this. Racism really feels like a conspiracy. Why wasn't I told I could do more? This is just one event in my personal process of unlearning racism. As much as this process seems to never end, I must say it's so beautiful to feel a sense of pride in my Jamaican ancestry that I can bring to what I do with Discwoman. It's such an emotional process to create a platform and be able to put people on it that you wish you'd seen at a young age. It feels like the biggest fuck you to all the racists I encountered growing up and this makes me beam maniacally with joy.

JOEY DE JESUS

Island: Puerto Rico
Craft: Poet



My ancestry exists
as a pantheon of whispers;

therefore, the wind
is my ancestry. Far off

sounds in my memory—
ni de aquí, ni de allá

—500 years of colonial rule,
enough generational distance

to be distant now. I work
hard. I work harder. Never

enough. For the product
of colonialism to be present

in the skin, is a thing I think
abt sometimes. I outlive each day

storm-fit and unsouling
myself. Loss. Lostness. Lost & list

-ening. Enemy, animate
my background—the noise

-scape of each triggered thought,
each iteration against oppression

a bone carved into the likeness
of my face—a pedagogy

of my own design—a murmur
of shadows

to which I must return.
& Thaz it.

CAROLYN LAZARD

Island: Haiti
Craft: Artist, Writer, Film Programmer



I'm interested in how marginalized people have always supported each other and cared for one another in the face of ongoing state terror and violent repression. I feel emboldened to do the work that I do because of the legacy of my ancestors. I come from a long, long line of freedom fighters and healers who defeated the French, Spanish, and British militaries during the Haitian Revolution—the only successful slave revolt in modern history, which resulted in the eradication of slavery and the expulsion of white people from the island. I rely heavily on my cultural heritage (art, music, storytelling, etc.) to keep the spirit of this resistance alive in the face of the 200+ years of disenfranchisement and persecution of Haiti by parasitic states like the United States and France.

Vodou is a particularly strong influence on my art practice and politics. Haitian cosmologies are quite complex and evade simplistic binary notions of gender, race, and disability. The Lwa in Haitian Vodou shape-shift: they take on the form of humans, animals, or plants. Many of them are queer and their genders are infinitely variable. They help me remember what it means to live in the spaces between life and death, sickness and health, the masculine and the feminine, and so on. My Haitian heritage is the home from which I continually reframe and question dominant social and political systems, namely white-supremacist capitalist ableist cissexist patriarchy (dang, that's a mouthful).

TAU LEWIS

Island: Jamaica
Craft: Sculptor



I think a lot about displacement, or the feeling of being displaced. I know I have a lot of fire in my history, or I guess in the story of how I got here. I'm interested in that collective fire that lives inside tropical bodies. I think blackness embodies resourcefulness and movement and beauty. Everything I make is in consideration of that.

Island people are interesting because many of us don't know our faraway ancestry. The dispersal of island people fascinates me—imagining my history that I don't know. I'm obsessed with storytelling.

I make work about blackness because it feels good to use my hands to tell these stories. I really dedicate my body to the process, and everything I make is infused with very personal, loving gestures. Blackness is the most complex, misunderstood, misrepresented, and never-ending story.

RAIN LOVE

Island: Jamaica
Craft: Musician, Model, Dancer



I grew up in Queens, NY, with my Jamaican mother. Outside the apartment was America but inside my house was Jamaica. I grew up listening to ska, old-school reggae/dancehall, and gospel music. In the '90s and early 2000s, a lot of amazing R&B, hip-hop, and rap songs with dance themes with real lyricism shaped my world outside of the home. Music and dance were part of my everyday routine. My mother would sing and dance all the time and everywhere. I got it from my Mama. Jamaican Patois is a dialect of English that has some core foundation, but a lot of it is based on improv, creativity, energy, and liveliness. From home to family gatherings to church, everything was lively and raw. Everything Jamaicans do is a show, and not for an audience; it's a natural poetry built into our bodies. One thing that did trouble me was the homophobic aspect of the culture. I would sing and dance to songs like T.O.K.'s "Chi Chi Man" and Buju Banton's "Boom Bye Bye" because the rhythm would catch me and the songs were melodic but the words spoke against the queer community that I am part of. My Caribbean upbringing shaped my life and work, feeding me the necessary improvisational talent it takes to navigate on earth, with earth, with other people, and with my ancestors, and to create.

SHANEKIA MCINTOSH

Island: Jamaica
Craft: Writer, Curator



I'm so proud of my cultural heritage, the colossal and far-reaching influence Jamaican culture has had on the way we present and consume music and culture in general. I can trace Jamaican influence in the production and consumption of popular musical genres and niche ones. Unfortunately, it remains consistently understated and disgustingly appropriated. The unique way in which we tell our stories and carry on traditions and how these morph have a huge influence on how I would like to continue presenting my more

performative work and curation. My Maroon background is my core touchstone for when I'm lost and need guidance.

I also think Jamaican Patois is really blunt, simple, and extremely elegant. There are many reasons for the language to have developed in the way that it has; it's probably the biggest influence on my writing by far. It's funny thinking about the little nuggets of sayings I grew up hearing my whole life and how those words became so important as I got older and began to sit down and actually hear what they mean. It's pretty powerful. Jamaicans tend to be quite powerful orators and I think that's one of the many reasons we've had such an impact considering our small size—it's pretty outrageous. I want to have that same impact with my writing, not necessarily on such a global scale but definitely for what it can give to an individual. When I'm blocked or having a hard time I immediately put on Linton Kwesi Johnson or Cedric Myton and Roydel Johnson (the Congos). LKJ is the ultimate poet to me. How he was able to use Patois in his work is groundbreaking, as is his ability to portray the contemporary experience of Jamaican immigrants and citizens. Same for the Congos, because it's a history lesson more than anything. Their songwriting immediately reminds me of the stories my grandmother told me about my heritage during my summer trips to Jamaica as a child, and to hear those stories again in song format is very inspiring.

MAYA MONÈS

Island: Dominican Republic
Craft: idfw titles “_(ツ)_/”



Like most Dominican families, mine refrained from exploring our roots, leaving me with a cloudy sense of pride in a sort of racial limbo. It felt like I was facing a foggy mirror, with a deep yearning to see and embrace the person who stood opposite me. There was no specification for which box I should check in the race section at the beginning of my standardized test, which I couldn't focus on: did I check the right box? There was no conversation at the dinner table on why 90 percent of the Dominican population are of African descent yet 5 percent claim blackness, or why we treat our family in Haiti with such resentment. My own people were willfully and proudly holding a steamer to my mirror, hoping I wouldn't notice, but as I started to notice, the need to see who stood opposite me in that mirror started to fade: I knew it was me; I knew who I was. My background *is* my life and work and always will be. It has lit a fire in me to be undeniably proud of everything that I am, for those who need to see me be.

OSCAR NUÑEZ

Island: Honduras (not necessarily an island but definitely Caribbean)
Craft: DJ, Cultural Producer



I've always been visibly queer and definitely the only one in my extended family. So growing up in Honduras, I felt different. When I moved to DC, I got better at hiding my queerness by using my ethnicity as a veil for

it so that nothing was ever questioned. I feel like that is a common struggle for many of us immigrant Caribbean/Latinx folks, we sometimes feel forced or safer navigating society assuming only part of our identity. I feel like that's changing a lot now, however; there are so many dope Caribbean folks at the front lines of everything from activism to art, being intersectional and actually using their backgrounds to uplift themselves and their communities. These are the kinds of vibes I'm trying to put out there. Black and brown children are the future and I'm so ready for them to challenge the status quo culture by bringing *platanos* and rice and peas to the table.

ANTONIA ESTELA PÉREZ

Kin: Santiago, Chile; born and raised in Washington Heights, NY
Craft: Medicine Maker, Community Builder, Painter



Being first generation, “who am I?” was a question that was always present. I had a really difficult time in elementary school, where I was one of the few girls of color. It's fascinating how at that age you really are aware of difference and racism. I had serious insecurity problems about my skin, hair color, and name. I wanted some typical white girl name. It was only while at home or back in Chile that I felt truly myself. Even so, being back in Chile, I still didn't entirely feel like I was home either. There is no doubt an incredible force that draws me back to Chile and allows me to better understand myself, but I have made my home in New York, on this land.

Searching and understanding my roots is a huge part of my practice. I do this work mostly through conversations with my grandma, learning about the medicinal plants of the land and of indigenous traditions. From a very young age, I felt this connection to the land and to plants, even in the city. This relationship has developed more deeply than I could have imagined when I was eight. I see learning about plant medicine as a way of re-empowering ourselves to become

autonomous with regard to our bodies and our health, to become our own healers again and take back what colonization attempted to erase from our ancestors. This is applicable to all of us. It is also a bridge that can bring our communities together in a powerful way. What are our grandmothers' remedies, *las recetas caseras* and the rituals that connect us to spirit and the energies that surround us? I am excited about creating spaces for these exchanges and awakening this power inside of us. The more we know about our bodies and the plants that grow around us, the more confident we can feel to care for ourselves and the people in our lives. In a fragile and corrupt system like the one we live in, I believe it is vital that we build systems of autonomy within our communities.

D'HANA PERRY/BATTYJACK

Kin: Ohio/New York
Craft: DJ, Video and New Media Artist, Other



I grew up in a very religious household. Both of my parents were preachers and socially conservative so, needless to say, being queer and trans was not a good look in our household. Even though I was a raging tomboy as a young girl, my queerness was not something I fully recognized in myself until my mid-twenties, and I didn't allow myself to fully express my gender until recently. The only media coverage I saw of trans people as a child were horror stories, and I literally thought only white people could be gay. I was scared and didn't have a clear vision of who I was. I'm thankful that my family gave me the space I needed to be that tomboy, because if they didn't, I would've

been an incredibly sad child. But even with the freedom I had to be butch, coming out under their roof as a teen was not an option. So I had to move away to deal with my sexuality and gender on my own terms, and this took a lot of energy and work in a time when there were no visible black queer/trans mentors.

Nowadays, I'm starting to see the fruits of my labor in terms of reconnecting with my family, as challenging as it is. I think standing firm in who I am has made it so much easier for me to accept the fact that I can't please everyone, and to see the value in agreeing to disagree. I'm thankful that my family is able to rally around me, even if they don't always understand me. In turn they are helping me realize that my assumption that they wouldn't love me because of my sexuality and gender was wrong. We're all kind of struggling together, and it's a beautiful thing.

SASHA PHYARS-BURGESS

Island: Sweet Sweet T&T (Trinidad and Tobago)
Craft: Photographer



My parents both came to this country, in that around-the-way immigrant style, to give me a better life. Now that I'm old enough to fully, and I mean fully, understand what they had to do to get here and then stay here—in order for me to be born, I can say firmly, without wincing, I was indeed born in America, though I have been resentful of this many, many times in my life. Growing up I of course fell in with some of the black kids that were around me, and I loved it, and I loved them, but I was always, culturally, a step or two behind. I'm black, I would never deny this or

mince words about this; I'm black, it's beautiful and I love it. But on that horrifying boat ride over here from the motherland, my peoples were dropped off at a place other than the USA and that made a difference. Not all of it, but some. So yes, we eat black-eyed peas at New Year's, but you'll find green seasoning and a scotch bonnet pepper in there. Your Mardi Gras is our Carnival, but you'll hear steel pan in our streets instead of horns. I don't say these things to be different, just to expand the narrative of what blackness is, what it looks like, and where it lives.

My background let me know from a young age that black people existed everywhere. All over the planet. I have family in Trinidad, England, Canada, and Denmark. We really, really out here! I can spot a Trini accent anywhere. I live for that island lilt! We all know my ten minutes is your forty minutes (but fuck European constraints of time thoooo), and that I can eat a pelau any time, any place, anywhere. I am obsessed with seeing and photographing black people all over the world. It's the best reminder that we are still living, still making it, no matter where we go. I'll never forget being thirteen years old and my friend telling me my parents had accents. I had no idea. I'm American-born, but Trini to de bone.

GUELMO ROSA

Island: Puerto Rico
Craft: Artist



Born in Puerto Rico, raised in the Bronx until I was fourteen, then moved back to the center of PR, to a very small town called Morovis, where everything was very *machista*

and men were very loud. From a very early age I gave hints of my queerness and was silenced, so I grew up admiring the women of my culture and the work they did with their hands. I learned that this was how they expressed themselves in spaces where they were not expected to speak over men. As an adult I've learned to embrace my silence and feel empowered through understanding the work I do with my hands as its own form of language, whether I'm creating a painting, putting together a look, or a preparing a Caribbean dish. This has been fundamental to how I see my craft. I'm carrying on the tradition of these women. The relationship between the US and PR is so fucked up and I see the struggle of the entire island being silenced by the US media. I feel strongly that the story of my people needs to be kept alive. Nothing gives me more satisfaction than putting into practice all that my mothers have taught me.

VIVA RUIZ

Island: Jamaica, Queens/Ecuador (although I have a huge Haitian leg of the family too)
Craft: Filmmaker, Dancer, Music Maker, Connector, Organizer



I am the daughter of immigrants. ESL plays into everything in my life. Coming up in an all-black, all-brown, mostly new/first-gen immigrant neighborhood colors everything I make. I have a ferocious drive to elevate—not just to be represented but to praise and honor immigrants and their experience, to make people aware of the superhuman strength and the kind of sacrifices that people are called to make when they journey here. I love this city for the constant influx of multiple cultures and for keeping so many languages in my ear throughout the day.

I long to and work towards dethroning and decentering English as a primary language here. I am possessed with the compulsion to drive a stake through the heart of white supremacy. I got to live through and see with my own eyes what a destructive force poverty is. I've seen families destroyed by crack and AIDS. We know it wasn't an accident which communities were targeted, and the rage I

have about that is useful and keeps my eyes open, or at least gives me the willingness to be awake. I saw what happens when self-loathing and hopelessness are passed down from generation to generation of colonized people. Internally I know it in myself, and have spent/spend time exorcizing that. I know how important it is to celebrate who we are, our skin, our culture, our language, our distinct way of being, and our roots. I have found that celebration is my favorite tool of liberation #dance. I learned, sadly from my own culture, how much control and subjugation of women/femmes is needed to uphold patriarchy. That this programming stops with me and us is a prime motivating force. My ancestors on all sides were machete carriers and when my dad passed five years ago, I had the distinct impression he handed me my own. I'm coming through swinging.

PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

Island: Jamaica, West Indies
Craft: Visual Artist



My background has affected my life and work by giving me unexpected opportunities. It has forced me to be curious about other nations, peoples, heritage, sects, religions, and foods, and about American and colonial history. I am in all ways a xenophile; it's what attracted me to move to Kansas City, MO, for undergrad studies. I think if I was born in the United States and not Jamaica, my outlook on life would be something else. By saying this, there is nothing concrete I can compare my experience to beyond it being a matter of chance. My works also spotlight my people, the ones whom I interacted with growing up in Jamaica. I question my memory of the past in order to look forward.

Memory is a battleground in terms of the way I think about images. My images are enlarged and depersonalized by mark-making, by patterns, by acts of scarring the black skin through scarification, by the choice of violence. The patterns in my work are associated with the dazed dazzle painting from early maritime camouflage—an optical illusion.

RENÉE STOUT

Kin: Kansas/Pennsylvania/Washington, DC
Craft: Visual Artist



Because of the early freedom my family gave me to question and explore, I was very receptive to African and African-influenced Diasporic religious belief systems as I started to encounter them through objects I'd seen in museums, travel, or books. The things I've seen, experienced, and read about have continued to inspire many bodies of work over the past several years.

A few years ago I realized that part of the reason that I have been able to stay relatively sane through the political and social upheavals of the past several years, which have culminated in a man who openly embraces hate being elected president, is that the spiritual beliefs of my ancestors have provided the grounding I need to be self-propelled and not get caught up in how others perceive me or try to define who I am through their perceptions. I know who I am and what I come from, and that firm sense of identity helps me to stay focused as I navigate the theater of the absurd that this country has become. I see myself reflected in the spirits that carried my ancestors and in that I find strength and purpose.

In thinking about my personal relationship to African Diasporic spiritual beliefs and how they have enriched my work and my basic sense of well-being, I often wonder what would happen in black communities if there were a sudden shift away from Euro-Christian beliefs to spiritual belief systems where we are seen as beautiful and powerful.



"MY OWN PEOPLE WERE WILLFULLY AND PROUDLY HOLDING A STEAMER TO MY MIRROR, HOPING I WOULDN'T NOTICE, BUT AS I STARTED TO NOTICE, THE NEED TO SEE WHO STOOD OPPOSITE ME IN THAT MIRROR STARTED TO FADE: I KNEW IT WAS ME; I KNEW WHO I WAS. MY BACKGROUND IS MY LIFE AND WORK AND ALWAYS WILL BE. IT HAS LIT A FIRE IN ME TO BE UNDENIABLY PROUD OF EVERYTHING THAT I AM, FOR THOSE WHO NEED TO SEE ME BE." — MAYA






"YES, WE EAT BLACK-EYED PEAS AT NEW YEAR'S, BUT YOU'LL FIND GREEN SEASONING AND A SCOTCH BONNET PEPPER IN THERE. YOUR MARDI GRAS IS OUR CARNIVAL, BUT YOU'LL HEAR STEEL PAN IN OUR STREETS INSTEAD OF HORNS. I DON'T SAY THESE THINGS TO BE DIFFERENT, JUST TO EXPAND THE NARRATIVE OF WHAT BLACKNESS IS, WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, AND WHERE IT LIVES." —SASHA

"I KNOW I HAVE A LOT OF FIRE IN MY HISTORY, OR I GUESS IN THE STORY OF HOW I GOT HERE. I'M INTERESTED IN THAT COLLECTIVE FIRE THAT LIVES INSIDE TROPICAL BODIES. I THINK BLACKNESS EMBODIES RESOURCEFULNESS AND MOVEMENT AND BEAUTY. EVERYTHING I MAKE IS IN CONSIDERATION OF THAT... I REALLY DEDICATE MY BODY TO THE PROCESS, AND EVERYTHING I MAKE IS INFUSED WITH VERY PERSONAL, LOVING GESTURES. BLACKNESS IS THE MOST COMPLEX, MISUNDERSTOOD, MISREPRESENTED, AND NEVER-ENDING STORY." — TAU





**"I'M INTERESTED IN HOW
MARGINALIZED PEOPLE
HAVE ALWAYS SUPPORTED
EACH OTHER AND CARED
FOR ONE ANOTHER IN THE
FACE OF ONGOING STATE
TERROR AND VIOLENT
REPRESSION. I FEEL
EMBOLDENED TO DO THE
WORK THAT I DO BECAUSE
OF THE LEGACY OF MY
ANCESTORS." — CAROLYN**

**"PART OF THE REASON THAT I
HAVE BEEN ABLE TO STAY
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POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPHEAVALS
OF THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS,
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WHO I AM THROUGH THEIR
PERCEPTIONS." — RENÉE**



LIST OF WORKS

Jahmal B. Golden

Memoir, 2017

Digital prints

16 x 20 in (40.6 x 50.8 cm) (triptych)

Courtesy the artist

Joey De Jesus

"Astrolabe / Curse 1, 2 & 3," 2017

Poems

Courtesy the artist

Carolyn Lazard and Bleue Liverpool

Chaos-monde, 2017

Wax, wood, black linen, leather, leaves, seed pods, hair, sand, shells, glass, 16mm film, analog audio tape, semiprecious stones, glass vials, dried hibiscus flowers, dried sorrel, dried rosemary, dried plantain leaves, dried sugarcane, rose water, castor oil, coconut oil, vetiver oil, jasmine oil, and rum

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artists

Tau Lewis

for every defence mechanism, a valid reason, 2016

Plaster, cement, tissue paper, fur, cinder block, and concrete

37 x 8 1/2 x 8 in (47 x 21.6 x 20.3 cm)

Private collection

Courtesy the artist and Cooper Cole

Tau Lewis

Georgia marble marks slave burial sites across America, 2016

Plaster, cement, acrylic paint, chain, and high-gloss finish

18 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 8 1/2 in (47 x 31.8 x 20.3 cm)

Collection Christine and Murray Quinn

Courtesy the artist and Cooper Cole

Tau Lewis

it takes me more courage to be soft, 2016

Plaster, cement, tissue paper, fur, cinder block, and concrete

37 x 8 1/2 x 8 in (47 x 21.6 x 20.3 cm)

Private collection

Courtesy the artist and Cooper Cole

Tau Lewis

Untitled (Love my Jamaica), 2016

Vinyl print on lightbox

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Cooper Cole

Shanekia McIntosh

"Touched," 2017

Poem

Courtesy the artist

Maya Monès

Ciencias Sociales [Social Sciences], 2017

Audio, two parts; 9:03 min, 19:09 min

Courtesy the artist

Paul Anthony Smith

Grey Area #5, 2014

Silkscreen and collaged canvas

60 x 50 in (152.4 x 127 cm)

Courtesy the artist and ZieherSmith

Paul Anthony Smith

Grey Area #7, 2015

Silkscreen and collaged canvas

34 x 24 in (86.4 x 61 cm)

Courtesy the artist and ZieherSmith

Paul Anthony Smith

Grey Area #10, 2014

Silkscreen and collaged canvas

60 x 50 in (152.4 x 127 cm)

Courtesy the artist and ZieherSmith

Paul Anthony Smith

Mask #1, 2015

Unique picotage on pigment print

40 x 30 in (101.6 x 76.2 cm)

Courtesy the artist and ZieherSmith

Paul Anthony Smith

Port Antonio Market #3, 2013

Unique picotage on C-print with spray paint

30 x 20 in (76.2 x 50.8 cm)

Courtesy the artist and ZieherSmith

Paul Anthony Smith

Port Antonio Market #4, 2013

Unique picotage on C-print with spray paint

30 x 20 in (76.2 x 50.8 cm)

Courtesy the artist and ZieherSmith

Renée Stout

I Can Heal, 2000–01

Neon sign

29 x 36 1/2 x 6 in (73.7 x 92.7 x 15.2 cm)

Collection Dean Dalton

Courtesy the artist

Renée Stout

The Rootworker's Table, 2011

Altered and reconstructed table, blown and

hot-formed glass, found and constructed

objects, oil stick on panel, and found carpet

78 x 50 x 30 in (198.1 x 127 x 76.2 cm)

Courtesy the artist

Christopher Udemezue

Untitled (In a trance, she walked out onto her reflection, closed her eyes and received a plan from beyond the mountains), 2017

Digital print

24 x 35 1/4 in (60.7 x 90.8 cm)

Courtesy the artist

Christopher Udemezue

Untitled (Taken by the loa with a knife in her hand, she cut the throat of a pig and they all swore to kill all the whites on the island), 2017

Digital print

24 x 35 1/4 in (60.7 x 90.8 cm)

Courtesy the artist

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

DEMYSTIFYING OUR STORIES: RESISTANCE AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

Saturday June 3, 12:30 PM

New Museum Theater

Tracing the work of an intergenerational group of activists who practice Afro-Caribbean spiritual traditions, this talk by Rose Sackey-Milligan will consider the close ties between these traditions and resistance movements—from the Haitian Revolution to contemporary struggles for justice and empowerment. The talk will be followed by an intimate workshop with Sackey-Milligan. To apply for the workshop, please email season@newmuseum.org describing your interest in Afro-Caribbean spirituality and activism.

RAGGA PRESENTS

Thursday June 22, 7 PM

Sky Room

Marking the closing week of RAGGA NYC's residency and exhibition, this evening event will feature performance, poetry, and music from a group of artists in the RAGGA community.

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joining one another"
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