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Upwelling

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University of Iowa

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UPWELLING

by

Keva Fawkes

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Art in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2017

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Steve McGuire
Assistant Professor Andrew Casto

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Keva Fawkes

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Art at the May 2017 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Steve McGuire, Thesis Supervisor

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Kee-Ho Yuen

This Thesis is dedicated to the village of women that raised me, loved me and taught me to be humble, kind
and practice gratitude always.

“Acceptance is a small quiet room”

“Cheryl Strayed”
Tiny Beautiful Things

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ABSTRACT

Presently, my practice is multi-disciplinary and includes ceramics, sculpture, metals, design, and social practice — the work explores cultural identity, immigration, and cultural imagery using found objects and vernacular architectural references. Many of which are rooted in a post-colonial Anglo Caribbean history, but have grown to include new environments, narratives, and histories that parallel the latter.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Presently, my practice is multi-disciplinary and includes ceramics, sculpture, metals, design, and social practice — the work explores cultural identity, immigration, and cultural imagery using found objects and vernacular architectural references. Many of which are rooted in a post-colonial Anglo Caribbean history, but have grown to include new environments, narratives, and histories that parallel the latter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
PROJECT DESCRIPTION	1
RELATIONSHIP TO PROJECT	4
RESEARCH ANALYSIS	5
THESIS PRODUCTION PROCESS	6
CONCLUSION	7
BIBLIOGRAPHY	12

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: STRUCTURE 27..... 2

FIGURE 2: STRUCTURE 27 DETAIL SHOT..... 3

FIGURE 3: UNTITLED STRUCTURES..... 3

FIGURE 4: DOCUMENTATION MFA THESIS SHOW 8

FIGURE 5: DOCUMENTATION MFA THESIS SHOW 8

FIGURE 6: STRUCTURE 27..... 9

FIGURE 7: STRUCTURE 27..... 9

FIGURE 8: UNTITLED..... 10

FIGURE 9: DOCUMENTATION “KINDRED” INSTALLATION SHOT..... 11

FIGURE 10: BORDERING: DOCUMENTATION VIDEO STILL..... 11

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This Master of Fine Art Thesis work titled *Upwelling* explores cultural identity, immigration, and cultural imagery using found objects and vernacular architectural references. Many of which are rooted in a post-colonial Anglo Caribbean history, but have grown to include new environments, narratives, and histories that parallel the latter.

In the text “Diaspora and Visual Culture; Representing Africans and Jews”, cultural theorist Stuart Hall suggests that identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think; we should consider identity not as an already accomplished fact represented by cultural practices but as an incomplete and perpetual production.¹ Hall analyzes two working definitions of “cultural identity”, an essentialist identity highlighting similarities between people and rousing feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racist art, and activism. Followed by a secondary definition, which highlights both similarity and difference among groups; which explicates an understanding of trauma through focusing on the historical/social contingency of identity in an effort to help understand the trauma of colonialism. These definitions create space for a deeper analysis of power and control in both historical and “post” colonial relations. At the root of these relations is the presence of the Diaspora identity: whose working definition is the dispersion of any people from their original homeland. In addition to this, Hall challenges that the Diaspora identity is one that is constantly producing and reproducing, “diaspora aesthetic”.

Diaspora identity’s location with and through difference, despite difference becomes profound in the distinction of “sameness” and “difference” culturally, politically, and historically in Caribbean Island Nations. As an Artist, my own location within Diaspora is through being a citizen of The Commonwealth of the Bahamas: which is historically and geographically considered a former British Colony within very close proximity to The United States of America. In the case of the Bahamian Identity, Anthropologist Nicolette Bethel theorizes that it’s captured by an archipelago of the mind and accepted as consisting of multiple realities, the physical archipelago is mirrored by a cognitive one. She describes Bahamian identity as being an inscription on the mind, which emphasizes flux over fixity.²

The Bahamas has no specific indigenous traditions surviving imperialism, as its original population was decimated, it's a nation formed by colonial settlers and was never considered for economic potential, but rather as a strategic location as a Border to Britain's enemies in the region represented by Cuba, Haiti and Florida.³

Taking this into consideration an entry point in thinking about identity began through the remnants, renovations and remodeling of colonial architecture.



Figure 1: *Structure 27*

1. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Diaspora and Visual Culture* representing Africans and Jews, (2000): 21

2. Nicolette Bethel, "Navigations: the fluidity of identity in the post-colonial Bahamas (2000): 257

3. Nicolette Bethel, "Navigations: the fluidity of identity in the post-colonial Bahamas (2000): 6, 7



Figure 2: Structure 27 Detail Shot



Figure 3: Untitled Structures

RELATIONSHIP TO PROJECT

Most of this wondrous life thus far I have spent living throughout the Bahamian archipelago, the Turks and Caicos Islands as well as the United States of America. Furthermore, I continue to travel to many different countries. It is interesting to observe the similarities and differences within Diaspora and “otherness” when confronted with a perceived experience of what “Diaspora” means or looks like. Three Generations of my family have moved from the UK through Bermuda, to the Turks and Caicos and the Bahamas. Who I am and how I identify has always been a looming thought, my family is a culmination of different racial groups of people half of whose lineage I can trace and the other I cannot. This couples with being what could be described as a latch key kid on a small island. I was constantly surrounded by a keen interest in all things mischievous and spent all of my free time as a child, exploring spaces left by someone as evidence that they were there. Evidence of when they were there and nurturing an ever deepening curiosity of what these people may or may not have done. I moved to the United States of America in August 2012, “Fresh of the boat” and freshly existing as a body that has experienced physical and mental Trauma.

In the foreword of the Book *Women, Trauma & Visual Expression* Patricia Reis states the following. All visual Art performs the work of revelation. Whether the subject matter is the beauty of the natural world, the elegant symmetry of abstract forms, the simple magnificence of colour, or the endless train of human suffering, the visual artist draws back the veil while, we the viewers, bear witness to what is revealed.

This revelation that Reiss Speaks about didn't arise until a moment between scanning Journals from the women's prison, by this point, I had read several of them. For a bit of context here, I participated in a semester long Healthy Relationships Practicum offered by The University of Iowa's Gender Women's and Sexuality Studies Department. A course designed and taught by Associate Professor Rachel Marie-Crane Williams. The journals in question, were being scanned to be submitted to the Iowa Women's Archive. During this process of reading these journals and thinking about parallels in my life experiences, and those of these women who I've never met and only know through these writings), particularly dealing

with traumas be they minuscule or gargantuan. A few things stood out to me in particular; the recurring themes of space, memory and symbolism.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

It is natural as a maker to ask questions through the making, experiencing, and use of objects, compounded by questions about the efficacy of creating objects, which will later serve as an artifact in space. The research shifted to creating a framework of inquiry from storytelling and shared conversations between other women about what it means to be a woman, a woman of color, living in a different country who is constantly misidentified as a different “other” than the “other” I am used to being; while simultaneously attempting to assimilate in to a new space. The human experience requires us to make an effort not to size people up based on our perceived stereotypes of one another?

Initially, through using objects as symbolism, the question was; what happens if the formal structure of a house is flipped inside out so that it shifts our perception of how we experience the object? The follow up inquiry was questions about “diaspora identity and aesthetic”. Assuming there is a story within the diversity existing in Diaspora space whose major themes are the pains of struggle and growth behind a Façade, how can the body be considered through objects in space? Jung theorizes that what happens in a house happens in ourselves ⁴ and Freud theorizes the formal house as being Feminine as equal to a woman. It is addressed as being sexual and sensual. ⁵ The house is a basic form of shelter; we have it, had, or need it. When analyzing space, memory, and symbolism, it was inevitable to also consider trauma as a direct result of lived experiences. I default to thinking about memories and the body through architectural space, because it’s this thing I feel like I know intimately even when I have no memory of anything else. Particularly when dealing with trauma. If the perspective of how we experience a house is now shifted, is it possible to imbue value through appropriating something that is considered valuable?

Enter, textiles. Androsia Hand Made Batik was started on the beach, in the late 1960’s by Rosi Birch. Batik was a low tech but vibrant art form that Rosi thought would be a wonderful fit for Andros, Bahamas. Not only would it be a creative outlet but also it would provide employment to local women,

which was an important cause to Rosi Birch. I developed my own patterns to create into a layered effect onto the houses, there-by inscribing a recognizable connection between the objects, which I hope could form “value by association”.

The second symbol that has found its way into my work is buoys or anchored floats, they are used as navigation marks to show reefs, as hazard moorings, and in reference to keep someone or something afloat. When thinking about migration and movement, the buoy has an inscribed history through its use. Afro-Caribbean identified women have largely dominated feminism in the Anglo-Caribbean with the Indo-Caribbean women’s experience as being minority.⁷ I am invested in understanding ideas about otherness and self through understanding the other, and have begun to confront my own biases of what it means to be other when your “otherness” is confounded with “sameness” as you change geographical place and identity space. This became all too apparent when meeting other diaspora-identified women with whom I now share identity space as well as place. These experiences pushed the work to become more outwardly focused, with a greater concern for involving other women in a meaningful way. This became an enriching extension of studio practice. Objects were being made in the likeness of women, but women were helping to create these objects and gain something through the experience of making by having autonomy over how these buoys could exist.

THESIS PRODUCTION PROCESS

The intention with this this particular Thesis project was to find a bridge between my various projects, which are linked through ideas about symbolism and put them in conversation with one another. I have accomplished this, but also realize that the chosen objects can stand on their own as well and don’t necessarily have to be in constant conversation. Although this is true now, it was still beneficial and necessary to place them together as it developed a conversation which thwarted rash reactions of the work being about slavery: which due to place has been the lens through which the work has been analyzed in the past.

Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color “A woman of colour who writes poetry, or paints or dances or makes movies knows that there is no escape from race or gender when she is writing or painting. She can’t take off her colour and sex and leave them at the door of her study or studio. Nor can she leave behind her history. Art is about identity among other things, and her creating is political”

My Studio practice covers a broad range of interests and its multi-disciplinary approach makes an imaginable amount of ways to develop and execute projects and ideas. This becomes challenging and at times feels insurmountable due to my broad range of interests.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to consider the title of this thesis exhibition; upwelling. Oxford dictionary defines upwelling as the following; an oceanographic phenomenon involving the wind to move dense, cooler, nutrient rich water towards the ocean surface, replacing warmer nutrient depleted water on the surface which stimulates growth and reproduction. An upwelling can also be defined as building up or gathering strength. In thinking about the relationship between cultural identity rooted in a post-colonial Anglo Caribbean history, women and Trauma, upwelling seems like the appropriate title to knit all of these ideas together as it is the definition of gathering strength and replenishment. It is my hope that in some small way that is articulated through the power of making and creating art. Life is about having enough heart to make one small positive change at a time, and maybe that’s it. But one small positive change in the world for you could be a great change in the life of someone else. I am grateful, if only to make one small positive change.



Figure 4: Documentation MFA Thesis Show



Figure 5: Documentation MFA Thesis Show



Figure 6: Structure 27



Figure 7: Structure 27



Figure 8: Untitled



Figure 9: Documentation "Kindred" Installation Shot



Figure 10: Bordering: Documentation Video Still

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