

# THE NASHER

FALL 2024

**CARRIS ADAMS** ORIANNA CACCHIONE **MARINA REYES FRANCO** FREEDOM MONUMENT  
**SCULPTURE PARK** **JERRY HAWKINS** JANNINE HORSFORD **DANIEL LIND-RAMOS**  
**SUCHITRA MATAI** **NASHER PUBLIC: URBAN HISTORICAL RECLAMATION AND**  
**RECOGNITION** **SHAUNA STUART** **TASHIMA THOMAS** **SARITA WESTRUP** **HAEGUE YANG**



Shelby David Meier, *A Part of the Whole*, 2021. Porcelain and flowers. Dimensions variable. Photo by Kevin Todora, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center







Community unveiling  
of *Nasher Public: Urban  
Historical Reclamation  
and Recognition* in the  
Tenth Street Historic  
District Freedman's Town,  
June 2024. Photo by Can  
Turkylmaz, courtesy of the  
Nasher Sculpture Center



**F**or centuries, sculpture has been given the task of commemoration. This summer I introduced my kids to some of the strange and wonderful effigies of royals past that top the crypts in Westminster Abbey: embodiments in wood or stone of the human bodies that lie beneath. They are markers of a presence passed, reminders of power, mortality, and reverence, hands invariably clasped in prayer. They are also often together in family groups, clustered in private chapels where existing relations can commune with their long-departed ancestors, a family's personal history made History.

Then there are the sculptures that are made as monuments, official commissions to honor important political or cultural figures or mark major historical events and the heroic figures who prosecuted them. Not far from Westminster Abbey is Trafalgar Square featuring Nelson's Column, celebrating Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson who led the British Navy to victory over the combined fleets of France and Spain in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. It is difficult to get a sense of the man from the sculpture there, placed high atop a column over 140 feet tall, but that wasn't the point. The point was to lift him above the fray, coveted and godlike. That's what we think of when we think of monuments. That's why Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, inaugurated in 1982 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., seems so radical and remains such a powerful place of pilgrimage today: a 500-foot-long dark granite wall engraved with the names of over 58,000 soldiers lost in the Vietnam War brings the memorial down to earth, literally and figuratively, honoring equally the vaunted and the unsung and embodying the massive scale of loss.

The truth is that all sculptures, perhaps even all works of art, commemorate, even those we may not think of as doing so. At their essence, works of art are vibrant documents of human thought, commemorating an idea that emerged from a particular person, at a particular time and place, in a specific cultural, political, sociological, and historical context. Consider these sculptures from the Nasher Collection: Constantin Brancusi

celebrates the universal and eternal experience of human connection in *The Kiss* (1907-08), like an archaic monument made new, stripped of pretense, essential; Naum Gabo's *Linear Construction in Space No. 1 (Variation)* (1942-43), takes inspiration from mathematical models and honors scientific and technological advancements of the 20th century while remaking sculpture in lightweight, transparent materials—all light and air rather than stone and metal; or Melvin Edwards's *Five to the Bar* (1973), an abstract geometric sculpture strung with barbed wire that can rock back and forth, made in homage to his grandmother, that speaks of simplicity and utility but also bondage, struggle, and through its title, the legacy of jazz.

In this issue of *The Nasher*, we learn of other ways artists today illuminate histories—personal, communal, cultural, political, and often overlooked or ignored. Upcoming exhibitions and programs at the Nasher highlight still more encounters with history and commemoration. Haegue Yang, whose work is discussed in this issue and will be featured in an exhibition at the Nasher this spring, incorporates craft traditions from her native Korea and other cultures in contemporary sculptures that consider our present-day relationship with the past. From April 3-5 we will celebrate 2025 Nasher Prize Laureate Otobong Nkanga, whose work highlights the histories and human connections forged in the movement of materials and people around the world. Meanwhile, *Nasher Public: Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition*, also featured in this issue, will embark on the second phase of its project to document and honor the overlooked history of the century-old neighborhood of Mount Auburn and the Mexican American and working-class community there. These projects highlight the importance of documenting our moment and reconsider what and who is worthy of commemoration.

Sincerely,

**Jed Morse**

Interim Director and Chief Curator

**M**y grandparents, Noel and Gene Loftin, started a family tradition with the third of their eight children, Chuck, crafting a special way for him to learn the truth about Santa Claus. That December, before his seventh Christmas, he received a note from Mr. Claus, telling little Charles that he would very much like to meet him the night before Christmas, during his rounds if you will. But on that night the Santa he met was his father dressed in jolly red garb with white underpants for a beard, greeting a first surprised, and then confused Chuck. His initial disappointment was promptly cheered with the prospect of joining the ruse and keeping the secret, playing the role of elf and big brother. The tradition continued with Francie, Joe, Mary Jean, Carol, and Kathy, and then with their children. Each reveal carries its own funny story.

In 1996, three years after I had been recruited to Santa's team, it was my sister Abigail's turn. She received her note in Santa's signature handwriting, which conspicuously matched that of the tooth fairy, and she awaited her rendezvous on Christmas Eve.

Abby's excitement blinded her recognition of my dad. We all watched in disbelief as she sat on his lap, believing that this skinny man wearing a cheap costume and my grandmother's eyeglasses was her revered Saint Nick. Eventually we resorted to the classic beard tug, and in an instant, she was devastated. The youngest of four, she had a flair for dramatics and spent much of the next hour or two wailing about betrayal, deceit, and revenge: "Santa would be ashamed of you! I know I am."

Many gifts were left unwrapped that night. I later learned my dad had the flu. But as it goes with family stories, the tribulations of that moment have slipped into a hilarious tale, typically told at twice this length, with the perfect crescendo of images to accompany it, seen on the right.

While forming this issue of *The Nasher*, my understanding of history shifted. I began to recollect my life and stories with a refreshed sense of importance, not because I've changed much in the grand scheme of things, but because so much of the grand scheme of things is made up of small, seemingly trivial moments; existing outside of and in between History is history—songs, tales, baseball games, letters, ancient crafts and new recipes, photos, yearbooks, deeds, and ledgers. All these things seep out of life with such frequency and banality that we forget that they form a whole, constructing a story of how people endure and celebrate life around the world, throughout existence. And in the case of non-European descendents and people of color, where recorded History has failed to represent all human history, these bits of life are critical to telling a fuller, more truthful and accountable narrative.

In the following pages, you'll find heritage and history resurrected in an array of manifestations: the record collections of activist and collector Jerry Hawkins, connections between art and food, the cultural assemblages of Daniel Lind-Ramos, the exploration of a "memory palace" by Suchitra Mattai, heart-wrenching illustrations of American slavery, traditional basketry used as contemporary metaphor, the scent of Haegue Yang's former Berlin apartment, and the important preservation of a Dallas neighborhood fighting for power and remembrance in the constant, and too often uncaring, current of metropolitan growth.

I hope through the art and stories you find here, you'll see that history is happening every day to everyone everywhere. Its significance is a matter of how we honor, record, and present it.

Gratefully,

**Adrienne Lichliter-Hines**

Editor in Chief

[alichliter@nashersculpturecenter.org](mailto:alichliter@nashersculpturecenter.org)



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#### **ON THE COVER:**

Haegue Yang, *Leafy Gradation Fountain Soul Site—Mesmerizing Mesh #233* (detail), 2024. *Hanji, washi*, origami paper on alu-dibond. Framed 36 1/4 x 24 5/6 inches (92 x 62 cm). Private collection, Busan. Photo by Studio Haegue Yang, courtesy of the artist

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## Carris Adams

Carris Adams is an artist, educator, writer, and nonprofit administrator. Her work explores the signs and signifiers that mark our landscapes. Through painting, drawing, and printmaking, Adams attempts to embody the sense, shape, and experience of these markers. Her work describes the appearance of subjects found during her day-to-day travels, while also reflecting the various social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances under which we labor. She received her BFA from the University of Texas at Austin (2013) and her MFA from the University of Chicago (2015). Outside of her studio she works with Mid-America Arts Alliance as the Director of Organizational Services and teaches at the University of Arkansas. Adams is represented by Goldfinch Gallery in Chicago, Illinois.

## Orianna Cacchione

Orianna Cacchione is Assistant Director and Curator at the Art, Design & Architecture Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Committed to expanding the canon of contemporary art to respond to the circulations of art and ideas, her recent exhibitions include solo presentations of Haegue Yang, Samson Young, Tang Chang, and Zhang Peili, and the thematic exhibitions, *Monochrome Multitudes* and *The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China*. Previously, she has held curatorial positions at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago. A specialist in contemporary Chinese art, Cacchione holds a Ph.D. in art history, theory and criticism from the University of California, San Diego.



## Marina Reyes Franco

Marina Reyes Franco is Curator at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico (MAC). Recent projects include the MAC's *Puerto Rico Negrx*, co-curated with María Elena Ortiz; *Tropical Is Political: Caribbean Art Under the Visitor Economy Regime* at Americas Society in New York City and the MAC; *El momento del yagrumo* at the MAC; *De Loíza a la Loíza*, a MAC en el Barrio public art commission by Daniel Lind-Ramos; *Resisting Paradise* at Pública in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and La Fonderie Darling in Montreal, Canada; *Watch your step / Mind your head* at ifa-Galerie Berlin; the 2nd Grand Tropical Biennial in Loíza, Puerto Rico; *C-32: Sucursal* at MALBA in Buenos Aires. As a curator and researcher, she has focused on the work of Esteban Valdés, artistic and literary manifestations on the frontier of political action, and the impact of tourism in cultural production in the Caribbean.



## Jerry Hawkins

Jerry Hawkins is the Executive Director of Dallas Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation. Dallas TRHT's mission is to create a radically inclusive city by addressing race and racism through narrative change, relationship building, and equitable policies and practices. Jerry is also a cofounder of The Imagining Freedom Institute, or The IF Institute, a national research-based leadership group that helps organizations and institutions understand the historical context to contemporary issues of place, race, and space. Jerry was formerly the Project Director of Bachman Lake Together for The Dallas Foundation and Zero to Five Funders Collaborative, an early childhood collective impact initiative in Dallas, and Director of Children's Services at the Wilkinson Center in East Dallas/Southeast Dallas.



## CONTRIBUTORS



### Jannine Horsford

Jannine Horsford is a poet based in Trinidad and Tobago. She was a fellow of the Corsicana Artist and Writer Residency in 2024, attended the inaugural *Moko Magazine* poetry masterclass in 2018, the *Callaloo* writers workshop in 2016, and The Cropper Foundation Caribbean writers workshop in 2014. In 2016 she was shortlisted for the Small Axe Poetry Prize. Her poetry has been published in *The Caribbean Writer*, *Caribbean Quarterly*, *The Manchester Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Moko Magazine*, *Magma Poetry*, *Arboreal Literary Magazine*, and others. In 2020, she was awarded an artist's grant from CATAPULT | A Caribbean Arts Grant; in 2021 she was longlisted for the Johnson and Amoy Achong Caribbean Writers Prize; and in 2022, she won the Bocas Lit Fest Emerging Writers Fellowship for poetry. Her chapbook, *Jurassic Coast*, is forthcoming from Peekash Press.

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### Shauna Stuart

Shauna Stuart is a writer and journalist based in Alabama and Georgia. Over the years, Shauna has covered culture, life, food, art, and business in the South. One of her biggest art stories to date is a 2022 long-form article on the series of historic exhibitions in honor of the late contemporary artist Thornton Dial, hosted at three institutions in Birmingham, Alabama. Shauna is also a novice jazz writer and hopes to write more stories about the genre's history and how the music is evolving.



### Tashima Thomas

Tashima Thomas is an art historian, gastronome, curator, and cultural critic. She currently serves as Assistant Professor of Art History at Southern Methodist University specializing in the art of the African diaspora. She received her Ph.D. in art history from Rutgers University and focuses on food pathways, visual and material culture, racial formation, Afro-Gothic as an aesthetic and theoretical framework, and the environmental humanities. Her book manuscript *Edible Extravagance: The Visual Art of Consumption in the Black Atlantic* is under contract with SUNY Press, Afro-Latinx Futures series. She is also co-editor of *Flora Fantastic: From Orchidelirium to Ecocritical Contemporary Botanical Art*, 2024, published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals, exhibition catalogues, and edited volumes.

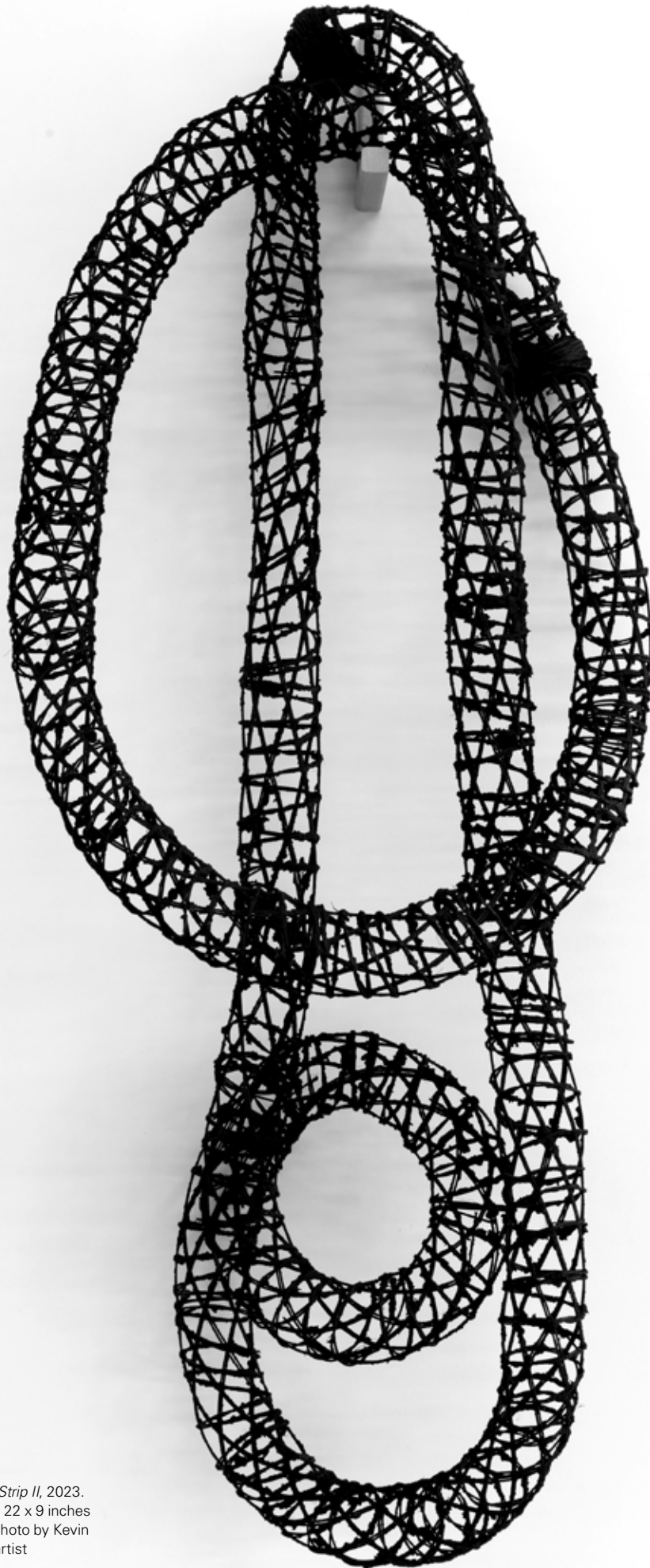
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### Sarita Westrup

Sarita Westrup is a craft-based artist who lives and works between Texas and North Carolina. She was raised in the Rio Grande Valley in the South Texas borderlands and earned an MFA in fiber arts from the University of North Texas in 2016. Most recently her work has been shown in *The Weight of Wonder* at the Penland Gallery in Penland, North Carolina, and in *Holding Space: Woven Works* at Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. She was awarded a Nasher Artist Grant in 2023, a \$10,000 grant through the Teaching Artist Cohort from the Center of Craft in 2024, and was a semifinalist for the Nest Heritage Craft Prize in 2023. Westrup is currently an artist-in-residence at the Penland School of Craft in western North Carolina and is represented by Cluley Projects in Dallas, Texas.





Sarita Westrup, *Mobius Strip II*, 2023.  
Reed, mortar, paint. 52 x 22 x 9 inches  
(132 x 55.9 x 22.9 cm). Photo by Kevin  
Todora, courtesy of the artist



Cliff Fragua, *Three Sisters*, 2023.  
Tennessee marble on granite base.  
84 x 60 x 24 inches (213 x 152 x 70  
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Texan artist Sarita Westrup reflects on basketry and the divided landscape of her home.

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A poem by Jannine Horsford

# ARCHIVING OUR FUTURE

A collector of books, comics, records, and miscellaneous moments of Black history underlines the importance of archives.

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BY JERRY HAWKINS

In spring 2018, I attended Theaster Gates's Laureate Town Hall at the Wylie Theatre in Dallas, when he was awarded the Nasher Prize, becoming the first American and first Black man to be selected. Accompanied by Thelma Golden, director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, Gates, sitting under an image from his collection of a recovered Harold's Chicken Shack sign, both questioned and affirmed the connection and relationship between the immaterial world and the material world. Utilizing a gospel-themed analogy of the wooden, Christian cross, Theaster explained that material objects by themselves have no "intrinsic value" to us, and these objects are "simply a thing waiting to be filled" by our immaterial and temporary power. He uncovers how "things we can't quite grasp" like historical events, can be activated by art, artists, and archivists. These words resonated deeply with me. In them, I saw my mother, her disciplined religious practice, and her refusal to throw things away. And I saw myself.

At that moment, I realized I had been in search of myself, trying to remember the places, events, and people who, as I continue to live, I struggle to remember. The word 'remember' is a symbol for the act of bringing what exists in our memory back to one's conscious mind and present thoughts. 'Remember' acts as a literal and figurative analogy when applied to the context of history and historical significance; it implies a physical act of re-remembering the disconnected parts of the human historical record to

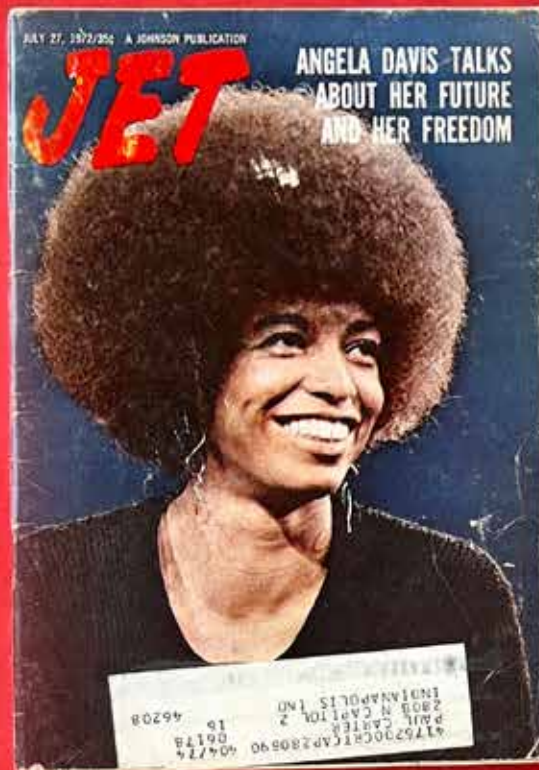
reproduce a happening, an existence, or a life. This is a huge responsibility and it requires dedication, passion, resources, time, research, critical thinking, empathy, love, care, and concern. This is the work of the archivist, who appears in many forms, such as a scrapbooking grandmother, an institution-building Afro-Puerto Rican, or a lesbian collector from the Bay Area. I believe archivists are engaged in surgery of the collective memory. The operations and interventions they choose determine what we value in the present and future.

In the epilogue of her book, *Dallas: The Making of a Modern City*, Patricia Evridge Hill explicated that "most of Dallas's past remains undocumented." In *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001*, Dr. Michael Phillips shared that "academic neglect of Dallas . . . represents amnesia by design . . . City leaders transformed the community into a laboratory of forgetfulness." What does memory work mean in a city designed to make people forget?

In my role as Executive Director of Dallas Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation, I am tasked with confronting the truth about how the false belief in a hierarchy of human value has arbitrarily created different life experiences and varying outcomes for all of us. My initial exercise (and the first guiding principle of Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation) was to attempt to compile a community racial history, or a historical analysis of the people of Dallas in terms of race, policy, and place from Indigenous times to

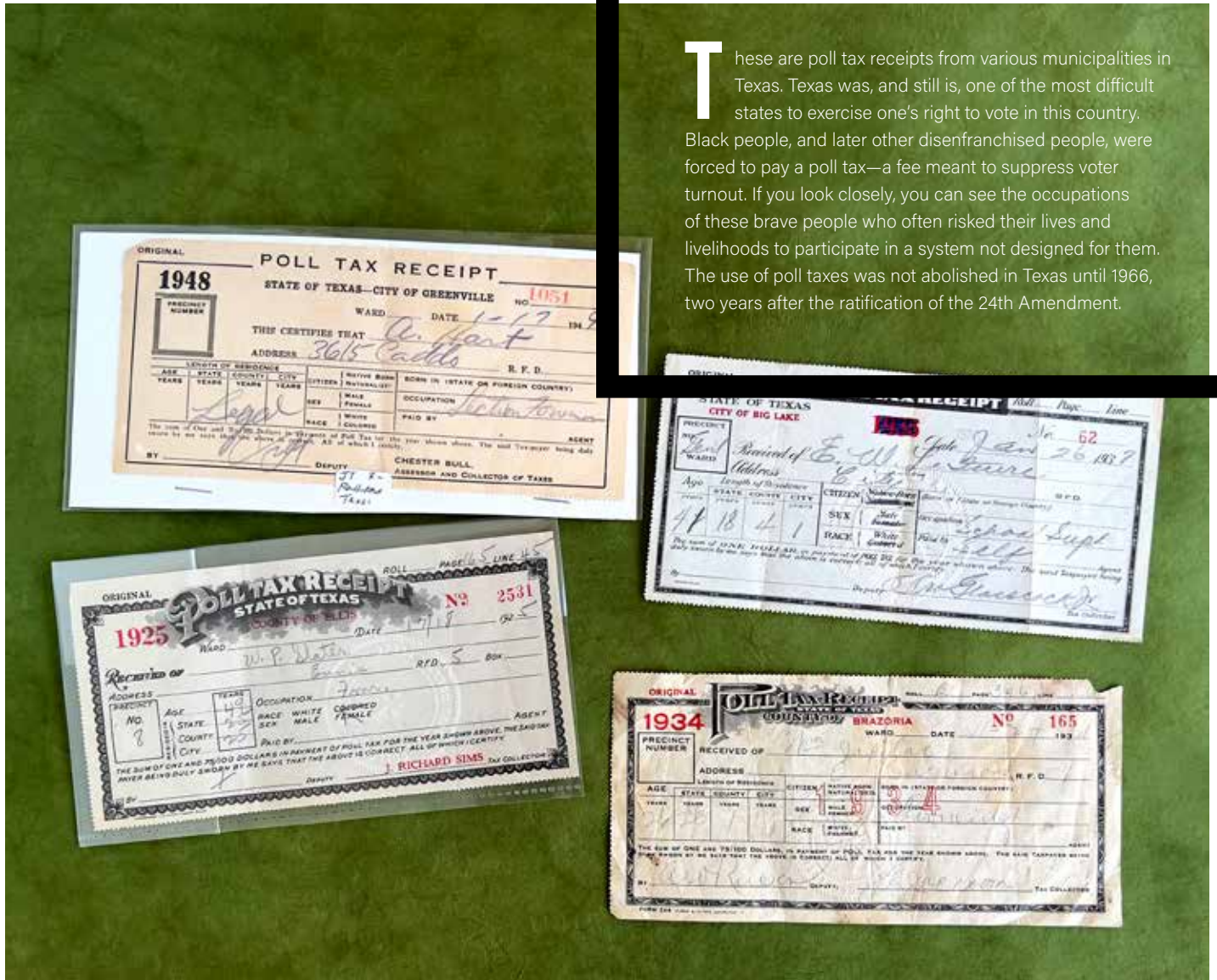


Jerry Hawkins at his home, August 2024. Photo by Nan Coulter, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center



**D**r. Angela Y. Davis, feminist political activist, philosopher, academic, and author, appeared on the cover of *Jet*, a Johnson Publishing Company weekly magazine, five times. These are all five covers. I brought her to Dallas in 2023 and had the honor of interviewing her on the stage at Moody Performance Hall in front of a sold-out audience. I had archival material of her onstage with me. She told me she was impressed by my research, and it may be the highlight of my career.

Photos by Adrienne Lichter-Hines



These are poll tax receipts from various municipalities in Texas. Texas was, and still is, one of the most difficult states to exercise one's right to vote in this country. Black people, and later other disenfranchised people, were forced to pay a poll tax—a fee meant to suppress voter turnout. If you look closely, you can see the occupations of these brave people who often risked their lives and livelihoods to participate in a system not designed for them. The use of poll taxes was not abolished in Texas until 1966, two years after the ratification of the 24th Amendment.

**“ARCHIVE AS IF THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT. BECAUSE IT DOES.”**

—LISBET TELLEFSEN, ARCHIVIST

the present. It was essentially a massive archival project I had already started years earlier upon moving to Dallas, and it meant compiling as much of the accessible historical record as possible to share widely. I started collecting books about Dallas (which was extremely difficult because Dallas has so few texts written about its history and its people) and moved to other ephemera, such as pamphlets, photos, and postcards. The goal in collecting these materials is to use them to change the prevailing narrative about who we all are. Renowned organizer, educator, archivist, and abolitionist Mariame Kaba affirmed this objective in a conversation we had in 2022, in which she explained the purpose of cultural organizing through her archival practice:

“My archival orientation is to pull from the past to make a better future. . . . I collect things and then I tell stories with those items that I hope will draw people in . . . and engage us differently around social change and transformation, and get us to see the past in order to better understand our current moment. . . . My collections are really intended to be used. I don’t collect for the sake of just hoarding or holding on to information, and I want my collections to be activated. Because why do I have them? I don’t want something just in a shoebox. I want something that a young person can look at and be like ‘Oh, that’s so interesting. I want to learn more about that!’ I want to have THAT experience for people. You know? A spark!”

This is a pinback button of the Rev. Louis Boddie, founder of my home church. He established the Greater Harvest Missionary Baptist Church on the Southside of Chicago in 1912 during the first Great Migration of Black people from southern states. By the mid-1950s, he had one of the most popular radio broadcasts in the Midwest, known as *The Rock*. Gospel greats like Mahalia Jackson, Albertina Walker, The Barrett Sisters, and Shirley Caesar sang from Greater Harvest's pulpit. I am currently researching Greater Harvest's untold impact on this country's Civil Rights Movement.



I started collecting postcards in search of the infamous 1910 lynching postcard of Allen Brook in downtown Dallas, pictured here. I could not find it at first, so I started acquiring Dallas postcards to try to piece together the physical environment of this lynching, and to find any other traces of Black life in Dallas. I found very few. One of the few instances I found was a postcard of the Hall of Negro Life building, part of the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition in Fair Park. This is one of the few photos that mark its existence. It was the first building torn down after the centennial closed.

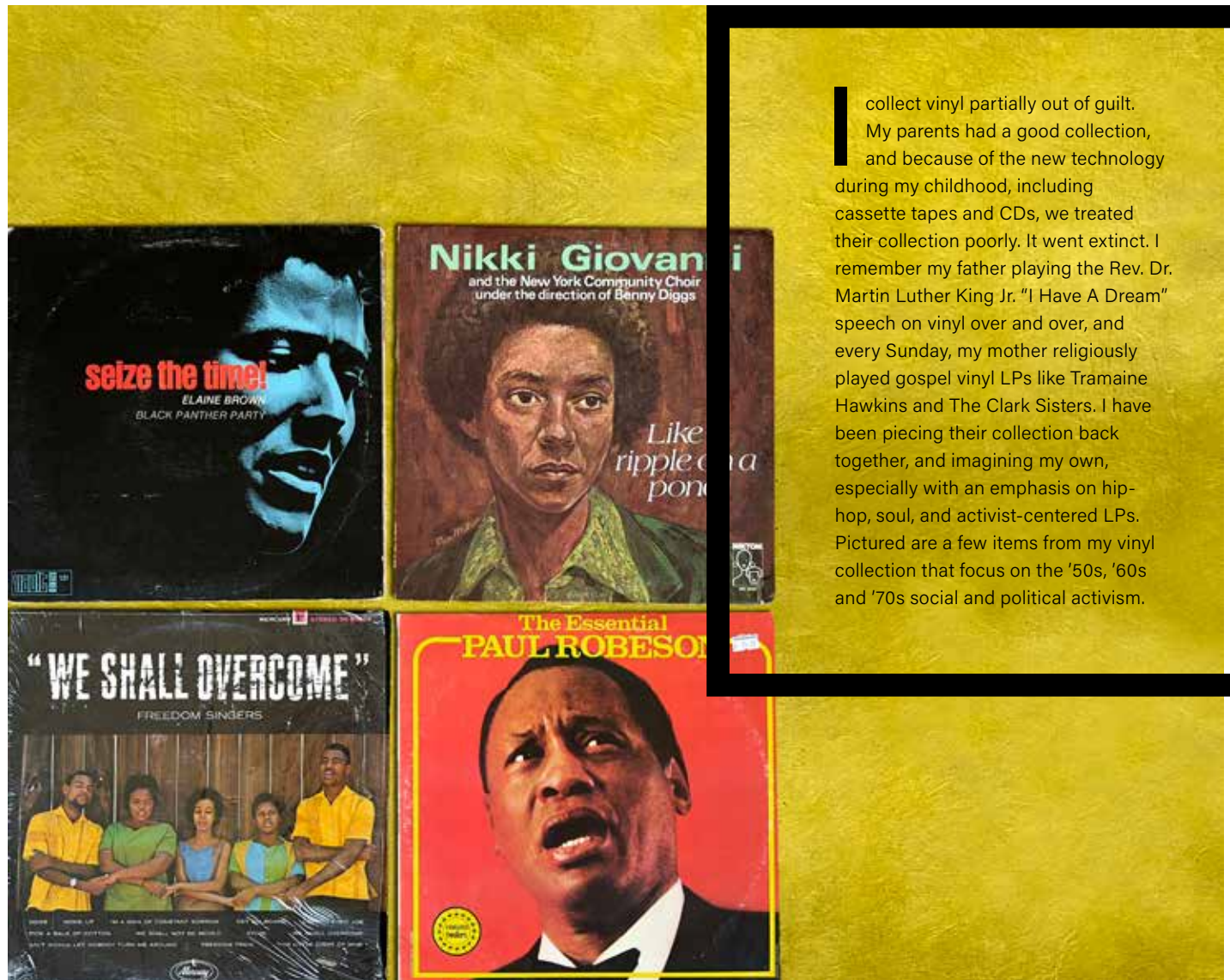
All my life, I have collected things. I value things.

I archive Black people's things. They are important because the lives that Black people live are important and have high value, and that meant that my life was also important enough to remember and preserve. I have always thought that I was part of history and, concurrently, making history. My collection of objects, ephemera, albums, magazines, and books is deeply personal and weaves my life experiences through a wider Black American and African diasporic tapestry. I ask you:

- What is the value of an object?
- What is the value of a human?
- What is the societal value of a human when the social perception of that human's personhood has been . . . an object?

Within these pages, I've shared some highlights from my personal archive.

I draw my inspiration to archive from people I am in community with who activate the available archive. Artists like Vicki Meek and Ángel Faz utilize the archive to help us remember what was lost in Dallas through oral history, sculpture, and printmaking. Historians like Dr. Marvin Dulaney and Amber Sims scour through manuscripts and newspapers in the archive to piece together the disappearing stories of Black Dallas. Genealogists like Donald Payton and the late Dr. George Keaton actuated the archive to share rich narratives about the lives of Dallas's enslaved and newly emancipated. Institution builders like Dr. Harry Robinson, President and CEO of the African American Museum in Dallas, and Brenda Sanders-Wise, Executive Director of the Tarrant County Black Historical & Genealogical Society and the Lenora Rolla Heritage Center Museum in Fort Worth, are preserving archives so we all can learn from them and grow together. Memory workers like Marilyn Clark, a community-centered legend-archivist, and Priscilla Escobedo, a Tejana archivist and President of the Dallas Mexican American Historical League, are guides to a more equitable future by showing us what the archives can teach us about our troubled past.



I collect vinyl partially out of guilt. My parents had a good collection, and because of the new technology during my childhood, including cassette tapes and CDs, we treated their collection poorly. It went extinct. I remember my father playing the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have A Dream" speech on vinyl over and over, and every Sunday, my mother religiously played gospel vinyl LPs like Tramaine Hawkins and The Clark Sisters. I have been piecing their collection back together, and imagining my own, especially with an emphasis on hip-hop, soul, and activist-centered LPs. Pictured are a few items from my vinyl collection that focus on the '50s, '60s and '70s social and political activism.

# The Storyteller:

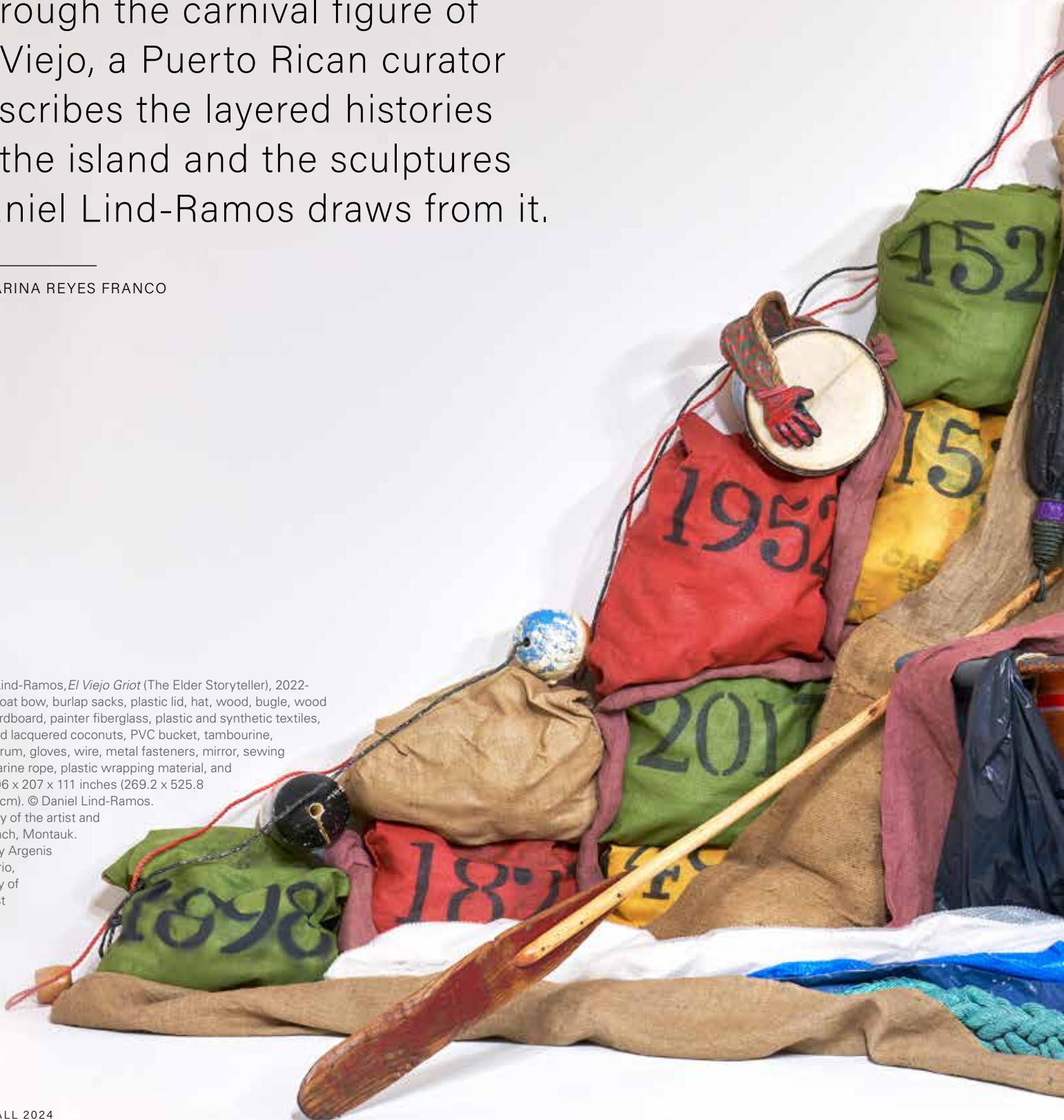
## Daniel Lind-Ramos and El Viejo

Through the carnival figure of El Viejo, a Puerto Rican curator describes the layered histories of the island and the sculptures Daniel Lind-Ramos draws from it.

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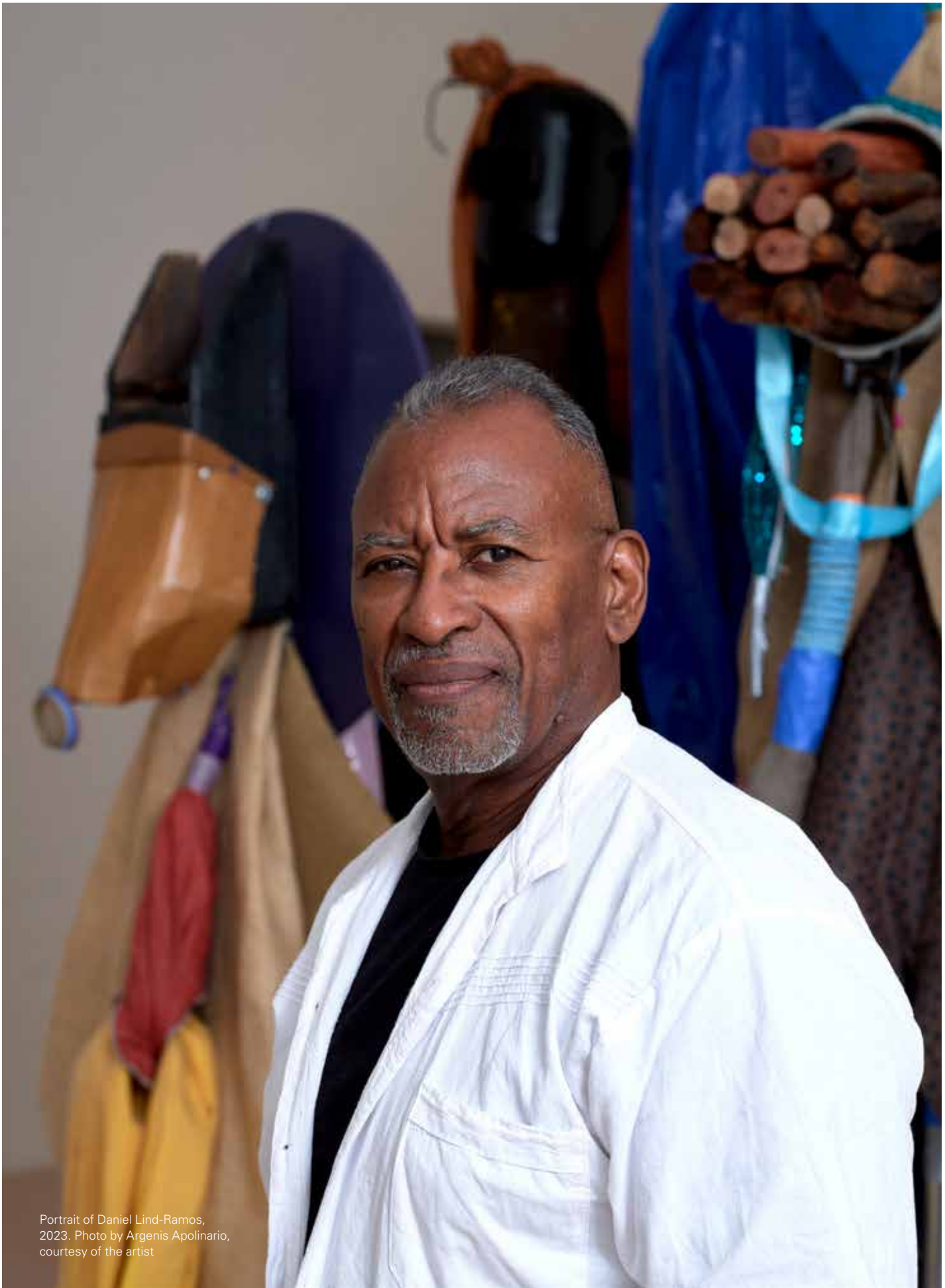
BY MARINA REYES FRANCO

Daniel Lind-Ramos, *El Viejo Griot* (The Elder Storyteller), 2022-2023. Boat bow, burlap sacks, plastic lid, hat, wood, bugle, wood oars, cardboard, painter fiberglass, plastic and synthetic textiles, dried and lacquered coconuts, PVC bucket, tambourine, conga drum, gloves, wire, metal fasteners, mirror, sewing pins, marine rope, plastic wrapping material, and rope. 106 x 207 x 111 inches (269.2 x 525.8 x 281.9 cm). © Daniel Lind-Ramos. Courtesy of the artist and The Ranch, Montauk. Photo by Argenis Apolinario, courtesy of the artist



An abandoned boat, pots blackened from daily use, an antique grater, sequined capes, musical instruments, gardening gloves, beach buoys, blue tarp, palm fronds, burlap sacks. In his ever-expansive body of work, Daniel Lind-Ramos incorporates all kinds of found, gifted, created, or designed objects imbued with meaning into his assemblage sculptures. All are tied, sometimes literally, to his own experiences, either at a personal or community level. His pieces are universally celebrated for their rootedness in the place of origin of the materials they consist of, a town on the northern coast of Puerto Rico called Loíza, a historically Black community with a strong Afro-Indigenous history. Lind-Ramos had long been revered in Puerto Rico, but he rose to international prominence after his participation in the 2019 Whitney Biennial with his piece *María-María*, a reference to both the Virgin Mary and the devastating 2017 Hurricane Maria. Consisting of a figure clad in blue tarp, coconut children at her feet, it was both a symbol of hope, and an indictment of colonial abandonment. Since then, Lind-Ramos has been creating ever-more ambitious and visually delightful works that delve into the histories, traditions and contemporary concerns shared by his community. Encompassing themes and lived experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic, hurricanes, the environment, mangroves, marronage, and Puerto





Portrait of Daniel Lind-Ramos,  
2023. Photo by Argenis Apolinario,  
courtesy of the artist

Rican history, his works embody the interconnectedness of the African diaspora in the Caribbean, particularly through his prismatic use of Loíza's carnival characters.

Daniel Lind-Ramos grew up surrounded by mask and furniture makers, wood workers, cooks, seamstresses, and artisans in the heart of a community in which many culinary and artistic expressions and traditions stemmed from an economy based on the coconut palm tree. Trained originally in painting and drawing, he started incorporating three-dimensional objects into his paintings, eventually producing large-scale assemblage sculptures almost exclusively. His pieces often pay homage to construction workers, musicians, cooks, and artisans by including their tools, many of which hold significant symbolism in Afro-Caribbean religions and traditions.

Many of his works are characterized by references to the carnival characters of the Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol, or Festivals of Saint James, such as El Vejigante<sup>1</sup>; El Viejo (the old man); La Loca (“the crazy lady,” traditionally a man in drag); and the Caballero (the gentleman, a satirical representation of the white landowner). In Lind-Ramos's creative realm, the masquerade figures from the Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol, rooted in the syncretic traditions of Loíza, serve as a lens for reinterpreting history. Among these characters, Lind-Ramos has a special affinity for El Viejo, whose mask and attire he re-creates and embodies annually using materials like cardboard and burlap. Reminiscent of many people within his community rather than any specific individual, El Viejo is a versatile character that can represent various roles such as a construction worker, an elder medicine practitioner, an artisan, or a storyteller. Of the four characters, El Viejo is an avatar that allows for more flexibility; it is the least picturesque and thus closest to his own aesthetic sensibilities.

It is this character in particular that he references in his large-scale installation *El Viejo Griot* (The Elder Storyteller), first presented in 2023 at MoMA PS1 in his solo show *El Viejo Griot – Una historia de todos nosotros*. Impressive in scale, the piece is a triangular relief assemblage extending from the wall to the floor, consisting of the bow of a small boat, or yola—a vessel often used for small-scale fishing or undocumented crossings—that carries a figure whose visage is devised out of a cardboard box, musical instruments, and other elements constructed out of tarp, rope, wood, and dried coconut inflorescence. Painted burlap sacks bearing key dates in Puerto Rican history are the main cargo of the vessel, which overflows and towers over the boat. In fact, the cargo seems to be the figure's body, a symbol of the human cargo that traversed the Atlantic Ocean. The colors of the sacks are red, yellow, and green, a reference to Loíza's flag—itsself a colonial imposition representing



From top: Performance of *Talegas de la memoria*, part of *De Loíza a la Loíza*, a MAC en el Barrio commissioned piece by Daniel Lind-Ramos. Playa Vacía Talega, Loíza, Puerto Rico, 2020. Photo by Raquel Pérez Puig

Performance of *La ruta del Pregonero*, the first event in *De Loíza a la Loíza*, a MAC en el Barrio commissioned piece by Daniel Lind-Ramos featuring the costume of El Viejo. Home of the artist in Colobó, Loíza, Puerto Rico, 2019. Image courtesy of Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Puerto Rico

the colors of the Spanish flag and Saint Patrick, the town's official patron saint—yet Lind-Ramos recontextualizes them to also allude to the colors of several African nations.

Lind-Ramos tends to work concurrently on various open-ended series, sketching, gathering, and assembling pieces until he has to “abandon” or finish them for the purpose of an exhibition. He meticulously tends to the sculptures until he can no longer do it. Some of the more overt references to *El Viejo* emerged in 2012 in a piece titled *1797* about the British invasion of Puerto Rico in that year and the subsequent defense of the territory by mostly Black and Brown militias—a point of pride in Loíza and an early marker of a budding, distinct Puerto Rican identity. Another was in 2019 and early 2020 during the development of a project titled *De Loíza a la Loíza*. Highlighting the connections between Loíza and Santurce through their culinary, familial, and commercial ties, the project incorporated music, poetry, performances, sculptures, and storytelling events in his family home, Playa Vacía Talega, and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico, which commissioned it. At the time, *El Viejo* was embodied by Marcos Peñaloza, a composer, historian, and community leader of a mangrove reforestation project. In a performance titled *Talegas de la memoria* (later turned into a video shown alongside *El Viejo Griot* at PS1), the coast of Loíza was poetically transformed into different parts of the world, synthesizing Puerto Rican history through music, the material exchanges, abuses and, ultimately, the culture that emerged from our multilayered history. In *Talegas de la memoria*, *El Viejo* appears as a timeless character inhabiting a magical time. Things change, but he is always there.

Daniel Lind-Ramos, *Vencedor: 1797*, 2018-19. Mixed media. 67 x 70 x 33 inches (170.2 x 177.8 x 83.8 cm). © Daniel Lind-Ramos. Image courtesy of The Alford Collection of Contemporary Art at Rollins College. Gift of Barbara '68 and Theodore '68 Alford

- 1493** Beginning of European colonization in Puerto Rico
- 1510** Arrival of the first enslaved people
- 1511** The Taíno rebellion begins
- 1525** Start of coconut cultivation
- 1527** The first rebellion of enslaved people in Puerto Rico is organized
- 1719** The town of Loíza is founded
- 1751** José Campeche y Jordán is born
- 1797** Loíza militiamen defend the territory and triumph against the English invasion
- 1804** Triumph of the Haitian Revolution
- 1821** Enslaved people conspire and revolt in Bayamón
- 1848** Rebellion of enslaved people in Ponce
- 1898** Spanish-American War and US invasion of Puerto Rico
- 1952** The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is created
- 1980** Adolfin Villanueva Osorio is murdered in Loíza while defending her home from eviction
- 2017** Hurricane Maria makes landfall

In *El Viejo Griot*, the storyteller doesn't tell a linear history of events, and the artist's lack of chronological arrangement of sacks suggests circular, recurring themes. In the piece's triangular structure, the sacks bearing the dates 1493 and 1898—marking the beginning of European colonization and the invasion of Puerto Rico by United States forces during the Spanish-American War—are located at both ends of the base. Effectively bookending the other dates and events within these two pivotal years, Lind-Ramos offers a Puerto Rico that, as a nation, is still struggling politically with the consequences of those events. However, at the top of the structure is a sack with the date 1797. Lind-Ramos doesn't close the door to the possibility of triumphing.

*In November of 2023, Daniel Lind-Ramos spoke alongside artists Minia Biabiany and Engel Leonardo, moderated by Marina Reyes Franco in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for Nasher Prize Dialogues: Sculpture and Place presented in partnership with the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico. A recording is available on the Nasher's YouTube channel.*



<sup>1</sup> El Vejigante is a central figure in the Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol in Loíza, Puerto Rico, known for its colorful bat-like costumes, horned coconut masks, and mischievous behavior. The character's origins trace back to Spain, where it emerged in medieval festivals symbolizing the battles between Christians and Moors, with St. James (Santiago Apóstol) as a figure representing Christian triumph. The name “Vejigante” derives from “vejiga,” meaning bladder, referring to the inflated animal bladders used by Vejigantes to playfully chase and taunt festival-goers. In Puerto Rico, El Vejigante evolved by blending Spanish influences with those of Indigenous and Afro descendant communities, becoming a symbol of cultural resistance and the fusion of traditions that define Puerto Rican identity.



Daniel Lind-Ramos, *Maria-Maria*, 2019.  
Installation view at the Whitney Museum  
of American Art. Metal basin, wooden seat,  
lamp, tarp, coconuts, palm-tree trunk, steel  
sheet, rope, beads, fabric, tacks, wood, plastic  
tubing, steel bars, scissors, and wooden box.  
89 x 39 1/4 x 43 inches (226.1 x 99.7 x 109.2  
cm). © Daniel Lind-Ramos. Image courtesy of  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;  
purchased with funds from the Painting and  
Sculpture Committee

# The Lot is Not Empty

Preserving  
History in a  
Growing City

Former site of Dr. Mamie  
McKnight's residence at 1402  
Plum Street, Dallas, 2024. Photo  
by Trey Burns, courtesy of the  
Nasher Sculpture Center

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PREFACE BY JED MORSE  
*Interim Director and Chief Curator*

**N**asher Public: *Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition*, or *UHRR*, is an ambitious and unconventional public art initiative designed to capture the voices of communities of color in Dallas whose neighborhoods are experiencing gentrification or erasure. The brainchild of Dallas-based artist, curator, and activist Vicki Meek, the project will unfold in three distinct phases, each focused on a different community. Each phase will be led by a different artist with a strong connection to the community in which they will work and who will lead a select group of multidisciplinary creatives, native to the city, tasked to form partnerships, conduct research, record stories, and interpret that collaborative work into a public art project. The final manifestation could take any form—a monument, a play, a film, etc.—but would be determined in concert with the community, incorporating social history and public memory.

The first phase of the project set out to memorialize the Tenth Street Historic District Freedman's Town in the Oak Cliff neighborhood southwest of downtown. The neighborhood was settled by people emancipated from slavery in the 1800s, becoming a thriving, self-sufficient Freedman's Town by the end of the century with African American-run churches, schools, parks, and businesses. After the construction of I-35 and damaging city-led ordinances, few of the original buildings or residents remain. Today the district is one of the only surviving Freedman's Towns left in the nation despite their formerly prolific existence—something the residents and their descendants fight to maintain and celebrate.

Starting in 2022, Meek acted as the Nasher's inaugural *UHRR* fellow, enlisting the talent of artist Ángel Faz, filmmaker Christian Vasquez, playwright Jonathan Norton, and African-American history scholar Dr. W. Marvin Dulaney. Together the group collaborated with the Tenth Street Residential Association to interview elders of the community, recording stories that will be added to the city archive, thanks to Dallas City Archivist John Slate. They poured over historic images preserved by the descendants of Tenth Street residents and organizations like Remembering Black Dallas and Kinkofa, a Dallas-based Black genealogy and digital family history platform. Inside homes, libraries, churches, and community centers, the *UHRR* cohort and the residents came together to remember the idyllic enclave of Black life that Tenth Street's original footprint provided while lamenting its degradation at the hands of the growing city.

After a year of connecting with Tenth Street's stories, the group of artists secured a partnership with the Kinfolk Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit that produces interactive digital media experiences in public spaces to highlight underrepresented histories. Together they compiled stories and documents to create a series of five app-based augmented reality experiences commemorating the people and places of Tenth Street. With markers in place to access the app at significant sites throughout the neighborhood, *Nasher Public: Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition* ensures that while buildings may come down and younger generations move out, the inspirational voices of this Dallas community will keep a presence in the neighborhood and its rightful place in the city's history.

# Nasher Public: Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition in Dallas's Tenth Street Historic District Freedman's Town

BY CARRIS ADAMS

**T**he *Nasher Public: Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition* project, or *UHRR*, is an example of remembering the past, respecting the present, and preparing for an unknown future.

Sometimes this future does not consider the past or present but is blatantly tied to development dollars that you nor I can afford. According to *The Dallas Morning News*, in 2017 almost 40% of homes sold in Dallas were bought by house flippers, investors, developers, and builders, making Dallas one of the most intensely gentrifying cities in the US. For those who have never experienced being priced out of their homes, let me give you an idea.

There is always a red herring that lets you know change is afoot. Usually, it's luxury apartments, followed by a new idiosyncratic eatery or coffee shop. Someone sells, someone buys, someone builds, and the first domino has fallen. Sweaty men with business cards offer you cash for your home. They call you constantly. They send mailers. They once sent my grandmother a plant because if the calls didn't get her attention, a succulent would. This is the kinder way of moving you out.

However, throughout history, removal practices by hook or by crook have included mysterious fires, false outrage leading to over-policing. One day, the cemetery is paved over to make highways; homes are bulldozed to make parking lots and dog parks. My favorite is eminent domain, a tricky practice of legal seizure that no one can escape.

Before there was interest in your property, the city government partially cared about your municipalities. You had one or two bus lines that were largely inconvenient or inaccessible. The local school was low on teachers, high on student population, and low on funds. The building was old and forever smelled like mold.



"WHAT REALLY DREW ME TO THE WORK WAS BEING ABLE TO WITNESS AND DECIDE WHAT IS A MONUMENT AND WHO GETS TO MAKE THE MONUMENTS THAT INFLUENCE CULTURE FOREVER." —ÁNGEL FAZ

Your water, sewer, electricity, and air were easily compromised if not already poisoned.

But the community was always lively and supportive. Resources were shared even if they were spread thin. Juneteenth parades, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, lemonade stands, and parties spilled into the front yard with music that made everyone dance. Yard football, much to the chagrin of your grandfather who worked hard on that St. Augustine grass. Pop-up performances, drinks, food, color. Dogs, cats, parakeets. Grandparents, parents, children, cousins, aunts, uncles—neighborhood, community.

The Tenth Street Historic District is yet another story of a place where a community once thrived, but as generations grew and inequality persisted, the identity and aesthetics of the neighborhood changed. Located in Dallas's Oak Cliff neighborhood, the Tenth is one of the only remaining intact Freedman's Towns in the nation. This neighborhood once had 257 domestic structures, four commercial structures, three institutional structures, and one cemetery. As a home for freed enslaved people after the

Above: *Nasher Public: Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition* project will document and memorialize the Tenth Street Historic District Freedman's Town in Oak Cliff, an urban neighborhood with past and present ties to the Black community. Pictured left to right: Ángel Faz, Vicki Meek (Fellow), Jonathan Norton, and Christian Vazquez.

Opposite: Images of the Tenth Street Historic District Freedman's Town, courtesy of the Dallas Public Library's archives and Kinkofa



“WHEN WE INTERVIEWED THE ELDERS, THEY WERE SO NOSTALGIC ABOUT BEING ABLE TO BE IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND NOT WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING. THEY COULD DO WHAT THEY NEEDED TO DO WITHOUT FEAR, WITHOUT TRYING TO NAVIGATE, AND THEN IT WAS GONE.”

—VICKI MEEK



"I CAME TO UNDERSTAND THAT SOCIAL CHANGE COULD BE EMBODIED. ART, THEATER, AND DANCE HELP US KEEP CULTURE ALIVE. IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY BUILDING, AND THAT LIVES IN OUR BODIES." —JONATHAN NORTON

Civil War ended, the Tenth was a self-sustaining community with nearly 2,000 residents by the 1950s. But the construction of I-35 in the 1950s choked the neighborhood, followed by disinvestment, city-backed demolitions, and now the familiar wafts of gentrification. With its history threatened, we must raise the question: *How do we remember a historic past while building an unknown future?*

*Nasher Public: Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition*, authored and led by Nasher Fellow Vicki Meek, is a creative initiative designed to honor the history and culture embedded in this pocket of Dallas. In this inaugural recognition effort, Meek and her team have memorialized Tenth Street through a short film titled *Remembering What Was: A Tenth Street Story* and an augmented reality experience that showcases the neighborhood's history and culture. In collaboration with the Kinfolk Foundation, an organization that develops self-guided AR experiences with classroom-ready curricula, interested parties can explore the rich history that shaped Tenth Street.

Five QR code markers are strategically placed throughout the district at significant historical homes, commercial buildings, and institutional structures. Scanning these codes with a smart phone camera prompts users to download the Kinfolk app. Once downloaded, users can explore Kinfolk's catalog of AR monuments, select and place a monument and listen to iterations of *Love Letters to Tenth Street*, narrated by Meek and written by community poet Shaun Montgomery. The monuments themselves allow you to delve into archival materials that provide more context about the historical figures, places, or spaces.

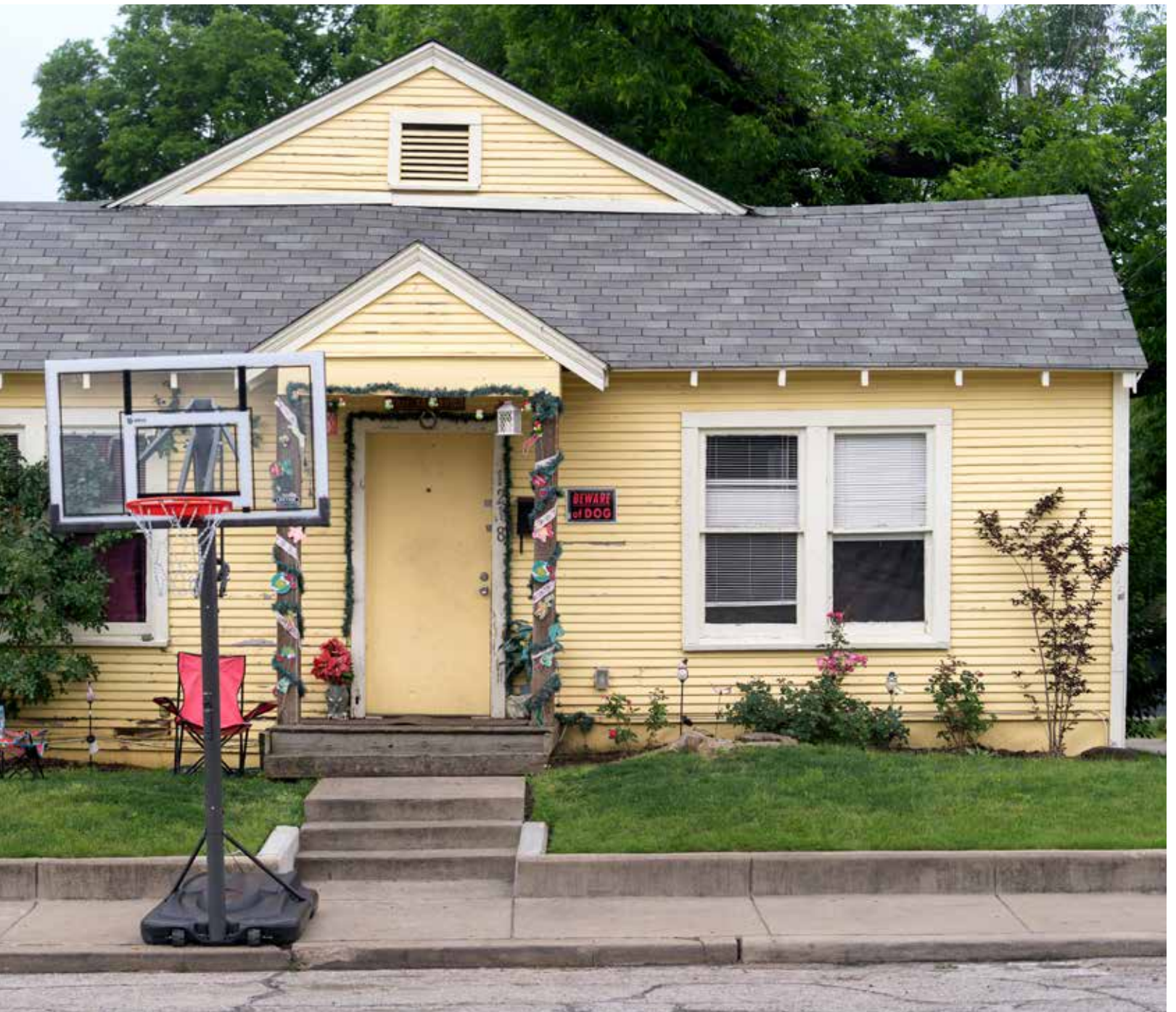
I'm not exactly a Luddite. I like to think of myself as a technologically challenged, grumpy painter-writer person who admittedly doesn't follow directions. However, the Kinfolk app is easy to follow and pretty damn cool. Its creative technology merges history, storytelling, and imagery that commemorates Black, Brown, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+ history—my cup of tea (with lemon, of course). The cute yellow house on the corner embodies grandma energy with its beautiful plants, wind chimes, and flowers. Little did I know that it was the home of Dr. Nathaniel Tolbert Watts (1893-

1976), a Black doctor and Tenth Street resident and community leader who provided medical care to Black people when very few would. Eloise Lundy Park provided Black people with a space for recreation, social gatherings, and creative expression during the height of segregation. Thanks to the residents of Tenth Street and their family archives, I was able to view images of people dancing, baseball players, and children's recitals. I love viewing old photos and hearing stories from elders. I love the good, the bad, and the ugly of our history. What I despise is that city government and developers think succulents and historical markers will atone for the years of segregation, disenfranchisement, and contemporary removal practices while building homes that many Dallasites can't afford. What I'd like to hope is that in addition to projects like *UHRR*, there will be initiatives with ample resources to help restore and honor communities such as these while continuing to make them accessible and affordable to folks like me, enabling us to build generational stability.

I do not have a solution for how to remember and respect a historic past while building toward an unknown future. As a society, we tend to leave this job to people of color and those working within the humanities. I've asked before, and I'll ask again: Why is this our job? We often lack the funds or social and political capital to make large strides in the arena of remembrance. A sculpture here, a marker there, a show, an essay . . . new homes are built, the old is torn down, a developer gets the land, and people are displaced. I don't have an answer, and I'm not sure that I should. What I do know is that those of us who have taken on the task of remembrance create beautiful objects, performances, and spaces. Finding La Yarda is a digital art storytelling initiative in Lawrence, Kansas, highlighting the Mexican American housing development and rail workers from 1920-1951. Two years ago, Etienne Charles developed an immersive multimedia work, *San Juan Hill: A New York Story*, that included music, visuals, and original first-person accounts of the history of the San Juan Hill neighborhood once populated by Indigenous and immigrant communities. Monument Lab, a nonprofit in Philadelphia, is dedicated to reimagining monuments as places for belonging, learning, and healing. Members of the



Former site of Dr. Nathaniel Watt's residence and office at 1218 East 9th Street, Dallas, 2024. Photo by Trey Burns, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center



"SOMEONE ENGAGING WITH THESE AR EXPERIENCES CAN WALK AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND HAVE A REVELATION ABOUT WHAT THIS PLACE HAS BEEN LIKE, WHAT IT'S LIKE NOW, AND CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT." —CHRISTIAN VAZQUEZ

*Urban Historical Reclamation and Recognition* project team are doing this work in their own practices as well. Jonathan Norton writes plays like *Penny Candy*, which highlight the creativity and day-to-day survival of local community members. Vicki Meek creates objects and installations that honor West African symbolism, histories, and the sociopolitical issues under which we labor. Ángel Faz's practice spans sculpture,

printmaking, and performance to create installations that invite viewers to imagine a just reality. Christian Vasquez's films and photos shift between documentaries on social justice and commercial image-making. We are already doing the work within our practices, homes, and neighborhoods. Through our food, style, stories, paintings, drawings, and sculptures. So, what are you doing?



# *FOLDING*



*Ahead of Haegue Yang's  
2025 exhibition at the Nasher, a  
curator and scholar of Yang's work  
unifies the opposing dynamics  
found in her sculptures.*

# *TRADITIONS*

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BY ORIANNA CACCHIONE

**I**t is difficult to describe Haegue Yang's artwork succinctly. Her oeuvre is prolific, materially and conceptually diverse. She has created artworks in two and three dimensions, employing materials as various as Venetian blinds, spices, vegetables, video, cloned voices, origami, texts, photography, drying racks, yarn, wallpaper, borrowed furniture, fans, bells, security envelopes, and *hanji* paper. Further still, she has incorporated sound, heat, wind, and smell into her sculptures and installations to produce atmospheric effects. As Yang weaves together diverse referents, materials, and experiences, she is able to draw out a tension between the handmade and mass-produced, the domestic and the monumental, the historic and the subjective, the haptic and the mystic, ultimately eliciting simultaneous collisions and integrations of divergent modernist, folk, vernacular, and craft traditions.

Throughout 20th-century art and art history, tradition has often been discursively and disparagingly associated with the opposite of modernism. Within this framework, the modern resided within the colonial and imperial capitals of Europe and the United States, whereas the traditional was often relegated to the colonized, indigenous, or so-called "non-Western" world. Yang's inversions of these disparate traditions upend the lingering residue of colonial structures and suggest new forms of relationality and being in the world.

Yang persistently engages craft techniques as an alternative to industrial production. She has prolifically knit intricate, decorative "cosies" that disguise and protect the canned foods inside; folded hundreds of origami shapes that occupy installations, are then photographed, and are silhouetted by black spray paint, remaining only as traces; learned macramé during a residency at the Glasgow Sculpture Studios; and studied traditional Korean straw-weaving techniques to construct abstracted totem-like sculptures on casters. In Yang's artworks, craft techniques bring together the domestic and the industrial, the vernacular and the modern, the handmade and mass-produced, the self-taught and the formally trained. They become representative of alternative systems of production that challenge (art) world hierarchies and open up to spaces beyond the institution.

Confounding the separation between domestic and gallery space, *Sallim* (2009) re-creates Yang's Berlin kitchen of that time as a life-sized, steel-framed structure set on casters. The scale model at once abstracts the banal domestic space and dematerializes it. In place of the typical furnishings, appliances, and home goods, she hangs lights, a fan, heat pad, scent emitters, extension cords, and Venetian blinds that only obliquely reference the outfitting of the original room. Only the artwork's title—Korean for household or housekeeping—and a diffuser that emits the smells of apple pie,



Installation view of *Haegue Yang: ETA 1994–2018*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2018. Photo by Saša Fuis, courtesy of Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Previous spread: Haegue Yang, *Non-Foldings – Cosmic Explosion #5* (detail), 2012. Spray paint on paper, framed. Two parts, each 50 5/8 x 36 5/8 inches (128.5 x 95 cm). Private collection. © STPI, Singapore. Image courtesy of the artist



IN YANG'S ARTWORKS, CRAFT TECHNIQUES BRING TOGETHER THE DOMESTIC AND THE INDUSTRIAL, THE VERNACULAR AND THE MODERN, THE HANDMADE AND MASS-PRODUCED, THE SELF-TAUGHT AND THE FORMALLY TRAINED.

—ORIANNA CACCHIONE



Clockwise, from top: Installation view of Kukje Gallery's booth at Frieze New York, 2024. Photo by Sebastiano Pellion di Persano, courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Haegue Yang, *Can Cosies – Dicke Ammerländer Bockwurst 4500 g and Wiener Würstchen 4500 g*, 2011. Installation view of *Teacher of Dance* at Modern Art Oxford, UK, 2011. Two cans of sausages, each 4500 grams, knitting yarn. Each can 5 1/8 x 9 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches (13 x 23.5 x 23.5 cm). Charpenel Collection, Mexico. Photo by Stuart Whipps, courtesy of the artist

Haegue Yang, *Leafy Gradation Fountain Soul Site – Mesmerizing Mesh #233*, 2024. *Hanji, washi*, origami paper on Alu-dibond. Framed 36 1/4 x 24 5/6 inches (92 x 62 cm). Private Collection, Busan. Photo by Studio Haegue Yang, courtesy of the artist



Haegue Yang, *Incantations – Entwinement, Endurance and Extinction*, 2022. Installation view of *PLANET B. Climate Change and the New Sublime*, Palazzo Bollani, Venice, Italy, 2022. Digital color print on self-adhesive vinyl film, paper pinwheels. Dimensions variable. Photo by Sebastiano Pellion di Persano, courtesy of the artist

coffee, vomit, and excrement, suggest the original architectural referent. Here, she comes at her subject from the side, inducing loose or vulnerable associations to the kitchen, domestic labor, personal biography, and itinerancy. This form of abstraction is at once disorienting and placemaking, rendering the home strange and yet relatable.

Yang persistently unmoors domestic objects from their common use. She releases Venetian blinds from the constraint of the window, instead using them to create monumental, suspended sculptures of beguiling folds. Here the material potential of the blinds is revealed through their very permeability—they simultaneously hide, reveal, create, and divide space. In others, she re-creates Sol LeWitt’s iconic white cube sculptures in white, or occasionally in black, Venetian blinds. The sterile white slats fill in the spaces LeWitt left open, domesticating Western art history and its canonic artworks.

Many of Yang’s artworks integrate sensory experiences beyond vision, resulting in immersive environments that challenge logic-based traditions and instead experiment with other ways of knowing and experiencing the world. *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements – Version Utrecht* (2006) included a humidifier, two infrared heaters, an industrial fan, and two scent emitters with

motion sensors, one containing a scent named “Wood Fire” and the other “Fresh Linen.” Yang constructs haptic experiences where bodily sensations—feeling, smelling, and often hearing—operate beyond the purely visual and are integral to drawing together uneasy and unexpected relations between the objects and sensory encounters that comprise her installations.

Arrangement becomes an operative strategy in Yang’s artwork, where diverse references—physical, experiential, perceptive, and conceptual—are pulled together in loose association, allowing her to easily trespass across artistic and cultural traditions. Creating oblique relationships between references, she abstracts narratives and narrates abstractions that challenge perception alone and instead rely on belief systems beyond logic. This is demonstrated in her ongoing series of wallpapers that engage the atmospheric to address the climatic in both subject matter and approach. In *Incantations – Entwinement, Endurance and Extinction* (2022), images of bells, double helixes, crystalline forms, serpents, coral reefs, forests, warped checked prints, and her white papercuts collide and coalesce into an unfamiliar landscape adorned with hundreds of small black pinwheels. Here, she compresses or flattens multiple references to create a nonhierarchical terrain that suggests narrative forms beyond the



Haegue Yang, *Sallim*, 2009. Installation view of *Condensation*, Korean Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 2009. Powder-coated steel frame, powder-coated perforated metal plates, casters, aluminum Venetian blinds, knitting yarn, acrylic mirror, IV stand, light bulbs, cable, zip ties, terminal strips, split rings, metal chains, fan, timer, dried garlic, plates, hot pad, scent emitters. 122 x 98 3/8 x 165 3/8 inches (310 x 250 x 420 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fund for the Twenty-First Century and gift of Agnes Gund, Glenn Fuhrman, and Jerry I. Speyer, 2010. Photo by Pattara Chanruechachai, courtesy of the artist

scientific. This seeking of other ways of knowing is prominent in her most recent series, *Mesmerizing Mesh*, where she incorporates paper-cutting traditions she has learned from different folk and shamanic practices around the world.

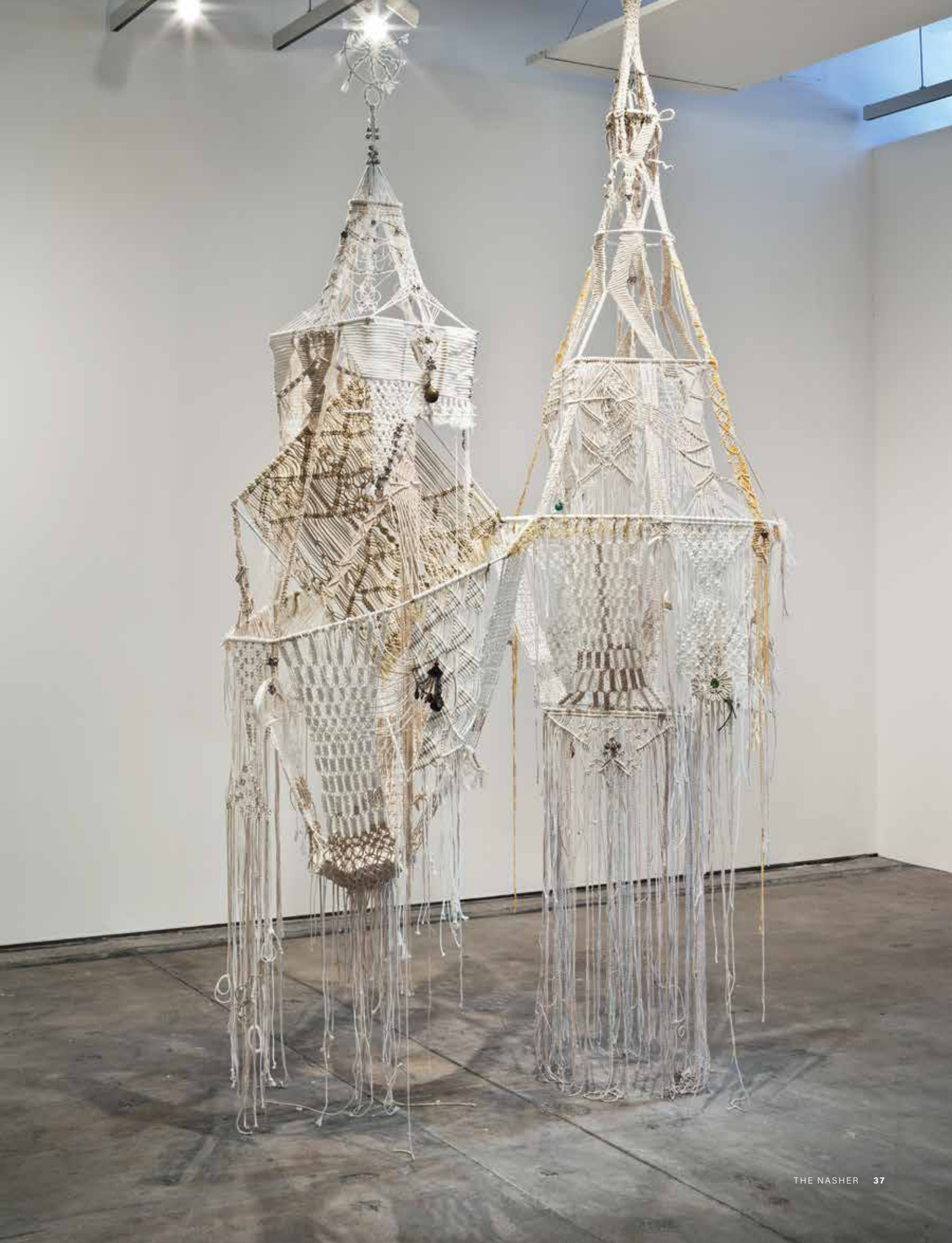
Yang traces other ways of knowing and being in the world that transcend the seemingly rational traditions of Western modernism and science. Seeking a common ground or perhaps a common visual language, she folds and often compresses traditions that are aesthetically similar but conceptually different to subvert colonial genealogies of Western modern art. A mystic leap, Yang weaves together new ways of experiencing art and the world.



This page, top right: Haegue Yang, *The Intermediates*. Installation view of *Latent Dwelling*, Hanok, Kukje Gallery, Seoul, South Korea, 2023. Image courtesy of Kukje Gallery. Right: Installation view of *Haegue Yang: ETA 1994–2018*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2018. Photo by Saša Fuis, courtesy of the artist and Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Opposite: Haegue Yang, *Floating Knowledge and Growing Craft – Silent Architecture Under Construction*, 2013. Installation view of *Journal of Boubal kiki*, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Glasgow, Scotland, 2013. Powder-coated mild steel, powder-coated steel mesh, steel wire rope, jute twine, cotton twine, bells, metal rings, synthetic hair, vintage jewellery, glazed earthenware, iPod, iPod docking station, electric kettle, plastic basket, cardboard box, crochet hooks, cutter knife, pliers, measuring tape, stool. 78 3/4 x 57 7/8 x 29 1/8 inches (200 x 147 x 74 cm). Private collection, Seoul. Photo by Keith Hunter, courtesy of the artist





A Beating

# DRU



# JM

Suchitra  
Mattai's  
exploration  
of memory,  
material, and  
mystic force

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BY EMMA S. AHMAD



Suchitra Mattai wields her fabric like a shaman wields their drum. As she weaves, fantastical forms emerge and the vibrations in the air slowly settle into a rhythmic heartbeat. Mattai then guides her sculptures, like spirits, through intangible realms, across land and sea, from the past to the present, and onward.

As a Guyanese American artist of South Asian descent who has lived in several countries, Mattai's identity isn't easy to categorize. This is evident in her work, which is neither 'this' nor 'that.' Not just a painting, though not singularly a sculpture either. Not strictly craft, but pushing the norms of 'traditional' fine art. Not solely fusing Caribbean and Indonesian cultures, but going beyond, creating something entirely new.

Mattai's practice is multidisciplinary, but her favorite and perhaps most notable material of choice is the sari. Some of her saris are sourced directly from India, but many are thrifted by her mother and her mother's friends from secondhand shops in New Jersey. Most of the materials she uses are found or repurposed, the history of the textile being equally as important as the history of the wearer. In that sense, the object never started with her. As she reworks the fabric, each with its own past, her practice becomes one of community and collaboration.

Through materiality and form, Mattai unravels the many historical narratives surrounding her identity: personal stories from her relatives, memories from her childhood, mythologies from each culture. She embeds these stories into her work as a way of archiving her ancestral past, simultaneously passing it down and reimagining it.

"I think of my whole practice as storytelling," Mattai says. "I'm going back into my ancestral past and pulling out stories as a way of archiving those that aren't documented in our Western history textbooks." Perhaps it is this practice of summoning the past that leaves me unable to shake the idea of her as a sort of medium channeling ancient formulas. As an artist, she performs the role of both a storyteller and a conduit, guiding us between two planes of time. Again, I hear the beat of a ceremonial drum.

And so she weaves, braids, sews, embellishes. Her work takes many final forms—it could be hung on the wall like a tapestry, sewn together on the surface of a canvas like a painting, or (my personal favorite) built into a structure—a spatially rich sculptural installation.

Mattai's 2024 solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary

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Right: Suchitra Mattai, *Pappy's house*, 2024. Installation view of *she walked in reverse and found their songs*, ICA San Francisco, June 5 to September 15, 2024. Worn saris, aluminum, beaded trim, tinsel. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno, courtesy the artist, Roberts Projects, and ICA San Francisco

Previous spread: Suchitra Mattai, *a self portrait* (detail), 2024. Worn saris, dried grass, found pendant, ribbon, beaded trim, and synthetic hair. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno, courtesy the artist, Roberts Projects, and ICA San Francisco



"I THINK MYTHOLOGY HOLDS FOR US, AS HUMANS, ALL THAT WE FEAR AND ALL THAT WE LOVE, AND IF YOU TAKE THAT APART, BREAK IT DOWN, AND THEN REBUILD A NEW MYTHOLOGY, MAYBE WE WOULD HAVE CHARACTERS AND STORIES THAT WOULD SPEAK TO A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE."

—SUCHITRA MATAI





Art in San Francisco, titled *she walked in reverse and found their songs*, probed further into the intersection of memory and mythology. She became fascinated with the ancient practice of using a “memory palace”—a memorization technique that involves envisioning a familiar space, typically a house, and attaching ideas or mnemonic images to each room or object within the space. For this exhibition, Mattai brings her memory palace to life in the form of a large woven house made entirely of sari tapestries; it is a replica of her grandparent’s home in Guyana that she visited as a child. Upon first glance, the house appears to be floating, grounded to the floor only by long braids, which resemble legs, spilling out of each corner. Mattai tells me that those “legs” are referencing the stilts that the actual home sits on to protect against flooding since the land is below sea level.

Without a doorway or windows, the house is impenetrable. “I wanted it to be that way because that’s how I vaguely remember it, but memory is so fleeting,” Mattai tells me. Here, she embraces the slippage of memory, simultaneously untangling these recollections and reimagining them.

Surrounding the house are bits and pieces of a domestic space: the interior of her memory palace. She fuses found furniture with her soft sculptures, creating fanciful, elaborate rooms. And as these subjective, half-fabricated stories become memories, she subtly underscores how the same is done within historical narratives.

“I think mythology holds for us, as humans, all that we fear and all that we love,” Mattai says thoughtfully. “And if you take that apart, break it down, and then rebuild a new mythology, maybe we would have characters and stories that would speak to a more equitable future. As our collective consciousness changes, how do we create stories that align with that?”

As Mattai braids her saris, I hear the boxy resonance of a frame drum. Slowly, the fabric morphs together forming a thick braid, which expands further creating a giant woven wall. Another braid wraps around itself until it becomes a large mass surging with life. The thrumming grows louder. Suddenly, the fabric has grown into an entity, the shimmery reverberating of her drum filling up the air around it. Pulsating. There is an unmistakable energy within her spirit-like sculptures. Yes, I’m sure. They are alive.



This page, from top: Suchitra Mattai, *she walked in reverse and found their songs* (detail), 2024. Found tapestry, embroidery floss, beads, bindis, sari, and faux gems. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno, courtesy the artist, Roberts Projects, and ICA San Francisco

Suchitra Mattai, *Pappy’s house* (detail), 2024. Worn saris, aluminum, beaded trim, tinsel. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno, courtesy the artist, Roberts Projects, and ICA San Francisco

Suchitra Mattai, *and the world swallowed us whole* (detail), 2023. Mixed media. Collection of Ethan Beard and Wayee Chu. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno, courtesy the artist, Roberts Projects, and ICA San Francisco

Opposite page: Suchitra Mattai, *memory palace*, 2024. Installation view of *she walked in reverse and found their songs*, ICA San Francisco, June 5 to September 15, 2024. Found South Asian processional umbrella, braided saris, woven saris, found furniture, tassels, beaded trim, gold rope, video. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno, courtesy the artist, Roberts Projects, and ICA San Francisco

# A Dinner for Pegasus



Photo by Ben Hines



# How Food, Art, and Culture Feed a City

*An art historian who studies food pathways and culinary culture imagines a diaphanous flight over Dallas.*

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BY TASHIMA THOMAS

**A**ccording to legend, Bellerophon, the son of the god Poseidon and the mortal Eurymede, is bestowed a gift from the goddess Athena: a golden bridle for the taming of the winged steed Pegasus.

When Pegasus arrives to drink at the fountain of Corinth at Peirene, Bellerophon slips on the golden bridle and so began their adventures soaring through the heavens.

Shaking a Greek mythological family tree is always a revelation. Pegasus was the offspring of the god Poseidon and the Gorgon Medusa and therefore Bellerophon's brother as well. Poseidon reigns over the seas, water, horses, and earthquakes, and his son Pegasus embodies the liquid element that would become the symbol of that Texas tea—the crude oil staked by the Magnolia Oil Company in 1934 and later becoming part of Mobil in 1959. The iconic red Pegasus logo would eventually become symbolic of the city of Dallas and serves as a lens here to think through the landscape of food and art.

I wonder what a hungry Bellerophon riding astride Pegasus over Dallas would spy for dinner. What exactly do our appetites reveal regarding local flavors and the cultural influences that feed the city? How have artists responded to the food landscape in the visual arts? And what are those culinary favorites or spicy crafted cocktails that beguile locals and visitors alike?

Dallas is a confluence of food pathways bursting with rich flavors and storied histories. It is the home of some of the best barbecue on offer—not a surprise coming from a cattle driving metroplex—and advances much of the city's culinary identity. The Dallas Cowboys are more than a reference to 'America's Team'; the name is a nod to the labor, ingenuity, and culture where one in every four cowboys was African American and the overwhelming majority were Hispanic vaqueros.

The blending of various tastes and culinary traditions are what make local barbecue the sticky good bites around every corner. The hallmark of a good BBQ joint beckons before you enter the eatery—the aroma of smoky brisket, spareribs, chopped beef, and sausages capture the



senses seasoned with the tanginess of sweet sauces. The offerings may be accompanied by loaded baked potatoes, truffle fries, potato salad, elotes, fried okra, baked beans, mac and cheese, cornbread, and enough juicy jalapeños to go around. Ambrosia was the mythical food or drink of the Greek gods and the namesake of a creamy concoction made with pineapple, citrus fruits, coconut, mini marshmallows, and whipped cream. In Dallas you are more likely to discover a dessert lineup of banana pudding, peach cobbler à la mode, handcrafted artisanal chocolates, churros, old fashioned ice cream, or pecan pie conjuring a sweet magic of mythical proportions.

Taco Tuesday is every day because who would not want to sample a variety of fajitas, empanadas, enchiladas, tacos al pastor, barbacoa, pupusas, and the best rice and beans topped with a hearty guacamole? Whether soft or crunchy shell, I imagine a famished Bellerophon on the hunt for tacos across the city.

Culinary diversity is a celebration of our cultural history and a reminder that the local is also international from Italian staples to Asian-inspired favorites, to plant-based options and juice bars, the city boasts a palette like no other in its appreciation for a dynamic food scene. Like the ancient Greek agora of Athens, a central marketplace located northwest of the Acropolis, Pegasus and his rider might graze the fare at downtown's Klyde Warren Park and cool themselves in the interactive splash pad at the Nancy Best Fountain. With a bevy of food trucks, Bellerophon would have his choice of salads, hot chicken, quesadillas, halal, shawarma, falafel, and sweet frozen treats. Across the street at the Nasher Sculpture Center we discover how artists are exploring the intersections of foodways and craftsmanship.



A few of the food and drink-referencing works in the Nasher's collection are Jasper Johns's *Bread*, 1969; Willem de Kooning's *Hostess (Bar Girl)*, 1973; Beverly Semmes's *Cake*, 2012; Shelby David Meier's *A Part of the Whole*, 2021; and Kathleen Ryan's *Jackie*, 2021, an oversized jack-o-lantern bejeweled with tens of thousands of precious gemstones and glass beads features the Halloween gourd in the most spectacular state of decay. In addition, the 2020 Nasher Prize Laureate Michael Rakowitz works in food pathways sourcing food packaging used in Iraqi cooking, mining the everyday objects as artifacts of memory, heritage, loss, and rediscovery. In early 2020 he and the museum hosted a community barbecue. Joseph Havel's *Drought*, 1990, a large bronze twisting chair piece, is an example of his toppling chairs made popular in the '80s and features eating utensils. The Seussian sculpture arching toward the sun, extending its body to the sky as if to feed itself the raindrops splashing on the upturned spoons, is a clever take on the stacked chairs.

Peirene was more than a watering hole, it was a source of inspiration for artists and poets who convened drinking in the water's creative powers. It is no wonder museums offer dining experiences for patrons; the Greek

Top left: Beverly Semmes, *Cake*, 2012. Painted ceramic. 45 x 24 x 24 inches (114.3 x 61 x 61 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center. Acquired through the Kaleta A. Doolin Acquisitions Fund for Women Artists. Image courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center

Left: Joseph Havel, *Drought*, 1990. Bronze. 100 x 75 x 42 inches (254 x 190.5 x 106.7 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center. Gift of the Barrett Collection, Dallas, Texas. Photo by A Sea of Love, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center



Jasper Johns, *Bread*, 1969. Lead, paper, and oil paint. 23 x 17 inches (58.4 x 43.2 cm). © 2024 Jasper Johns and Gemini G.E.L. / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Published by Gemini G.E.L. Photo by Tom Jenkins

muses counted the fountain of Peirene sacred, having sprung from the place where Pegasus struck the ground with his hoof. One of the Nasher Garden's water features is accompanied by Nicole Eisenman's *Sketch for a Fountain*, 2019, a five-part work featuring a supine oversized figure cast in bronze lounging poolside with what I suppose is a can of beer resting on their chest. While the exact nature of the libation may be in question, restful indulgence is in full effect.

The watering hole is a public space calling to mind the communal nosh where friends, old and new, gather to break bread. Such an experience was hosted by the 2018 Nasher Prize Laureate Theater Gates. *Afro Mingei: A Project by Theater Gates* ran from October 2022 to April 2023 and was a living installation—a pop-up cafe merging Japanese and African American foodways, music, culture, and drinks. The spirit of commensality, that is the social practice of eating together, was the heart and soul of *Afro Mingei*, which featured the artist's own ceramic serving dishes accompanied by tea service, Japanese whisky, craft cocktails, and Asian fusion faire served at communal tables. Conversations with strangers flowed effortlessly under the soulful rhythms of '70s grooves from Gates's own collection of 1,000 records spun by local DJs. *Afro Mingei* was a curated watering hole resting under the fantastic ultramarine neon aura of a blue afro headpiece mounted on the wall where commensality inspired artists and poets alike.

Dallas native Hugh Hayden's exhibition *Homecoming*, 2024–2025, at the Nasher draws upon the “American Dream,” including reflections on dining with dinner tables and chairs. Hayden's rich practice in crafting the culinary appears in his cast-iron skillet portraits referencing both African masks and family members. In the Nasher's gallery the artist has added a sound recording of him frying bacon, playing from a sousaphone welded to a copper-plated pot.

Food, art, and culture continue to collide in the most delicious and unexpected ways thriving on the diversity of a city bathed in the shadow of Pegasus's wings. It is a mythical place where the muses get hungry too, and the city's offerings of a thriving food and art scene nourish the senses and expand our appetites. As an art historian focused on food pathways and the cultural flows of both modern and contemporary art, I often wonder: What do these works of art say about our own appetites and consumption? Food is often an analog of the self, as well as a source of inspiration for many artists reminding us who we once were and who we are becoming. In the hands of artists, these works of art become more than fanciful reflections of eating and drinking, they serve as group portraits, culinary conduits, memories materialized, celebrations, and our hopes and wishes.



Nicole Eisenman, *Sketch for a Fountain (figure with can)*, 2017. Bronze. 33 x 111 x 60 inches (83.8 x 281.9 x 152.4 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center. Acquired through the Kaleta A. Doolin Acquisitions Fund for Women Artists. Photo by Adrienne Lichliter-Hines



# A Recipe from *Afro Mingei:* A Project by Theaster Gates

RECIPE BY CHEF NAT ASSAVABOONSATHIEN  
WRITTEN BY ADRIENNE LICHLITER-HINES

**I**n the fall of 2022, I joined the staff at the Nasher. On day one, my colleagues gave a quick and vague meeting update on an upcoming project they called “Afro Mingei.” The explanation I asked them for was not so easy to deliver. A bar by Theaster Gates at the Nasher? Right. Sequestered in the Corner Gallery? Got it. Vinyl records, handmade pottery, whisky, tea, and soul food? Amazing! Do we know how to run a bar? Not really. But I quickly found that sort of thing does not stop the Nasher from moving forward.

A couple months later we opened *Afro Mingei*—a temporary space of conviviality designed by Theaster Gates, bringing together two distinct places with visual philosophies he felt naturally comingled: Japan and the African American South. Upon entering the dimly lit space with a speakeasy-like clandestinity, visitors were met with prints and neon designed by Gates, a small bar stocked with Japanese whiskies, and one long, communal table built with wood salvaged from the artist’s hometown of Chicago. On the menu they found craft cocktails and small bites—karaage chicken with tomato chow chow, pork rinds, ice cream with pecan pralines and candied kombu—all served on ceramic wares made by Theaster Gates. Guests raised their glasses (and their voices) over soul and R&B, played from over 1,000 records from Gates’s personal collection, spun by local DJs. The music took pauses for regularly programmed talks, readings, and performances from local artists of color. Strangers met and new friendships were formed.

This short description doesn’t capture all the magic and meaning, for the simple space teamed with consideration, nuance, and community, but on the occasion of missing an after-work Sazerac, I wanted to share an adapted recipe for my favorite dish from that pocket of time.



Ceramic teacups by Theaster Gates for *Afro Mingei: A Project by Theaster Gates*, 2022.  
Photo by Kevin Todora, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center

Anson Mills heirloom cornmeal dumplings served in shiitake leek broth with kabocha squash, chili oil, and My Epicurean Farm greens, served in *Afro Mingei: A Project by Theaster Gates*, October 2022 to April 2023 at the Nasher Sculpture Center.  
Photo by Grant Daniels, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center





Poetry reading by Brandon Goodluev in *Afro Mingei: A Project by Theaster Gates*, 2023.  
Photo by A Sea of Love, courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center



## Heirloom Cornmeal Dumplings in Shiitake Leek Broth

Recipe for 4 servings

### INGREDIENTS

#### Dumplings:

- 1 ¼ cups Anson Mills fine white cornmeal (or an alternative brand)
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 ounces unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 2 teaspoons baking powder

#### Broth:

- 1 piece dried kombu, about 2 x 4 inches
- ¼ pound whole shiitake mushrooms, quartered
- ½ a leek, quartered with green top removed
- 3 slices daikon radish, cut 1-inch thick
- 1 ½ tablespoons white miso
- 1 tablespoon shoyu
- 1 stick cold cubed butter
- \*¼ cup canned pumpkin purée

### TO MAKE DUMPLINGS:

1. Combine all dry ingredients in a bowl.
2. Simmer milk and butter in a pot until combined, then add to bowl and let cool for 10 minutes.
3. Mix dough by hand and roll it out into a long piece, about 1-inch thick.
4. Cut dumplings by hand, so they are about 1 x 1 inch thick or smaller. Dust the surface and dough with flour if it becomes sticky.
5. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.
6. In medium-size pot, add water and 2 tablespoons of salt and bring water to boil. Once boiling, add dumplings into the pot.
7. Let dumplings cook for 3-5 minutes, or until floating at the top of the water.
8. Serve with broth.

### TO MAKE BROTH:

1. Prepare the dashi by bringing 6 cups of water to a simmer in a large pot. Add kombu and remove from stove. Let sit for 20 minutes.
2. Add shiitakes, daikon, and leeks to broth. Let simmer on low heat for 2 hours.
3. Strain broth and discard the vegetables.
4. Bring broth to a boil. Add miso, shoyu, pumpkin puree and stir. Add butter to taste.

### TO FINISH:

1. Bring water to boil on stove top, drop raw dumplings and cook for 2-3 minutes or just until they float.
2. Add cooked dumplings into simmering broth.
3. Serve and garnish as desired. Chef Nat added chili oil, micro greens, and seared corn to each dish.

\*Chef Nat's original recipe calls for kabocha confit made from Japanese pumpkins. We simplified the recipe here with canned pumpkin puree.



Nikesha Breeze, *108 Death Masks*, 2018. Ceramic cast in bronze. Wall: 8 x 10 feet (2.4 x 3 m). Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures



Freedom Monument Sculpture Park

# A Solemn History

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BY SHAUNA STUART



Simone Leigh, *Brick House*, 2019.  
Bronze. 16 x 9 feet (4.8 x 2.7 m).  
Image courtesy of Equal Justice  
Initiative/Human Pictures

After a visit to the Legacy Sites in Montgomery, Alabama, a reporter interviews Bryan Stevenson, Equal Justice Initiative's Founder and Executive Director, about the role sculpture plays in honoring the memory of enslaved people.

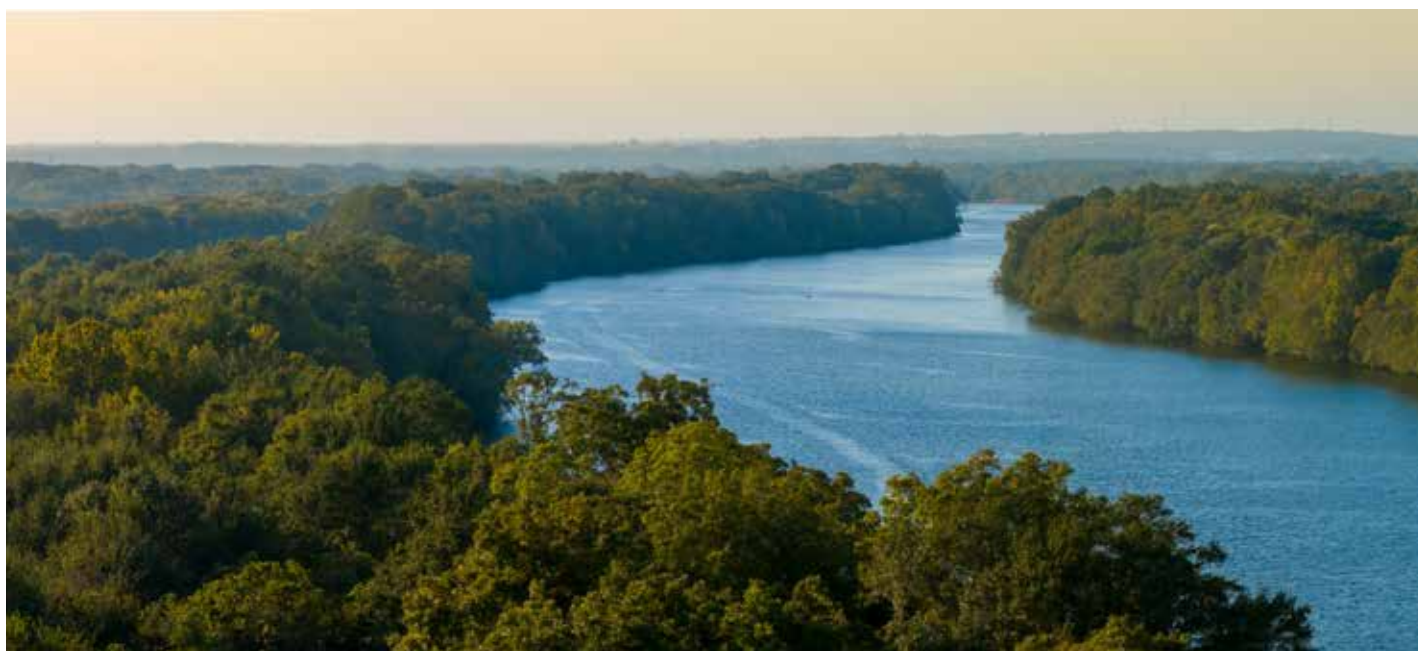
**S**imone Leigh's *Brick House* (2019), a 16-foot-tall bronze sculpture, beckons visitors toward the entrance of Freedom Monument Sculpture Park in Montgomery, Alabama.

The sculpture is a bust of a Black woman with high cheekbones, full lips, and no eyes. An afro and cornrows crown her head. The braids, adorned with cowrie shell beads, reach her shoulders. Her torso mimics a skirt and clay house.

It was the inaugural piece for Leigh's Anatomy of Architecture series—a body of work incorporating architectural forms from West Africa and the Southern United States, combined with the design of the human body. Leigh, who describes her work as “auto-ethnographic,” was inspired by the Batammaliba architecture from Benin and Togo, the *teleuk* dwellings of the Mousgoum people of Cameroon and Chad, and the restaurant Mammy's Cupboard in Natchez, Mississippi. The sculpture was first unveiled for the High Line Plinth, a site for public art in New York City. Surrounded by street signs and the sounds of traffic in a sprawling urban space, the statue was Leigh's towering homage to the beauty and resilience of Black women.

Five years later, *Brick House* resides in a new home more than a thousand miles away, removed from the chaos of urban sprawl, initiating a wooded landscape along the Alabama River. Steeped in solemn history, the river was a central passage for human trafficking during the American slave trade and by the mid-1800s Montgomery was Alabama's most prominent slave trading community. Now, a 17-acre sculpture walk sits near that same Alabama riverbank, weaving together a narrative of North American slavery with contemporary art, artifacts, recollections, and literature.

The Freedom Monument Sculpture Park is the third public space created by the Equal Justice Initiative. Founded by civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson, EJI is a nonprofit dedicated to examining and challenging the country's history of racial violence, mass incarceration, and economic inequity. In 2018 EJI opened two sites in Montgomery: The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration and The National Memorial for Peace and Justice. The Legacy Museum uses a range of media to connect the timeline of the transatlantic slave trade to the modern-day prison system, while the memorial remembers victims of lynching and racial terror. This year, in the spring of 2024, EJI added the Freedom Monument Sculpture Park with hopes to bestow honor and intimacy to the already shakingly emotional experience.



The Alabama River. Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures



Clockwise from top: Brad Spencer, *From the Ground Up* (detail), 2023. Brick. Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures

A whipping post installed in 1931 in Georgetown, Delaware, now installed at Freedom Monument Sculpture Park. Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures

The National Monument to Freedom, Montgomery, Alabama. Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures

After visiting the three sites, I spoke with Stevenson to learn more about his embrace of sculpture in this context of history and memorial. Here are five questions from that conversation.

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*The following conversation was edited for length and clarity:*

**SHAUNA STUART:** What was your goal with Freedom Monument Sculpture Park?

**BRYAN STEVENSON:** I think some visual animation is required for people to be able to absorb the tragedy of slavery. The visual record of slavery is not very complete, and it's not very honest because people didn't have an interest in characterizing or representing that experience in a way that revealed the barbarity and the cruelty. Sculpture emerged as an important way to help people navigate this difficult and challenging history with images, with art, and with beauty that depicts the brutality of slavery, but also the humanity of those enslaved.

**SS:** To me sculpture is very immersive and emotive, and you're talking about illustrating the horror of slavery—a history that doesn't have a lot of visual documentation. Is that why you chose sculpture?

**BS:** Sculptures are powerful. They are in many ways larger than life, and I think this history looms over us

in a way that's larger than the facts that we read and the details that we've heard about that institution.

We're fortunate to have some extremely talented Black sculptors that have been saying things about history and the Black experience. I think their art takes on a different meaning when it's in a narrative space focused on the Black experience. This wooded environment near a river in the shadow of tens of thousands of people who were enslaved, who were looking to the earth for relief and rejuvenation adds something to the story many of these artists are trying to tell.

**SS:** Simone Leigh's *Brick House* is the first thing you see when you enter. I noticed the park doesn't start with mourning and tragedy; the first pieces are very regal, celebrating Black excellence and beauty. EJI also includes work that honor Indigenous Americans. Grouped together, the sculptures seem to illustrate how Black people in Africa and Indigenous people built thriving civilizations before Europeans came. What was your motivation for starting with these exalting pieces instead of with adversity?

**BS:** I think it's important that we see the beauty, the boldness, the largeness of Black life before slavery, before Europeans. Simone Leigh takes the experience, the history, the nobility, the strength, the courage, the power, the capacity, the love of Black women, and represents that in something towering and plain and



Wangechi Mutu, *In Two Canoe*, 2022. Bronze. 68 x 72 x 108 inches (172.7 x 182.9 x 274.3 cm). Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures



Alison Saar, *Treesouls II*, 1994-2024. Unique bronze. Male figure: 198 x 89 x 223 inches (502.9 x 226.1 x 566.4 cm); Female figure: 193 x 89 x 259 inches (502.9 x 226.1 x 657.9 cm). Image courtesy of Equal Justice Initiative/Human Pictures

“YOU DON’T APPRECIATE THE HARM AND THE TRAGEDY OF SLAVERY IF YOU DON’T APPRECIATE THE BEAUTY AND THE DIGNITY AND THE POWER OF THOSE WHO, WHEN FREE, REPRESENTED SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT FOR THE WORLD.” —BRYAN STEVENSON

direct and honest. I think *Brick House* was a necessary way to start the experience. You don’t appreciate the harm and the tragedy of slavery if you don’t appreciate the beauty and the dignity and the power of those who, when free, represented something so important for the world. And, of course, Indigenous peoples lived on these lands, on this riverbank, for centuries before Europeans arrived. It felt essential to make sure people understood that these lands were not only tied to the history of slavery in America, but also are sacred and consequential to the peoples who occupied them.

**SS:** On that note, I want to ask specifically about the Alabama River. When you’re walking through the park, it takes a turning point right after Wangechi Mutu’s *In Two Canoe*. That sculpture is the last time you see water as a peaceful life force. Thereafter you sort of transition into the racial terrorism that happened on the water, and that happens right when you have the clearest view of the river. Was that intentional?

**BS:** Very much, very much. I think that the river is beautiful. The river has life. The river sustained Indigenous cultures for centuries, and we need to acknowledge that. But the river also was a portal of terror and violence. It was a place of bondage and cruelty where horrible things happened to enslaved Black people. Seeing the river as a place of beauty and sustenance, but also of trauma and terror, is important.

You’re absolutely right that when you get past Wangechi’s sculpture, the river takes on a different aspect. Your relationship to it shifts, and that is the relationship that you carry as you walk past the holding pens and the whipping posts and the labor represented by the cotton field. It then shifts again toward the end where we begin to encounter the music, the coping, the resistance, the resilience of Black communities. So, yes, the river is a really central part of the experience.

**SS:** Can you talk about that transition a little bit, because you have words from Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, and then it transitions into works of resistance and rebellion.

**BS:** I think it’s important that we understand the violence that has shaped the Black experience—from the brutality and the lashings and the beatings and sexual violence that characterize slavery, to the era of lynching that followed slavery into the 20th century. We continue to

struggle against that violence; that is a legacy of slavery. It’s important to represent that, and we have several pieces that do it brilliantly. Alison Saar’s *Treesouls II* speaks to an eternal resistance to oppression and even death, with figures that rise from the ground, rooted to and growing from the soil. Daniel Popper’s torn bodies and Kehinde Wiley’s slumped, equestrian figure also dramatize the legacy of the violence through a lens that values perseverance.

The centerpiece of the park is our National Monument to Freedom where we celebrate those who were enslaved and their capacity to love in the midst of agony—their willingness to give life, to create life, despite the brutality of their day-to-day existence. That’s the remarkable, and I think the most significant, aspect of the history of slavery in America, and to appreciate that we have to be fully conscious of the death and the violence, the despair, the agony, the pain and suffering. Collectively the sculptures, and the entire experience of the three sites, allow you to appreciate how extraordinary it was that this community of people found a way to carry on, to create life, to love, and to share a future and a hope for generations to come.

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Before reaching the National Monument to Freedom, the path brings you to an iteration of the sculpture *108 Death Masks* by Nikesha Breeze. Breeze’s original work is a nod to the wax funeral masks created for deceased leaders and luminaries in Europe during the 1800s.

This version of her installation, commissioned for EJI, features 80 feet of bronze cast faces. Each is molded from clay and left to weather and crack before casting. The line of worn visages evokes the Middle Passage and the African people who were shackled and placed in ships like cargo—an association heightened by the fact that Breeze made many of the masks in Africa before they were symbolically (and practically) shipped to the United States.

Along the park’s final stretch, visitors reach the National Monument to Freedom, a 43 x 155-foot wall inscribed with 122,000 names chosen by newly emancipated Black people in the 1800s who were previously denied the honor of a surname. The sculpture wall, in the form of an open book, honors nearly five million formerly enslaved Black people and their tens of millions of descendants. It’s a solemn, yet striking way to honor the dead and a place for their spirits to rest with dignity.





# Weaving the Borderlands

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BY SARITA WESTRUP

**F**ounded in 1929 by weaving artist Lucy Morgan, Penland School of Craft—nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina—is devoted to traditional craft and its contemporary manifestations. It’s an education center, a retreat, a community. Though I’ve been involved with the school in different capacities over the years, today I am an artist in residence. From spring to winter I am here to sculpt and weave from rattan, pulling from the long lineage of basketry.

Rooted in weaving techniques and bricolage, my basketry works are inspired by where I was born and raised: the Rio Grande Valley on the Texas-Mexico border. Over the past few years, I’ve been constructing sculptures and installations that reimagine the harsh, manufactured borderline into meandering tunnels, archways, and portals, translating my intangible border experience into abstract forms, textures, and transparent layers. The geographic distance between the South Texas coastal plains and the Blue Ridge Mountains deepens my contemplation of place. Here, in the Appalachians, the cool wet air and cushy grass feel a world apart from the scrappy mesquite trees and prickly dry earth of my sweet home. At night I feel unsettled by the green trees and soft mountains obscuring the vastness of the sky.

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Sarita Westrup, *Klein’s Bottle Brush*, 2023. Reed, mortar, paint, cochineal ink, ixtle. 21 x 21 x 8 1/2 inches (53.3 x 53.3 x 21.6 cm). Photo by Kevin Todora, courtesy of the artist

Basketry is an ancient technology created out of a need to construct dwellings and functional containers. Past makers intuitively constructed what was required to survive using natural materials that were readily available in the landscape they inhabited. Traditional baskets hold data about land, place, and invaluable cultural context in regard to form and design. But baskets can be broader than that. They are sculpture, architecture, and design. Artists using basketry today bring ingenuity to their practice while experimenting with materials, shapes, and meaning, connecting to history through textile structures and processes.

Twined basket structure reminds me of the grid—the border wall. I think about how air can pass through the open cells of a basket, the way I wish people could freely move and migrate from one country to the other. Baskets are a domestic craft referencing the human body, mind, and spirit

while also expressing ideas of home, tenderness, and carrying. They are of the past, but their open space holds room for future potential.

In recent works, I wonder: If the Texas-Mexico border was a line that cannot be crossed, what if you took that line and flexed it into an infinity sign where infinite amounts of migration and movement were permitted? My interest in infinite forms led me to the concept of the Klein bottle. It's a form that exists in the fourth dimension, with a non-orientable surface. If traveled upon, it could be followed back to the point of origin and, most importantly, it has no boundary. In my sculptures, the agave fibers attached to the form insinuate that it's meant for sweeping. If the borderline was a line drawn in the sand, I wish to sweep it away. It's a very mathematical form and for me fits as a poignant symbol for the borderlands and my wish for it to function without boundaries.

Similarly, a Möbius strip is a surface that can be formed by attaching the ends of a strip of flat material with a half-twist. I am not a math-y person but what I love about a Möbius strip is it is a non-orientable surface and if you try to cut it into thirds lengthwise, it produces two linked strips. The links cannot be separated. This is a beautiful and poetic symbol for the borderlands. The land between the United States and Mexico cannot truly be divided.

I chose to translate these mathematical forms into basketry because of their relationship to time, linkage, movement, and lack of boundary. The results are clearly handwoven and appear both ancient and contemporary, embracing imperfection, color, and warmth. They are functionless yet hold my translation of tenderness and home, carrying my “of the border” perspective inside.

I think of my sculptures as wishes for the future of the borderlands—poems written for and spoken to the region. Using ancient techniques and rhythms, the woven sculptures are metaphors for aspirational movement shared by one land divided only by name, fence, and law.



Left: Detail of Westrup's studio, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist

Opposite, clockwise from top, all images courtesy of Sarita Westrup: Western North Carolina, 2024

Details of Westrup's Penland studio, featuring the artist

Bottom right: An image taken near Westrup's home in Texas's Rio Grande Valley



# Wheat

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BY JANNINE HORSFORD

It seems I have vaulted the distances  
for this bread: thing of wholeness. My hunger  
recites an ode to the unbroken kernel.  
In this landscape, I am a flung-far discomfort.  
I am riven and splintered, each day  
filled with my thinness.  
But this pilfered bread is warm and sweet.  
It is not watered down. Is not a lie rash and acrid  
with the molasses put to dupe you  
in some of the whole wheat bread I bought  
on the island.  
(As if the bakers thought the buyers as thick  
and as viscous.)  
This British bread. In my palm, the full and flaxen slice  
is moist and limber. I push the slice top to toe  
and it bends.  
On my tongue I catch the taste of brown sugar  
and behind it, the fullness of grain.  
Late nights, the bread calls from the kitchen:  
its voice lush and gorgeous, calling to my hunger,  
which is muscular and full of hair.  
Until here I am commanded to slink from my bed  
nipples rigid, fingers reaching into the plastic bag  
for the richness that is not mine.

Jessica Hilvitz, *Loafs #1 and #2*, 2024. Digital photo of two SX-70 Polaroids,  
courtesy of the artist



