Honor Thy Motha

by

KAYLA HALL

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Dear Colleagues,

As Major Professor and Thesis Committee Chair for Kayla Hall, I am pleased to share that the committee has awarded her the honor of graduating with distinction.

Kayla's efforts in the MFA program have been defined by an exceptional level of rigor, sustained hard work, and a willingness to take meaningful risks in her practice. Her engagement with cross- and interdisciplinary research has enriched both her studio work and academic inquiry, resulting in a body of work that is ambitious, thoughtful, and highly resolved.

Across the duration of her studies, Kayla has demonstrated remarkable growth. Both her studio practice and scholarly research have yielded significant gains, reflecting a deep commitment to experimentation, critical thinking, and the development of a distinct artistic voice.

It is with great confidence that I affirm her successful completion of the MFA examination and commend her achievements.

Sincerely,

Jon Swindler
Professor of Art

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Major Professor:	Jon Swinder
Committee:	Dr. Barbara McCaskill
	Lindsey Reynolds
	Melissa Harshman
	Sha'Mira Covington

acknowledgments

To all the women in my life: blood, friend, academic, artistic, Louisianian, and ally relations, thank you! Your presence, experiences, words, and engagement together has profoundly informed my work and praxis efflorescently. I hold you all tenderly alongside my creative foremothers, cultural, and contemporary scholars whose legacies made space for mine.

Immense gratitude to Dr. Barbara McCaskill and my major professor Jon Swindler, whose immense mentorship during these past 3 years has shaped my time here in lasting ways. Special thanks to my remaining committee members: Lindsey Reynolds, Sha'Mira Covington, and Melissa Harshman for their time, thoughtfulness, and commitment in my research.

To my lover, Adrian Randle, thank you for your unwavering patience, kisses as well as the many hours of problem solving in the woodshop with your guidance.

Thank you to the San Antonio Ethnic Art Society for your generous support that made the realization of this body of work possible

Lastly to my mother, my first teacher and forever muse, this is my offering to you. Thank you mama.

What do Black daughters inherit from their mothers and grandmothers?

Survival strategies, vigilance, protection, creative spirit, unfinished dreams, cultural traditions, and historical memory. This thesis dwells in that inheritance, asking how it shapes Black girlhood and womanhood, and how it might be reimagined into new possibilities. Grounded in Black feminist thought and womanist praxis, this interdisciplinary body draws from my own matrilineal history through archival inquiry, material experimentation, and person writing. It attends to the embodied, sacred ways knowledge is carried down through domestic spaces, storytelling, cultural rituals, and everyday acts of creation across generations. These gestures form living counter-archives centering Black women's interior lives, creativity, and spirit.

The project unfolds across printmedia, poetry, and sculptural installation. Through reconstructed objects, woven textiles, handmade paper, and collaged archival imagery, these materials construct visual environments that hold the layered nuances of Black womanhood. These materials operate simultaneously as aesthetic forms, familial fragments, and ritual gestures, positioning artistic practice as a method of research ancestral preservation, and communal testimony. Honor Thy Motha ultimately functions as a space of reverence and return. It honors the legacies of what Southern Black women have imagined, nurtured, and sustained beyond the demands of survival while asking how Black daughters and femmes might carry these histories forward and insert themselves into freer futures.

List of Works

Our Grandmother's Garden (Triptych)

Mother and Child (Central Panel)
Mama's Rightful Flowers (Left Side Panel)
Daughter Profile (Right Side Panel)

Printmedia (monoprint, relief, screenprint, plate lithography) sculptural installation with handmade paper, woven, found, and constructed materials

Seat to My Sistas
Pulp pigmented woven wicker peacock chair with letterpress, handmade paper, and textile elements

Take a Seat Sweet Sadie
Letterpress print

Mama Mama
Screenprint, monoprint, letterpress, and handmade denim paper

Ms. Jerydine Taylor, Master Sweetgrass Artisan
Lithograph on handmade hemp paper

womanism

1. “From womanish. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” Ans. “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.”

4. "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender"

Coined from Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens

positionality on terminology

In this thesis, I use “Black women,” “Black girls,” and “Black femmes” as overlapping but distinct positionalities rather than fixed categories. “Woman” and “girl” refer to socially and historically assigned positions. “Femme” is used to hold queer and gender-expansive expressions of femininity that may or may not align with womanhood, but that are shaped by similar structures of visibility, care, labor, and constraint. Across these terms, I am less interested in containment than in how Black life moves through, against, and beyond imposed definitions of intersectional gendered and racialized being.

how it all came to be
underpinning initial roots

...they looked at us like violets; like violet teas they drank us. We said here we are. They said, you are still alive. We said, yes, yes we we are still alive. How lemon, they said, how blue like fortune.

- **Dionne Brand, Verso 5**

I entered graduate school with one phrase lodged gently but firmly in my spirit: ubuntu, an African philosophy translating to “I am because you are” or “I am because we are.” My time here has clarified what it truly means to make work from an ethic of relation: to be an artist accountable to the people and histories that formed me and our everyday way of being. Of course, this raised a complicated set of questions: What does community practice look like in MY artistic praxis? How does this function differently across mediums I engage with? Who is my audience? What is the purpose of my work? These were not simply academic questions, they were existential ones, and while I imagine I may spend my entire career navigating them, graduate school was the first prolonged space where I learned to sit inside these questions with intention.

My thesis is informed by scholarship, lived experience, and my sustained engagement with Black women, Black girls, creative beings, lovers, admirers, and the many who fall somewhere in-between. The work began not as an academic pursuit but as a quiet reverence, a tender, almost obsessive affection that lived just beneath the surface of my everyday life. It is only in retrospect a reverence that has been accumulating for years, waiting for the moment it would overflow. What follows is a detailed account of my thesis formation alongside larger questions that emerged and have been explored during my graduate study.

in memory of bonnie

That overflow came suddenly during my first year of graduate school, when I encountered the story of Dr. Antoinette Candia-Bailey affectionately known as “Bonnie”, an esteemed administrator at Lincoln University who died by taking her own life in January 2024 after allegations of severe workplace harassment and bullying. I never met Bonnie. We shared no genealogy or proximity beyond being both Black and women and operating inside the world of academia. Yet I felt for her deeply as I navigated my first year living out of state for the first time at the ripe age of 23. In Bonnie, I saw myself. I saw my undergraduate English professor, the only Black woman professor I had in four years as she also navigated a climatic workplace environment. I saw my mother and the circle of professional Black women I grew up watching in education—Ms. Shaw, Ms. Hinton, Ms. Capote, Ms. Delores, women I have witnessed hold their breath, hold their tongues, hold everything together under the weight of workplace stress against policies, administrators, parents, and other external pressures. I knew Bonnie because I know so many like her. The only difference was that she, despite her extensive scholarship on Black women navigating administrative labor, could not survive its brutality. On March 18, 2024, I drafted an email to the pastor who officiated her funeral—a letter of condolence, mourning, and recognition. It remains unsent in my drafts. But the impulse to write it (even an unsent e-letter), to testify, to honor her, and her lasting impact, to name later unknowingly became the foundation of this thesis.

In her memory, I ask that you say her name with me here:

Dr. Antoinette Candia Bonnie Bailey

Antoniette Candia Bonnie Bailey

Antoniette Candia Bonnie

Bonnie

Ashe

My interest in Bonnie’s experience and the forces that drove her to her final moments was coupled by online exposure to the ongoing genocide in Palestine, compelling me to confront humanity itself as a theoretical and ethical question:

What makes a person human?

What does being "human" mean?

How does humane-ness

and humanness

emerge or

Collapse

in a world where genocide unfolds across digital timelines in present tense,

where literal extermination

Becomes

hypervisible,

consumable,

and seemingly survival for/ as distant observers?

What happens to humanity when violence is not only enacted

but endlessly

circulated,

Watched,

and absorbed?

What conditions erode our sense of shared humanity?

I began to reflect on how the absence and erosion of human(e)-ness operates not only at the scale of war and state violence, but reflecting back to Bonnie, within institutions, workplaces, and everyday interpersonal relations. I wondered how those same forces that permit genocide to persist might also manifest in subtle-er, more intimate forms of brutality: unamed violences, accumulative pressures, and things we cannot fully articulate but is constantly felt and gathered until….

a person reaches a breaking point

The things that drove a woman to leave this world by her own hands as her final act of release…the things that drive drones to exterminate an entire group of people, bullets ricocheting through the bodies of children barely old enough to walk, graduate, to experience their first crush, and live into old age. Their blood now buried beneath rubble that was a home not long ago. What logic determines a human life taken and what that taking does to both the person holding the weapon and us as we watch them take fire? What logic determines whose life is considered liveable, grievable, or disposable? At what point does a person stop being a human or were we ever "human" to begin with? A human-being can be devoid of humaneness even while possessing humanness.

What breaks a human? What preserves/ sustains one?

Where does care reside?

(in the in-between)

when the world we've built,

curated, and maintained

fails us?

However, wrestling with these questions became alarmingly overwhelming. It's enough to drive one to self-destruct. To survive them and make sense of it all, I had to scale backward and inward. This led me toward the interiority of kinship, care, and healing, which culminated in *WOMBIKIN*- my first attempt to compound associations, words, and meanings. Beginning with the word humanity, wombikin became outcome. The root word womb, that from which all life emerges, however presented to conundrum. In the case of Blackness. The womb is historically entangled with violence. Under slavery, the doctrine of partus sequitur ventrem, translated to "that which is born follows the womb", determined that the legal status of the enslaved child followed that of the mother, effectively transforming the Black womb into a site of inherited bondage. Before birth, classification had already been imposed: the womb itself was marked as a site through which property reproduced itself. What should signify the origin of life/human-being/instead became a mechanism for the reproduction of non-being.

This paradox of non/being, non/place, non/human, un/becoming/inbetweeness as Blackness was found through my engagement with Christina Sharpe's concept of "the wake". Within *In the Wake*, Sharpe describes the wake as contemporary Black life remaining structured by the aftermath of slavery. These ongoing conditions produced by slavery, is the "orthography of the wake", a set of structures she metaphorizes as the ship, the hold, the weather, and the wake, through which Black life continues to be lived in proximity to death.

My ancestors were the only group of people generationally relegated to a sub-human class for centuries, economically, physically, sexually and psychologically exploited, commodified, and mutilated, yet insisted on surviving. That insistence feels like the making of spirit. African Americans/ myself/descendants of the enslaved, become carriers of trauma and containers of violence and love simultaneously. From there I began to wonder, as a people existing with this traumatic residual, or as Sharpe calls it "living in the wake", where does that spirit of living derive and how is it sustained? or proposed differently how did we keep our humane-ness amidst occupying constant, pervasive violence? Black existence remains shaped by these historical logics even in the present. Yet Sharpe also identifies forms of artistic and intellectual practice that emerge within these conditions. She calls this wake work: practices of care, witnessing, and creative production that make life possible despite the persistence of violence. (Sharpe 18, 2016) In this in-between, artists and writers such as M. NourbeSe Philip, whose work *Zong!* fragments the archive to speak of the unspeakable violence of the slave ship, demonstrating how new languages must sometimes emerge when existing ones fail. By confronting the violence of the colonial archive, language stutters, scatters, and reassembles.

Within this context, Black expression often appears what Sharpe calls agrammatical, existing outside the structures that traditionally produce meaning. Yet this agrammatical quality also opens a space for imagination and new forms of articulation. Scholars such as Keguro Macharia describe this as the emergence of "we formations," new relational modes through which Black life continues to imagine itself otherwise. My own work enters this space through writing and collage. Letterpress reconstructed texts and poems became the embodied epistemology and narrative ground of my thesis. The words arrived well before the visual works did. The womb became the first conceptual seed in my work, not only marking a shift in my writing style and practice, but also a deeper introspection of women, specifically Black women, their labor, their knowledge, and their cultural continuities.

As Saidiya Hartman suggests, an autobiographical example can function as a method for examining broader historical and social processes. Personal narratives become a window of entry through which larger structures of power, violence, and survival become visible. In this work, Bonnie serves as the first opening. Her story initiated reflections that led me toward WOMBIKIN and a broader investigation of personhood, kinship, and humanity: its fragmentation, its in-betweenness, and alternative epistemology. Through this lens, the work that follows draws on artistic and writing practice, literary, cultural, and historical analysis alongside material experimentation grounded predominantly in Black femme/ womanist epistemology. Together these approaches explore how Black women continue to produce life, knowledge, and possibility within the wake of historical violence. Perhaps through this work and their lives, it is my hope this offers a lens of living in a constant stage of precariousness/ chaos while holding on to our humanity.

round kitchen table

In alignment with womanism's communitarianism ethos, my artistic praxis understands social wellbeing as a collective, proactive effort. Artists -educators such as Margaret Burroughs, Augusta Savage, and Dr. Samella Lewis, among many others, are my leading models for their holistic approach and contributions to art, education, activism, and institution building.

My time as a graduate chair in the Black Artists Alliance (BAA), Printmaking Student Association (PSA) and other supplemental community initiatives existed in a desire for points of connection of fostering opportunities and relational exchange that did not readily exist, but was felt as needed. Entering graduate school that began with BAA Sits with Diane, a private informal celebratory farewell of Diane Edison's retirement of 30 years from the Dodd, as the only Black female faculty member. It was a moment of imparting wisdom, hearing stories, and listening to Diane and Marie Cochran's navigation as Black female artists in the South. Within this project, community participation became part of the work itself. There are many more beautiful instances I've had the pleasure of fostering and contributing towards that aren't listed, but it is my hope that all those moments offered something deeper and further through a gathering of people, stories, histories, and vested passions.

Together these intellectual foremothers make up my kitchen table, however there are many unnamed seats that hold equal weight in the shaping of this body, literary, artistic, everyday, and familial that are introduced elsewhere throughout this body. Together they inform my methodology and artistic praxis for uncovering new languages and modes to realize the worlds and interior experiences of Black femmes and the broader non/human world that dominant vocabularies have long failed to hold.

She is the voice of the People; She is the People."
—Renita Weems on the role of the Black woman artist

tending to my grandmother's garden

Creative Inheritance and Domestic Archives

"She is involved in work her soul must have."
Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (241)

This section turns inward, attending to the creative lives of our mothers and grandmothers as depositories of knowledge, artistry, and survival. Rooted in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker, it considers how Black women, historically denied formal opportunities to produce art within institutional spaces, sustained rich creative practices through everyday acts of making, tending, and living. Drawing from family memory and domestic interiors, the central panel of the triptych, Mother and Child is explored further in this section through process, material, and architecture.

Like the gardens Walker describes, the home becomes a place where stories, aesthetics, and values are cultivated across generations. The details of this metaphor are expanded in the triptych, visualizing matrilinean inheritance as something grown, tendered, and continuously reworked across time. Inspiring artists in this section include Faith Ringgold's use of narrative quilt and her artistic collaborations with her mother, Leticia Huckaby's altarpiece centering her grandmother in Southern Louisiana history, and my great grandmother, Mama Theresa. Their engagements with memory, everyday material, and ancestral presence alongside the oral histories of my grandmother situates kin as archive, the inherent embedd-ness of creative spirit.

Snippets of Mama Theresa told by Grandma and Mama

She walked the same path to church every Sunday
She always stopped by her neighbor's and they'd walk the road together together
But one day her neighbor was sick, so she had to take the path alone
She could feel something, someone walking with her
She put her umbrella behind her
As she rounded the corner and continued down the path
she could feel a presence
she turned and opened the umbrella covering her back
She turned down the church lane
the footsteps stopped and she believed it was an angel protecting her
Delivering her to the church safely
There was no rain that day.

When grandma smells gardenia's she thinks of aunty tin tin
She smelled it during her passing.

She could sew her behind off-quilting, crocheting, you name it.

Crossing - Grandma's Random Wisdom

This is not our world, yet
we were brought here
born into it/ and we shall die
leaving from it.

We are merely
passing
through
and how you choose to pass is your own crossing.

my inheritance of a creative spirit

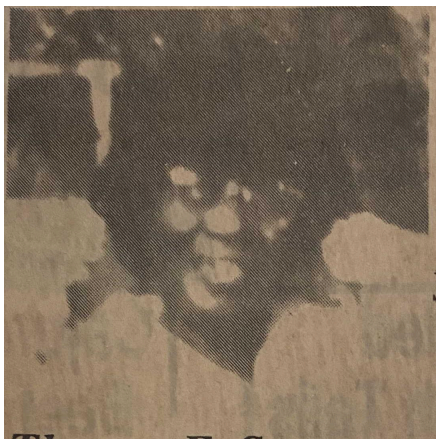
Before I even knew what my thesis would evolve to, my reading of Alice Walker's In Search of Our Mother's Garden seemed to answer everything I was looking for. How did my mother and my mother's mother sustain and channel their own creative power in a world that allowed otherwise. Women, particularly black women, exist in a constant state of precarious-ness. We are expected to bear it all and endure it all without complaint and struggle. Although there's a certain strength and beauty I respect to this paradox, I was less interested in glorifying or admiring our perseverance. I was more interested in Black women's sacred solitude, and at our essence-our spirit. What feeds it, keeps it alive, nourished, and blooming? Although they did not name themselves as such and would not even know, I was seeking to understand how Black women from the past were artists and creators. "...being an artist is still a daily part of her life. This ability to hold on in even very simple ways is work black women have done for a long time." (Walker 242)

I inherited my mother's creative spirit.

"*And so our grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed flowers they themselves never hoped to see or live like a sealed letter they could not read.*" *(Walker 240).*

My mother was the second born of 6 in the early-mid 70s (1975). My grandparents fostered a climatic home with its high highs and low lows. As my mother navigated her volatile adolescence she clung to creativity. My mother will tell you the many things she could've been: a painter, a seamstress, but I always believed she would've been a renowned musician. Even now, I recall high school photos of her as first chair with her clarinet in hand or low-res snapshots of her in marching band attire on a pavement road. I recall in elementary school, her passing down 1 of 2 clarinets to me and thumbing through old sheet music marked 1st Clarinet with notes towering well above the staff line. Years later being removed from practice, her hands still falling in line with the key pads and written notes to teach her daughter an old forgotten passion. I remember daydreaming about what if she majored in music, how different her life would be if she'd gone on to be a professional musician. She occasionally returns to the instrument however, outside of my adolescence in the band, she has never played consistently beyond high school. However, most of my mother's return to her creativity has always been in relation to me, ironically my mother was also the first artist I studied.

My mother could've been that renowned clarinet-ist but as a college student in the 90s, despite the boom in black artistry across all sectors: music, media, literature, she was also first generation, and for that reason, teaching became the practical option. Art was a high



school hobby that was not worth the investment of scholarship and tuition college dollars. Like Saar mentions in a 2016 Frieze essay, “Fine art was for white people who came from a different class, one in which art could be a vocation. If you were Black , you had to find a job, some stability, in an unstable world.” This cultural ideology rang true even as I spent my high school years battling on the decision of pursuing a creative major versus a “stable one” before taking the plunge and spending subsequent years defending that decision since. However, my choice to major in art was not selfish, but because I was doing what my mother, grandmother, and great grandmother couldn't.

Where did my mom’s creative spirit originate?
My great grandmother: Theresa Francisco, or as I like to call her Mama Theresa. (Image above) Born in 1914 and passed away in 1991, 10 years before I entered the world, my mother attributes our creative gifts to her. My mother recalls her as a free-hearted woman, always giving and could sew anything she desired from scratch simply dreaming it up. She also quilted, crocheted, and gardened; hydrangeas were her favorite flower.

I think back to my mother’s excitement 3 years ago as she walked through the halls of the Dodd during Accepted Student’s Day giddy as a child entranced by the wonders of these facilities. I remember vowing to learn weaving because it seemed like something I needed to learn for her sake if not my own. These stories, these experiences, this creative spark that I exude is not my own, but also my mother’s and my mother’s mother. When you look in the archives Mama Theresa’s occupation is “keeping house.” Classified as a negro, female, wife, employed. These are the records of her life. But it doesn’t speak to her as a person.

What occupied her?

I’m no speaking to the 10 children she nursed and the unbiological ones she did, nor the house she kept at home and at work…what is the thing that kept her sane…

that was unequivocally hers in *that world* during *that time*

when her movements and existence was relegated under Jim Crow.

What was the “thing” that kept (her)self?

She, her mother, and those before were the washerwomen, the seamstresses, the planters: seen, not heard. Oftentimes when people ask me where I'm from, I'll state Louisiana. They'll assume I mean New Orleans, I say Baton Rouge. Sometimes they'll guess correctly and say "O the capital", others will directly ask "where it is that" or (my least favorite) its proximity to New Orleans, but beyond that the conversation quickly flatlines and shifts elsewhere. Baton Rouge is forever and always the thing that is washed over, an "ordinary" place that is inherently part of me and makes me who I am, but feels insignificant in relation to something else. We may not have all the glitz, glamour, and allure as our sister city, but we have grit. The everyday people of Baton Rouge also have stories and history. We aren't worth glossing over, if you stop for a moment and really see, you'll understand the consecration running through these roots. These overlooked places possess overlooked genius.

In Search of Our Mother's Gardens, Walker writes of Black women whose creativity was stifled under the weight of racism and misogyny, and yet who continued to make beauty anyway through gardens, quilts, stories, and care. Their gardens were not hobbies; they were acts of resistance, proof of presence, worlds carved from nothing. Alice Walker and Renita Weems from Home Girls both ask: Who records Black women's stories? Who is allowed to be an artist? What counts as art when the maker herself is denied leisure, literacy, and bodily autonomy? These questions reverberate through my research and methods of making.

collage as wake work

Wake work is defined as a mode of inhabiting and rupturing dominant epistemes with our known lived and un/imaginable lives.

Reassembly though collage and layering is a staple of my process, allowing me to bring together fragments of disparate histories, images, and texts conflated into a single composition. Within my artistic practice, reassembly becomes a form of intergenerational dialogue. Materials are layered, cut away, recombined, and repositioned in ways that mirror how ways of knowing are transmitted: fragmentary, partially remembered, reinterpreted, instinctive, and added on with new contexts. Collage also serves as a low stakes method of making of moving through mental blocks where I'm able to easily and quickly experiment, redact, and add material, allowing new relationships in composition to unfold from the manipulation of visibility, absence, and subversion of media. Through these layered compositions I think about time as a spatial structure. As layers recede and advance, it marks generational distance alongside presence and variable outcomes of possibility.

From there I began to imagine how fragments of the past could be reorganized to construct a future for my mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and myself. I produced about 5-6 variations that tested how information could be moved, replaced, folded, and distorted without the pressure of permanence and commitment that the lithography stone had failed me. As the compositional variations evolved, certain visual and material priorities readily surfaced that were essential to the world I was constructing: wood paneling reminiscent of grandma's living room, chairs, couches and outside elements I could not yet signify. Yet I instinctively felt an unleashing. Curtains. Picture frames, candleholders, armchairs overlapping with shrubbery and garden paths began to suggest this interplay of interior and natural environments as extensions of one another. As I collaged, not only did I lose track of real time as I contemplated speculative, but I explored spatial relations between images and figures as well as how time could operate spatially through layers. Images that recede back in the composition represented deeper generational presence, while layers in the forefront signaled futurity. The garden at the foremost was essential as I want to invite the viewer's impulse to reach out and touch. These aspirations for sensory proximity mirrored the project's larger foundations of connection.

In this fashion I began to think about how to render the future of Black women that feels materially possible. But my great grandmother's census record proposed a dilemma. Within this structure, the archival fragment of my great-grandmother's census record introduces a different visual language. Bureaucratic text interrupts the intimate environment of the composition, inserting the state's vocabulary of classification into a space otherwise shaped by memory and imagination. Where this document appears within the layers determines how it functions: as historical constraint, structural background, or a pressure that continues to shape the present. This method of assembling fragments recalls Sharpe's "wake work". Sharpe argues that Black life often appears scattered within the historical archives, visible only through fragments produced by systems that documented Black people primarily as labor, property, or social problems. However, I wasn't trying to resolve that, instead I wanted to acknowledge and hold that tension as wake work suggests through new ways of seeing and inhabiting the fragments that remain. College, in this respect, was not meant to resolve. Instead I wanted to gather a fragment that allowed my great grandmother to appear in the reimagined environment beside my grandmother, mother, and I in an attentive manner. There were other photos I could've chosen, but a census record felt right reflected how Black women's lives so often remained partially obscured in historical documentation.

The final layer introduces the garden. This future space is populated by flowers symbolic of these familial women surrounded by a woven border. Positioned closest to the viewer and the outlying borders, the garden represents a speculative future where the women of my lineage can exist without constant vigilance demanded by historical conditions of survival.

Together these layers are a space where archival scraps become heirlooms, scattered and discarded materials of the past are recycled and embedded into a site of rest, imagination, and flourishing. Through collage the work performs what Sharpe calls an insistence on Black life. It gathers what remains disparate and rearranges it into a world where my matrilineal family aren't defined by the limitations of the archive, but in the wholly-ness of their interiority.

What becomes possible when Black women and girls are allowed softness, interiority, and futurity?

Walker's articulation of womanism is deeply rooted in metaphors of gardens and creative self-definition. In *The Color Purple*, the garden becomes a place where Celie experiences selfhood beyond patriarchal control. Walker describes womanism as "loving music…dance…gardens…roundness," invoking a philosophy of sensual fullness. From this lens, tending a garden becomes a literal and symbolic labor where beauty is cultivated for oneself rather than imposed service for others. If we draw on Walker's womanist philosophy to examine the garden as a site of interior sovereignty, historically Black women have tended to many spaces that weren't their/our own. The quiet politics of tending raises critical questions: What happens when care is redirected. Watering one's own flowers becomes an act of restoration, refusal of depletion, and a labor of love out of necessity.

Walker's work also expands the concept of mothering. In the novel, women frequently mother children who aren't biologically their own. Mothering becomes a network of care rooted in mutual aid, emotional, spiritual support, shared survival, and collective healing. These relationships among women allow Walker's characters to imagine lives beyond motherly sacrifice. They become entrepreneurs, singers, gardeners, friends, and sisters, pursuing independence and creativity outside the roles and perceptions historically assigned to them. As Celie declares in the climatic Thanksgiving dinner, "It's time for me to get away from you into creation." In doing so, Walker's women transcend above what Zora Neale Hurston once described as the expectation that Black women be "the mules of the world." The symbolism of the garden crystallizes in the novel's title itself. Shug Avery teaches Celie that the divine is not distant but present in the beauty of everyday life, suggesting that failing to notice "the color purple in a field" of flowers is a form of disrespect to God.

Womanist networks of care are not only literary concepts but lived experiences. I think of my own mother driving eight hours from Louisiana simply to "lay eyes on me." This act of care gestures to the quiet vigilance of love captured in Shug Avery's song, 'Miss Celie's Blues' "*Sister, you've been on my mind… we're two of a kind. I'm keeping my eye on you.*" This form of attentive care mirrors the womanist ethic Walker describes: an ongoing practice of watching, nurturing, and tending one another's well-being. Within my work, the garden becomes a visual translation of these ideas. It imagines a space where my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother can exist without constant vigilance, both inside and beyond the domestic sphere. Viewers are often compelled to reach toward the surface, drawn by the lush textures and layered materials. That impulse to touch reflects the garden's symbolic function: a place where Black womanhood is abundant rather than constrained. In my garden, Southern flowers found in my mothers, grandmother's, and great grandmother's gardens are abound: hardy amaryllis, hydrangeas, orchids, azaleas, petunias, morning glories, petunias, magnolias, each containing their own significance in relation to the women and myself depicted.

When we look back in comparison to Western art history, gardens have not always represented freedom. Renaissance and early modern painters often framed women within controlled natural environments. Example works such as Botticelli's Primavera or Raphasel's Madonna of a Meadow showcase gardens that symbolize fertility, purity, and divine harmony. Jan van Eyck's Madonna in the Garden places Mary within a walled enclosure, the hortus conclusus, where the garden functions as a metaphor for virginity and containment. 19th century European paintings continued this tradition in subtler ways. Impressionist Claude Monet's Woman with a Parasol or Pierre-Auguste Renoir's Woman with a Parasol and Small Child situate women within airy landscapes that soften realities. The garden becomes a stage for feminist, leisure, and contemplation, often transforming these women into atmospheric presences rather than active agents. Even while female artists such as Berth Morisot depicted women in gardens, the space remained more intimate and observational than overtly political. Across these traditions, the garden often functioned as a symbolic enclosure. Women appear within nature as objects of beauty, purity, fertility, or transience. Flowers signaling virtue, sexual awakening, or desirability.

My reinterpretation seeks to shift the relationship between women and the garden. Rather than merely depicting women as flowers to be admired, I also imagine them as gardeners of their own interior worlds. The garden isn't an ornamental backdrop, it's a living, sprawling ecosystem shaped by creative lineage, personal memory, and active engagement. Layered printed flowers derived from my foremothers abound, transforming the landscape itself into an archive of heritage. My garden extends outward from my grandmother's kitchen in dense layers of texture and color into the foreground, its overgrowing vegetation and abundance signals a release, or a better work, an unleashing. Orgasmic, thinking back to desexualized Mammy. In this way, the garden becomes both a healing space and a counter-image to earlier representations of Black motherhood that emphasized protection and vigilance. Where Elizabeth Catlett's maternal figures often shield their children from external threat, my garden imagines a future in which that vigilance can soften into play, creativity, and rest, aligning with Saar's screenprint. We see these examples across Mickalene's work such as Landscape with Camouflage (2012). Faith Ringgold likewise often depicts Black women occupying and shaping landscapes collectively. In works like *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* (1991), women gather outdoors not as decorative figures but as makers and caretakers of space. The act of quilting parallels cultivation. Fabric, labor, and storytelling become forms of tending. Ultimately, the garden in my work functions as a womanist space of reclamation, offering Black women something that history has rarely granted them: room to expand, take up space, cultivate leisure for themselves, and exist in states of softness, pleasure, and creative sovereignty.

archive of the everyday

Textiles and handmade paper are metaphorical material in my triptych work. In the central panel 2 exterior borders permeate, framing the portrait of my mother and I, each containing distinct material histories. The first border is the reconstruction from a woven tapestry I completed. The second border consists of scraps from thrifted denim jeans parts unusable for papermaking beating. These fragments echo a tradition of quilting within Black American cultural history. Quilts didn't function solely as objects of warmth and decoration, but repositories for artmaking, storytelling, and narrative preservation. Artists and scholars often describe quilting as a practice of transformation where discarded materials are reassembled into objects of value and continuity. Letitica Huckaby mentions quilting's relationship to cultural identity. Perhaps Ringgold's most acclaimed quilt, Tar Beach derives its name from tradition. Ringgold recalls hot Harlem summers when African American families would picnic on the tar-covered roof of buildings. "We would take blankets, a jug of lemonade, some sandwiches, and some watermelon. While the adults would play cards or talk, we kids got a chance to stay up late, snack, and look at the stars until we fell asleep." (Ringgold 17) Ringgold existed in a generation where day to day personal communication was integral because of the lack of telephones, social media, and other technology that have now socialized our everyday. Her quilts retain this memory of upbringing in the 1930s up north existing among unspoken, but integral aspects of African American life. "When a woman makes a quilt, she takes the scraps or things that people might think should be thrown away, and sews those together to create something beautiful," Huckaby said. "I feel like sometimes people of color, people of less means, can be

seen as disposable. And what I'm doing in the work is trying to show the beauty in the culture where I'm from, the culture that helped me be who I am today."

By embedding discarded, repurposed, and fragmentary textile materials into my composition, the work holds and reflects the identities, people, and knowledge that have often been dismissed, overlooked, or disposed of. Denim, with its entangled histories of cotton and indigo, worn fabrics, woven threads, and handmade paper carry the residuals of memory, touch, and care. Within the triptych, textiles extend beyond the surface into a language of interior architecture and material culture. Wood paneling from my grandmother's kitchen, overstuffed plastic couches, lace dolly coasters, dried goods, floral fabrics, and rounded bedposts reappear as sensory echoes. These aren't merely aesthetic references, but lived intimate environs of gathering, ritual, and storytelling that have shaped my understanding of self. This logic of reuse calls back to Bettye Saar whose practice is rooted in what she describes as an "accumulative consciousness", where ordinary objects hold emotional and historical residue. As a child of the depression, she never threw anything away, seeing their future potential as art. Saar's work frequently incorporates found and inherited domestic materials such as buttons, photographs, jewelry, sewing tools, and family objects, transforming them into vessels of ancestral memory. Similarly, Mickalene Thomas constructs staged immersive environments with furniture where pattern and space hold imprints of Black women's lives even in their physical absence. These material worlds align with what Rinngold identifies as a working class aesthetic, where textiles carry the intertwined histories of labor, leisure, and cultural production. Within my triptych the textile borders reuse everyday material as active vessels of memory and identity. Through stitching, layering, weaving, and collage, these processes honor the ingenuity of Black women who made beauty and meaning from what was available, transforming limitation into form. In this way, the work sits as Dionne Brand writes, "in the room with history", holding its weight while reshaping its presence.

The textile inclusions also function autobiographically, tracing the creative relationship between my mother and myself. Our earliest artistic collaborations were through sewing and scrapbooking: me pinning patterns into fabric that she'd then sew and I'd model for her revision. Us sitting side by side for hours co-assembling spreads from scraps of paper, photographs, and cricut cutouts. This shared making is reflected between Faith Ringgold and her mother, Willi Posey in her confessional narrative, We Flew Over the Bridge. Ringgold reflects on her mother's intuitive design sensibilities, particularly in their quilt Echoes of Harlem (1980), carrying forward her influence through form, their first and only mother-daughter quilt collaboration, while also acknowledging ways she failed to recognize her mother's instinctual ways of making at the time before her passing in 1981. These lessons were carried forward and transformed in *Mother's Quilt* (1983) inspired her

mother's design decisions and the continuing practice of making a quilt annually in her memory from then forth. My own engagement with textiles follows this respect, though imperfectly and at a distance. Initially, I was intimidated by the quilt form because of its vast lineage in Black tradition and minimal textile experience seemed a disservice. Yet I came to understand that my weaving like quilting can be an improvisational practice shaped by trial and error, touch, ritual, and often in communal spaces of exchange like my printmaking practice. My woven tapestry became my quilt in this sense: provisional, intuitive, and grounded in care. Though my mother could not physically work beside me, her presence remains embedded in the material nonetheless. Denim scraps, sewing pins, color, and other compositional aesthetic choices carry residuals of her influence.

The women in my family were always artists, even without formal recognition. Living on in sewing, gardening, oral lore, cooking, and other forms from the resources they had access and knowledge imparted. Their creativity appeared through sewing, gardening, storytelling, and the ability to transform limited materials into spaces of warmth and beauty. These acts of making cultivated interior worlds where imagination could survive restriction. Creativity moves between us not as isolated authorship but as an inheritance passed through everyday acts of care, observation, and experimentation. The work insists that the artistic labor of mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers did not disappear simply because it was unrecorded. It survived in gardens, in sewing needles, in songs, and in the quiet determination to make beauty nonetheless. The matrilineal artistic relationship between myself and my foremothers carries a shared visual language that moves fluidly across collective, cultural, and generational storytelling, while remaining distinctly individual within the broader tradition of Black making.

mammy deserves flowers, wings, and a halo
Reclaiming Black Maternal Representation

> *"In the selfless abstractions their bodies became to the men who used them, they became more than "sexual objects", more even then mere women: they became "Saints"...their bodies became shrines: what was thought to be their minds became temples suitable for worship."*
> *(Walker 232)*

This chapter examines the construction of Black womanhood and Black maternity within visual culture. While Western art history sanctified motherhood through the Virgin Mary and the *Madonna and Child* tradition, American racial culture produced a different maternal archetype. Stereotypes such as Mammy, reduced Black women to figures of service, flattening maternal labor into devotion while erasing autonomy and interiority. Within this contradiction, Black motherhood has been both sanctified and diminished.

Beginning with the lineage of the Black Madonna in comparison to the Western canonization, this section considers how contemporary artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Betye Saar, and Allan Rohan Crite reinterpret maternal imagery to challenge these visual traditions.

In dialogue with these histories and interventions, I situate my own work within this evolving lineage. My printmedia triptych, *Our Grandmother's Garden*, alongside the left panel *Mama*'s Rightful Flowers functions as a set of counter-icon proposals. Drawing from religious iconography, family archives, and literary influences such as The Color Purple, these works reimagine the maternal figure not as a static symbol, but as a living site of reverence, presence, and generational continuity. This chapter begins as invocation as much as analysis, an offering that asks us to reconsider what has been inherited and what must be restored.

Let us now bow our heads, close our eyes, and begin with grace.

How has Black motherhood been imaged, mythologized, and reimagined?

Why am I honoring Black women? My inquiry is shaped in part through everyday engagement and literary parallels found in the Color Purple by Alice Walker. Derived from literary parallels of Celie in the Color Purple. The novel takes on an unconventional epistolary structure, tracing the life of Celie, a poor Black woman in rural South America through first-person letters. Celie's understanding of God shifts from a distant patriarchal figure to an immanent presence found in people, nature, and joy through her relationship with Shug Avery, a "flamboyant blues singer". *You have to git man off your eyeball before you can* see *anything a'tall*," Shug tells Celie God "ain't a picture show . . . something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself:" (178-9) Shug urges her to unlearn indoctrinated ways of seeing. This spiritual reorientation mirrors my own practice. Like Shug for Celie, my mother was an early guide in teaching me how to locate meaning beyond institutionalized dogma. Through her everyday gestures, creativity, and care, I learned to understand spirituality not as something prescribed, but as something lived, something embodied through connection to others, to making, and to self.

From this grounding, my work began with an investigation into the visual history of Black maternal representation. I looked to the iconography of the Black Madonna, tracing the evolution of the Madonna and Child from Byzantine devotional imagery to contemporary reimaginings of Black motherhood. This lineage informs my own reinterpretation within the triptych *Our Grandmother's Garden*, particularly in the central panel *Mother and Child* and the adjoining portrait *Mama's Rightful Flowers*. The central image features a staged, vintage-inspired photograph of my mother and me, surrounded by an environment of layered materials: archival imagery, speculative print, cyanotype, handwritten memory, woven textiles, found objects, and familial fragments. Together, these elements construct a space of Black womanist reverence, one that centers interiority, possibility, and self-authored presence.

Across my study of Black maternity, I found myself most drawn to the work of Elizabeth Catlett, whose renderings across decades move between protection, vigilance, and tenderness. Elizabeth Catlett's recurring Madonna and Child motif represents one of the most influential reinterpretations of this lineage through the lens of Black American life. In works such as *Mother and Child* (1959) and *Black Maternity* (1982), Catlett's figures echo aspects of early Byzantine iconography through elongated proportions and simplified geometric forms. The mother's arms folded protectively around the child create angular contours that resemble a protective enclosure and arch-like halo. Rather than serene devotion, Catlett's mothers frequently appear vigilant; Their bodies functioning as shields

containing and guarding her children from harm. Across her series, maternal love becomes an act of defense shaped by historical reality that Black parents must raise children under persistent threat of racial violence. Yet Catlett's work also resonates with the Eleusa, Virgin of Tenderness, a Byzantine iconographic type in which the child is pressed against the Virgin's cheek. This gesture introduces intimacy and emotional vulnerability absent from the earlier Hodegetria tradition where the Virgin appeared composed, frontal, and distant as she gestures toward Christ. Catlett bridges these traditions. Her renderings retain the formal structure of the sacred icons while introducing relational care rooted in Black lived experience that I was seeking to retranslate from my personal lens.

Left: Madonna 1982 lithograph; Right:Black Maternity offset lithograph 1959,

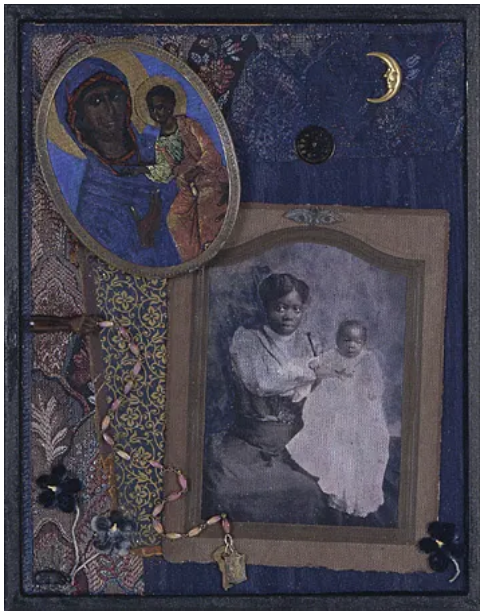
My first attempt to translate the vintage photograph of my mother and me began with lithography. I was drawn to the medium's historical antiquity and its capacity to render the richness and luminosity of Black skin due to the medium's charcoal-like tonal depth. Betye Saar's Midnight Madonna employs a similar feeling where the deep indigo and shadowed surfaces evoke mysticism paired next to the Black Marian imagery.

However, despite lithography's paradoxical capacity of durability and archival permanence, the process itself was delicate and chemically unstable. When my drawing materials broke

down during etch processing, shedding from the stone's surface. Although the image could not be transferred, I remained drawn to aesthetic quality. My technical shift from lithography realized new questions and possibilities within the composition and construction of the image. I decided to retain the photographic realism of the central figures in plate lithography and screenprinting while surrounding them with monoprinted elements to convey a hand printed, childlike rendering of flowers and garden forms to capture a sentiment of childhood memory where realism and imagination coexist. While the vintage photograph anchors the portrait in familial history, the surrounding marks evoke the imaginative landscape of girlhood and inherited creativity I explore in subsequent chapters. Returning to Catlett', *Black Maternity* was influential in shaping the compositional and emotional register of the central image of my mother and myself. Unlike her other variations of protection and vigilance this image captured a momentary glimpse of unguarded joy. The mother smiles as she looks directly at the child, seemingly unconcerned with the viewer's presence. The lines of anatomy soften, taking a naturalistic quality to earlier abstractedness, representing an emotional shift from anxiety to tenderness. Holding and sustaining that moment between mother and child became the focus of my own reinterpretation.

I think to Sojourner Truth 19th century daguerreotypes of self image representing the larger trend of 19th century Black portraiture. Dignity and pride (elegant and proud) reflected back in the clothes of our Sunday best, pearls, floral dress, straw bale hat. this is what a normal family portrait looks like. The absentee father is the commonality. One of the few surviving images of my mother and I. Her smile signifies hope. The suitcases, one of upward mobility but also baggage lady. This is my reimagining of mother and child in a southern black tradition I am looking to my mother and she looks to me- holding eye contact between us, unknown (or uncaring of the viewer) Though clearly contemporary in its production, the image intentionally reproduces the visual language of Victorian and Edwardian studio portraiture, a language historically denied to Black subjects. Within an art historical context, this photograph participates in a lineage of reclamation photography, in which Black artists and families re-stage, reimagine, or inhabit visual worlds from which they were historically excluded. It also recalls James Van Der Zee's Harlem Renaissance portraits, with their elegant costuming, symbolic props, and emphasis on dignity and aspirational self-fashioning. (Portrait of Mother and Two Children, 1934) and contemporary Black archival reenactment, seen in the work of Mickalene Thomas, Carrie Mae Weems (Kitchen Table Series, Colored People Series), and Ayana V. Jackson, they examine the politics of representation, beauty, and the photographic archive. The power of this image lies in its quiet subversion. It places Black womanhood within an aesthetic historically shaped by white femininity, Victorian morality, and colonial ideals of purity and innocence. Lace, pearls, and stillness reference a visual code from which Black girls were systematically excluded. By occupying this space, the photograph does not simply replicate

it, but transforms it, redirecting its language toward tenderness, lineage, and self-authored presence, echoing what Saidiya Hartman describes as the reimagining of Black life beyond its historical constraints.



Betye Saar, *Midnight Madonna*, 1996, Mixed Media

Fra Filippo Lippi. *Madonna with Child and two Angels* (1460-65 c.)

My composition references and departs from the historical Madonna and Child tradition. Rather than cradling me in her arms, my mother and I sit apart from one another at arms length, our hands folded calmly in our laps. We are posed, better termed-staged as the picture of poise. I appear as a small child, a few years older than the canonical infant Christ. Unlike the frontal gaze typical of Byzantine icons, neither of us addresses the viewer. Instead we hold one another's gaze, echoing the humanist turn introduced during the Renaissance by one of the most prominent, Fra Filippo Lippi. Though carefully staged, we retain agency over our image. This gesture recalls the self-fashioning of Sojourner Truth in her 19th-century daguerreotypes, where dignity and authorship were asserted through pose, dress, and presence. Our Sunday attire, pearls, floral dress, straw hat, are markers of pride and care. This is both an ordinary family portrait and something more deliberate. The absent father lingers as an unspoken structure, while the suitcases gesture toward both mobility and burden. Though contemporary in its making, the photograph intentionally draws from Victorian and Edwardian studio portraiture, visual languages historically denied to Black subjects. In doing so, it enters a lineage of reclamation photography, where Black

artists and families inhabit and rework aesthetic spaces once closed to them. It also echoes the composed elegance of James Van Der Zee, as well as the archival interventions of Carrie Mae Weems, Mickalene Thomas, and Ayana V. Jackson, all of whom interrogate representation, beauty, and the politics of the photographic image.

I continue to reference and depart from the mother and child tradition. Returning to Lippi's Renaissance rendition, his softened figures and relational intimacy dissolves rigid hierarchies between scred and human. This is reflected back in the environment as the earthly mother is situated within a natural landscape opposed to the earlier depictions of a virgin as a distant celestial figure in the flat, gold heavenly realm. Similarly, behind my mother and I is a painted backdrop of clouds and distant trees alongside the red kitchen cabinets found in my grandmother's home. Floral forms and layered frames surround us, creating a threshold between interior domestic space and imagined garden landscape. The composition establishes a dialogue of sacred iconography within canonical tradition with everyday portraiture and speculative reconstruction. Other contemporary artists also inform this approach such as Allan Robern Crite who reimagines the Black Madonna within ordinary environments (Streetcar Madonna, 1946).

Allan Rihan Crite (American, 1910 -2997), Streetcar Madonna, 1946. Watercolor with black ink and white gouache over graphite, 23.8 x 31.4 cm. (9 ⅜ x 12 ⅜ in.)Boston Athenauem, Gift of Artist, 1971

The reconstructed structure of the triptych framed by a headboard further expands these historical references. Byzantine devotional objects often framed the Virgin and Child with ornate materials such as pearls, emeralds, and golds transcending the sacred icons into jeweled religaries to wear and transport. During the Renaissance, large-scale multi-panel altarpieces were common, placing the Virgin and Child in the central panel as focal devotion while saints, angels, donors, or other narrative scenes appeared on the flanking wings. These hinged panels could be opened during prayer and closed for protection, their unfolding resembling wings that revealed a sequential story. While my work retains the triptych's structural format, I reconfigure its narrative hierarchy. My mother and I not only occupy the central panel but the side panels as well, where our portrait profiles function as expansive space to visualize your individuality beyond the singular role of mother and child. The framing devices of the triptych: wrought iron gates, repurposed headboard, woven, and textile borders are reconfigured objects that contain materials and imagery tied to our personal histories, narratives, upbringing, and creative identities. In this way, the triptych resists the historical marginalization of dark-skinned figures within sacred imagery by the

occupation of my mother and I across its entirety: the center, borders, and sequential extensions rather than historical periphery. Lastly, unlike historical portable triptychs, my structure is intentionally heavy and ornate. It serves as monument furniture anchored in space. Its scale, permanence, and sacred structure operate together as a domestic altar, honoring Black motherhood as worthy of reverence. Together these visual references create three overlapping layers of interpretation: the Byzantine and Renaissance traditions of Marian iconography, modern and contemporary reinterpretations of Black maternity, and my own Southern Black womanist perspective grounded in lived family history. Through this synthesis, Our Grandmother's Garden reimagines the Mother and Child motif as a living intergenerational portrait of care. These constructed interiors become a sanctified architecture of reverence where Black maternal life becomes honored as inheritance and possibility.

In migrating to my mother's side profile the intentions of expansion remain. **Like Mickalene, my mother is muse and reimagining. I wanted to see her mother beyond the fixed role of motherhood, assembling her through fragments, details, and textures like a lived scrapbook. She's realized as whimsical, playful, serene, and unruly at once, a figure not bound by a single register but multiple states of being. Foregrounded in the cyanotype profile across the side panels.** Historically, the side profile functioned as a means of recording identity, status, and memory from antiquity through the nineteenth century, appearing in coins, silhouettes, and portraiture. Under imperialism, however, the profile took on a different function. Nineteenth-century colonial portraiture used the profile to classify Black women as racial "types" rather than individuals, isolating physical features such as skull shape, hair texture, and facial structure as objects of scientific and ethnographic scrutiny. My composition pushes against this historical use of the profile. Through collage, I surround my mother's image with fragmentary mementoes, fabrics, archival materials, and personal objects that recontextualize her as a layered, relational subject rather an a fixed specimen. The cyanotype as a process and material lends itself to this intervention through its inversion. It acknowledges the historical flattening of Black identity while also undoing it. In pushing the cyanotype through over-exposure, I sought both saturation and erasure, allowing the figure to approach as close to silhouette state as possible in its deep hue where physical details could be rescinded and presence becomes atmospheric. The result hovers between visibility and obscurity. This oscillation mirrors the conditions of Black representation, where visibility has long been shaped by distortion, overexposure, and absence. The deep cyano hue recalls photographic negatives, archival records, and carceral documentation that have historically rendered Black bodies as data. Yet, within this work the silhouetted-profile becomes generative for pushing the viewer to see past it towards the detailed collaged background where parts of my mother show up more clearly. The wrought iron frame further complicates this act of looking. While the

viewer can still see the full composition behind it, its ornate pattern interrupts full access, forcing attention onto the layered details that constitute her life. Seeing becomes an active negotiation as the eye moves back and forth between the cyan profile and its surrounding fragments. This oscillation also reflects a womanist mode of seeing that recognizes identity as both singular and collective, composed of memories, relationships, and lived experience rather than a fixed visual type.

Together these inserted elements trace my mother's life before, during, and beyond motherhood. A photographic clipping of her in a gold dress for her clarinet solo performance gestures towards her younger years and creative talents as a first-chair musician. The wood-paneled backdrop recalls the living room and kitchen walls where many of her formative celebrations were documented, recording moments of transition: prom, graduation, musical performances. Within those scenes the couch reappears as a quiet witness to her becoming and an architectural presence of movement and pause, later unfolding in my work as a site of rest and gathering in subsequent chapters. Other elements map her creative interior. Floral stencils mirror popcorn ceilings and decorative trims, while drapery and blooming forms suggest domestic space and imaginative overflow. The inclusion of 2B pencils and wooden rulers points to her life as an educator, but also to a sustained commitment to making, to shaping, to designing. These objects expand the portrait beyond the singular role of mother, revealing a life layered with artistry, discipline, and quiet invention.

This approach resonates with Mickalene Thomas's articulation of the muse as an embodied source of knowledge and creation. Here, my mother is not a passive subject but an active force, her life generating its own visual and intellectual language. Through her, Black womanhood manifests as a continuum, a shifting constellation of daughters, sisters, artists, caretakers, and thinkers shaping one another across time. In honoring this lineage, the work becomes an offering. A gathering of flowers laid at the feet of those who made a way: my mother, my grandmother, the Gullah women, Bonnie, Diane, my teachers, my peers, and the women I will and may never meet but still recognize. This thesis stands as an altar, shaped by the belief and an insistence that Black women's lives are not only to be acknowledged, but to be held with deep care, depth, and admiration.

Thank you, Mama, for this daily bread. Amen. Ashe.

I am not a Black Goddess
I cannot save you
I am not a Black devil
I cannot destroy you
There is Healing in my arms
And the cold residue of fear in my cells
Yes I was Harriet once
But I cannot save you

There is Healing in my hands

If you can hold these contra dictions in your head

/ in your heart

You can hold me in your arms
I am not a Black goddess
I am not a Black goddess
I am not a Black goddess
I am a Black woman
I am a Black woman
I am a Black woman
Do you know what I mean?

Segments from Black Goddess by Donnie Kate Rushin

relinquishing bag lady
Racialized Girlhood: The Inherited Baggage of Becoming

“So who am I Harriet Tubman or a scared little Colored girl?”
Donna Kate Rushin, The Black Goddess of Home Girls A Black Feminist Anthology

After tracing the creative and lived legacies of mothers and grandmothers, this section shifts perspective to the daughter. It examines how Black girls inherit both the imaginative abundance and the social weight carried by previous generations. Cultural touchstones such as Bag Lady by Erykah Badu frame this inheritance as accumulated embodied weight, asking what it means to carry, and more importantly, when to set things down. What, then, do Black girls inherit? This section argues that Black girlhood is shaped by a dual heritage: survival strategies and imposed expectations. Freedom emerges through the difficult ongoing act of relinquishment, negotiation, and authorship. both the imaginative abundance and the social weight carried by previous generations. This transition grounds the works of the letterpress poem Mama, mama and the daughter panel of the triptych where girlhood is reimagined through a lens of play, interiority, and self-construction.

Artists such as Mary Sibande and Betye Saar establish an intergenerational dialogue that mirrors this thesis’s investment in matrilineal transmission. Their practices demonstrate how inherited histories are not static, but continually reinterpreted through new visual and conceptual languages. This dialogue is extended through the work of Mickalene Thomas, whose representations of Black women reclaim interiority and rest, alongside bell hooks, whose scholarship names the psychic and structural conditions shaping Black womanhood. Popular culture also enters this conversation through Olivia Pope in Scandal, whose negotiation of power, visibility, and autonomy reflects the complexities of contemporary Black female self-definition.

Through poetry, printmaking, and sculptural installation, this section explores how Black girlhood is both protected and constrained by maternal care. It asks: how do Black girls come to know themselves when their identities have been historically overdetermined? Engaging visual histories of the Black female body .Ultimately, this chapter considers Black girlhood as a space of tension and possibility, where inherited images, fears, and expectations are both carried and contested. It is within this negotiation that new forms of self-definition begin to take shape, not as fixed identities, but as evolving, self-authored ways of being.

In Michelle Obama's documentary, Becoming, she reflects on the relentless scrutiny she endured during her husband's presidential campaign and eight year tenure. Though Barack was the candidate, Michelle was required to be equally if not more, perfect. When no fault could be found with him, the gaze turned to her: how she dressed, waved, smiled, spoke. Her body and words became a public courtroom. That white-hot glare Michelle lived with during her tenure as first lady is not unique to her proximity to power, but an intensification of the everyday condition of Black womanhood. The difference is that this scrutiny doesn't just come from dominant society, but is often reinforced within our communities during adolescent formation. From an early age, young Black girls are instructed to prioritize education above all else, warned not to chase after boys but degrees in the name of "having your own". Yet once the degree is earned the questions and expectations shift. When are babies to be expected? When will you settle down and get married? Never having even equipped us in the art of dating. We are taught to excel, but there is an unspoken glass ceiling. To be accomplished but not too intimidating. To be presentable, but never excessive. The Black femme body in its natural form is perceived as a site of negotiation.

These contradictions are rarely imposed elsewhere, yet Black women are still expected to bear them all and bear the weight of its accumulation. This balancing act of trying to appease everyone, just leaves you barren. You begin to wonder which parts of yourself are actually yours. This constant calibration produces a particular fatigue. In attempting to satisfy the competing demands, one risks becoming unmoored from oneself, shaped more by expectation than by self-definition. bell hooks articulates this in Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism, noting how Black women have historically been denied space to claim womanhood on their/our own terms. During the Black liberation movement of the 2oth century, many Black women unfortunately fell victim to this very condition when positioned between racist white feminist and patriarchal Black nationalism movement, asked to prioritize race over gender despite existing at the intersection. Some were labeled traitors for engaging in feminist politics; others were relegated to supportive or reproductive roles within a male-centered movement, while others opted out of both altogether. In that crucial moment, Black women forgot to choose them/ourselves. Long before this Sojourner Truth warned of such outcomes, recognizing that the granting of rights to Black men would not necessarily dismantle the structures that subordinated Black women. Power would be redistributed as black men would simply be substituting the role of white men as masters over Black women.

While white feminist movements sought new definitions to redefine womanhood, Black women were first forced to prove our eligibility for it. As hook writes, this struggle was shaped by "the silence of the oppressed", a condition produced both by "engendered resignation and acceptance of one's lot…Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification." (hooks 1) Race was made hyper-visible while gendered humanity was negated.

Within 19th century visual culture we observe this through the aesthetic movement of orientalism. The Black female body became a site through which colonialism, scientific racism, and sexual exploitation converged. Under the guise of "anthropological eroticism", figures such as Louis Agassiz and Joseph t. Zealy produced images that stripped Black women of clothing, context, and personhood. These photographs rendered them as naked specimens rather than subjects, flattening identity into type. In these representations, the removal of clothing was not merely physical but symbolic of severing the subject from dignity, agency, and self-possession. Black women long before and thereafter were reinforced as laboring bodies through the camera lens, their sexuality tethered to utility, as the "working girl" whether through forced reproduction, domestic, or sexual work. Like the hold of the slave ship, the body of the Black female itself became a vessel of containment, domination, possession, surveillance, and extraction. These histories have lasting consequences.

Under slavery and its afterlives, Black girls were often denied the temporal protections of childhood, moving prematurely into labor, care work, and sexual vulnerability. Girlhood, rather than a space of becoming, was truncated. Within this context, the maternal figure(s) in my work emerges both as protector and witness, holding tensions between inherited violences and imagined futures. In such works such as the central panel, Mother and Child this relationship becomes a charged site where past and future converge, care attempts to interrupt history, and possibility takes roots. So much of my work now asks: what might it mean to move freely? What does it look like to stop rehearsing for safety and begin composing our own freedom? Composing a self. Because the real miracle is not that we simply survived the wake, it's the miracle that we're still dreaming in it.

How do Black girls arrive at self-definition when their identities have been historically predetermined, when even the condition of being human has had to be asserted?

Reflection written on May 18, 2025 at 3:32 a.m. following to a sporadic encounter that prompted Mama, mama

Moments ago I was reminded of the weight of black fatigue and the invisible cage placed on our bodies and spirits as byproducts of an unkind world that has and continues to repeatedly reinforce that censorship. I was reminded of the necessity and the essentialism of brown bodies moving fluidly and freely unexplained for. However freedom is difficult to claim. I have often felt a responsibility branded onto me, especially for those unaccounted-for bodies from a place of care and taught anxiety. Perhaps because historically the unaccounted-ness of those bodies were by design. It is difficult to relinquish control while asserting autonomy in environments that are built on the soil of horrific atrocities.

It is difficult unlearning what we are bred from. But perhaps that is not only America, perhaps that is simply being human.

I am still finding my way. We are all still finding our way. I came to realize that I had built my own cage, bound my own wings in anticipation of an omnipresent gaze, even guiding others to do the same. In doing so, I was failing to see the sky above it. I must let myself let go again and allow myself and others to traverse this world freely, curiously, and attentively without preemptively stripping myself powerless.

Betye Saar, Flight, 1963. Screenprint, 14 9/16 x 18 ⅛ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York

We are often disciplined into ways of thinking through and behaviors that inscribe our own annihilation, reinforcing, and reproducing what Sylvia Wynter calls "our narratively condemned status." (Sharpe 13). Returning to Sharpe's theorizing of the wake, we live in the ongoing afterlife of the hold, a structure that continues to organize Black life through containment and surveillance.

Contemporary institutions such as prisons, schools, and even intimate interior spaces reproduce this logic, teaching Black children early that their bodies are watched, their movements policed, and their freedom conditional. What emerges is an internal panopticon, a self-survillence that disciplines behavior before any external force intervenes.

Mama, mama emerges in response to this drawn from Catlett's Mother and Child series that renders Black motherhood through a visual language of vigilance. The poem calls forth for an unrelinquishing of the cage we've placed on ourselves as black women/girls that have been taught to be extra vigilant, cautious, careful, hyper accommodating in a society that has historically not wished us well. Her earliest version, a 1944 lithograph, recasts the sacred maternal image within the context of a racially segregated United States. A leafless tree appears behind the figures, and the mother's tight, protective embrace suggests the historical threat of racial violence, particularly lynching. In works such as Black Maternity (1982), Catlett positions the mother's body as a protective shield, her gaze outward, alert to threat. These are active images of maternal tenderness, but embodiments of protection shaped by historical and contemporary violence where guardness is foregrounded. Across Catlett's work, Black women appear as laborers, protectors, leaders, and figures of strength. Yet joy is rare and softness is often restrained, even in her stylistic rendering of the Black female body. Among these images, only a few suggest ease of play. Blues for my people and Playmates are 2 key exceptions I draw from. However, that absence across historical Black artists, such as Catlett is telling. Mama, mama shifts this vantage point. Situated in the voice of a young Black girl, perhaps a younger self, the language oscillates between play and plea. The poem carries a childlike musicality through simple rhyme, yet beneath the surface lies a pressing insistence: to truly be seen not only as someone worth protecting, but understood as a curious being. To not merely be safe, but free. Writing her was difficult because I also wanted something else for her. In thinking about the motif of Badu's bag lady, here I imagined a girl who had not yet inherited that baggage. She is not naive, but new in a sense that she has not yet absorbed the fear that silences her movements, audacity, and willfulness in the name of protection. And she also gently, but firmly resists taking that on. Placing myself in her big shoes was quite a task as she speaks not only to her mother, but every inherited voice or "good intention" that has said, "Be careful, stay in a child's place, or stay put or trouble will find you." What is typically interpreted as defiance or "womanish" behavior is in fact, curiosity, an early articulation of selfhood. Walker defines such behavior

in her definition of womanism with adjectives such as outrageous, courageous, audacious, and willful. The young girl embodies this spirit through her advocacy for her right to move, imagine, and become, integrating her mother into this desire as well.

In this way the poem functions as a counter-spell, seeking to resist the inheritance of fear without dismissing the care from which that fear originates. It is a delicate negotiation between gratitude and refusal. She is me before I learned to anticipate harm and she is an insistence that something else is possible. I believe Betye Saar's 1963 screenprint, Flight, captures a similar intention.

Rooted in orality, my writing employs African American Vernacular English (AAVE) allowing the work to be spoken as much as read, giving the text a corporeal rhythm and grounding it in a lived, linguistic tradition. This choice also reflects the double consciousness of Blackness, the ongoing negotiation between the tongue of home and standardized language of institutions. By impressing Black speech into print through letterpress, a medium historically aligned with elite and Eurocentric traditions of "proper" discourse, this vernacular is materially inscribed. In Citizen Printer, Amos Kennedy refers to his practice as a "humble Negro printer, a deliberate naming that rejects respectability politics and embraces the fullness of Black language, humor, and everyday life through bold dense typographic backgrounds, vernacular phrases, and reclaimed offensive iconography. "I do not want to put 'blackface' on so-called 'fine printing'. I want to print negro. To use printing to express negro culture. To do to printing what the blues and spirituals did to music". Like Amos, the act of printing in my work becomes a recording and authorization of Black customs, tongue, and oral storytelling. What is often dismissed as informal, unworthy, or fleeting such as the ideas and expressions of a young Black child is pressed into permanence.

Left: Bottom left: Danys y Liethis, 2005 offset lithograph; Right: 1944 Mother and Child lithograph

The world has long dictated how Black women are seen; now How do Black women define themselves?

When I think of Black womanhood in contemporary art, Mickalene Thomas immediately comes to mind. Kick-ass. Wild. Exclusive. Disruptive. Garish. Well-made. Authentic. These are the words Mickalene used to describe her work when interviewed by Roxanne Gay and they aren't exaggerations.

My first encounter with Mickalene's work was arresting and awkward. I felt an immediate urge for these women to be "covered up", an internal reflex shaped by cultural conditioning that equates Black female respectability with modesty. That discomfort was compounded by the longstanding historical and contemporary proliferation of a Black female body rendered naked for consumption, flattened into pornography and spectacle. To encounter a confident, unabashed nude Black woman, fully self-possessed disarmed me. My initial failure to see her forced me to acknowledge the architecture of a psychological cage. Why couldn't a black woman be nude, relaxed, confident, and still be understood as art?! Mickelene's work disrupted that enclosure offering a new way of seeing, one in which Black women existed outside reductive narratives of service and sexuality. As Deborah Willis notes, "We know little of rest or self-interest in the ways we are represented. Our bodies have rarely been afforded repose or relaxation." (Pg. 9) Thomas's work corrects this history by revering Black women in their wholeness. Their limbs sprawl. Their bodies sag. Their nipples are adorned. There is a grace in their ease as her figures settle into themselves in lush environments brimming with texture, pattern, and color. These women aren't overtly and ostentatiously sexual, performing for the male gaze. Yet they still command presence, meeting your eyes with measure. This reverence echoes my earliest understanding and exposure of the black female body through my mother.

MARY SIBANDE, SOPHIE IN ATTITUDE DEVANT , 2025, BRONZE AND FABRIC, 88 1/8 x 68 x 55 in. (224 x 173 x 140 cm)

In my home and many Black households, a naked mother was not a taboo, but an ordinary thing. My mama's naked body existed in the quiet rituals of unwinding, moving between bedroom and bathroom, soaking in the tub after a long day's work. As a velcro child, I adhered closely behind narrating my day as I observed hers come to a close. conversation beside her about my own day. Because naked mamas are rarely given privacy, her stretch marks, rolls, hair, and belly fat were never hidden from my gaze. She was my first model of a natural robust body, as whole, unedited, and sufficient. One I knew and accepted long before the world taught me otherwise. Returning home now, that dynamic remains, but my awareness has shifted. I witness her speak about her body with critique, longing for a body untouched by time, childbirth, menopause, and a 9-5 workday. Her desire for a "smaller, younger, more agile" self reveals the sediment of a patriarchal logic that tethers a woman's value to thinness, youth, and upkeep. Yet this longing exists in opposition with the aesthetics of the Black community I was raised in where fullness, curvature, heavy, "big boned" figures as we'd call it carry their own beauty and recognition. Her body sits at the crossroads between these competing gazes, negotiated daily. Mary Shibande's lifesize portrait, Sophie in Attitude Devant captures this paradox. Shibande presents a full-size, dark-skinned woman elegantly suspended in flight. The body is both weighted and airborne, draped in voluminous layers of silk and tulle, asserting power, tenderness, leisure, and poise. Sophie, Sibande's altar ego, engages counter-historical narratives and language of dress by animating the stories of South African women and familial members under

apartheid, critiquing western imperialist depictions of their lives. Sophie's attire is an acknowledgement of their domestic servitude by the apron, while reimagining her through color, fabric, and posture. Blue in her attire operates across multiple registers by entering a realm of the fantastical, conjuring figures such as Alice in Wonderland, Mary Poppins, and other heroines of imaginative escape. Simultaneously it resonates with the iconography of the Virgin Mary, invoking divinity, and sanctity. Sibande collapses these registers, allowing the figure to sit in history and simultaneously transcend it, speaking across diasporic lines and reauthoring women.

This reauthoring finds a striking parallel in Scandal, particularly Season 4, Episode 11, "*Where's the Black Lady*?", directed by Debbie Allen and written by Raamla Mohamed. The episode foregrounds Black female agency within a high-stakes white political landscape, where visibility and disposability exist side by side. When Olivia Pope is kidnapped and placed on the auction block, her body is reframed to a commodifiable geopolitical bargaining chip. Her decision to manipulate the terms of her own sale marks a critical pivot. Like Helen, she becomes the catalyst for conflict, positioned as something worth going to war for, the launching of "thousand ships". But unlike the myth, Olivia is not simply the object of war; she is an active participant in shaping its outcome. Rather than waiting to be rescued, she intervenes in the very system that seeks to define her, weaponizing perception, intellect, and timing. Her freedom is negotiated, calculated, and precarious. One forged within the same structures that enabled her capture. Freedom, in this context, is not outside of power but wrestled from within it. The title itself gestures toward a collective absence and urgency. The search for Olivia runs parallel to the quiet disappearance of another Black woman, Lois, an elderly neighbor across the hall whose absence is only noticed through the disruption of intimate, everyday rituals shared with her partner. This layering underscores a critical paradox: Black women are hyper-visible when instrumental and invisible when vulnerable. Their presence is tracked when useful, yet their absence is often unmarked unless held within local networks of care. Throughout Scandal, Olivia's character exists within a web of contradictions that mirror broader cultural expectations of Black womanhood. She is a crisis manager for elite political figures, tasked with maintaining order in systems that exclude her. She is romantically entangled with the President, a dynamic that inevitably evokes the historical shadow of Sally Hemings, complicating notions of desire, power, and consent. At times, she is reduced to "the help," her proximity to power never fully translating into belonging. And yet, Olivia exceeds these frames. She is ambitious, intellectually formidable, emotionally complex, and unapologetically sexual. She is not constructed as a moral ideal but as a fully realized subject, capable of contradiction, failure, control, and vulnerability. Much of this dimensionality can be traced to the vision of executive producer, Shonda Rhimes, whose authorship allows Olivia to exist outside the narrow confines of stereotype.

Importantly, Olivia's authority is not rooted in likability but in action. She commands rooms not because she is universally admired, but because she is effective. Even those who resist her often defer to her competence. The language used to describe her within the series consistently centers what she does rather than how she looks, interrupting the habitual compression of Black women to appearance. Her narrative reveals that autonomy is rarely pure. It is often strategic, partial, and hard-won.. Across these examples I realize to become oneself, is not a singular act of arrival. It is a continual negotiation, "an ongoing doing of carving one's self" from histories that have reduced Black women as non-being, sub-human, excess, and absence. "No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have Black women." (hook 7). What comes forth is a condition of in-betweenness, a space where selfhood is both constructed and contested. To exist within this space is to feel the weight of what has been imposed, alongside the fragile, ongoing process of defining oneself otherwise. It is to ask: are we becoming who we are (and what is that) or performing who we've been taught to be? Where does inheritance shift and innovation begin? And perhaps most urgently, what does it mean to see ourselves clearly without the distortion of a gaze or to live on our own terms even if that gaze never disappears?My work enters this question not by asking the world to see Black women differently, but by reorienting the lens through which we see ourselves.

Black women need not always be holding the world together to be worthy of representation, for once I want to start creating worlds that bend to us.

This intention grounds the triptych, most explicitly in the side panels of my mother and myself. We are positioned behind decorative wrought iron gates for the purpose of protection but also preservation of interiority. Referencing Betty Saar's Black Girl's Window, the panels offer a threshold as opposed to access where viewers can gaze through and look into this world but the experience of full immersion and consumption is restricted. This deliberate boundary safeguards not only desire and possibility, but also the right to opacity and existing without full disclosure or legibility. The wrought iron frame itself carries layered significance, particularly within Louisian's architectural and cultural landscape. Historically associated with wealth, security, and ornamentation, these gates are artifacts of Black craftsmanship. Embedded within the design is the Adinkra symbol of the mirrored vertical hearts, Asasa Ye Duru ("The Earth has weight") reinforcing themes of abundance,

reciprocity, and care. In this context, the frame is a quiet anchor of my ancestral and geographical roots, while also holding the relationship between my mother and myself within a broader cosmology of inheritance. However the frame is also a reclaimed object and visual language. The adinkra wrought iron is a stylized technique recognized widely across Black neighborhoods in the America South, and has also been absorbed into cycles of commodification. Purchased secondhand from a white affluent seller who originally acquired it as decorative decor, the gate also gestures towards an ongoing repackaging and circulation of Black aesthetics for other audiences, detaching it from origin. By placing ourselves behind the frame, I resist intrusion while acknowledging the inevitability of the gaze and ways Black visual culture is continually framed, circulated, and consumed beyond our control. This extends into the material language of the work itself, particularly the relationship between the handmade and the manufactured. Handmade elements such as paper, printed elements, and woven forms carry the trace of body, hands, time, and ancestral knowledge in contrast to barrettes, horsehair, dried goods, and other manufactured goods that speak to the mass production, accessibility, and everyday economies of Black life. These items often sourced from beauty supply stores, facebook marketplace, and other public spaces are part of a larger capitalist system in which Blackness is extracted, marketed and sold back to us. Despite Black life's deep entanglement in these systems of production, we are still capable of carving out spaces of self and collective.

My placement across from my mother facing her serves as reflection and continuation. Our resemblance is biological, but also conceptual, thereby a mirroring of experience, influence, and divergence. Within my panel, I pull from fragments of my child self, heavily informed after my mother, as a way of reclaiming a more expansive interior world and whimsy state. Red hair, once prohibited to my adolescent expression for being "too grown" now is inserted as a critique and resistance of those early projections of respectability and sexualization. Dance imagery recalls a space and time where my body moved freely, unburdened by surveillance but also playing into performance as an early mode of self-fashioning. Barettes a common motif in my thesis, serves as a physical marker of girlhood, adornment, and self-expression. Together these elements construct a space that denies easy entry and reading. It's a held interior where possible selfhood is not performed for validation or external demand, but cultivated from an authoritarian lens and archival memory.

Bath time

It is true all women love baths
It is especially true brown women love baths
It is positively absolutely especially true
black women love baths

I remember afterschool car rides home
in the backseat listening to mama rant

about her latest workday affairs, ending with
“I can’t wait to hop in the tub and take a nice hot bath”

I’d always ask mama
why you like taking baths so much,
and she’d say I just do

I used to love baths too
before those climatic periods once’s adolescence
then maturity when longstanding debates
among schoolkids of baths as unsanitary ascend and recede

But tonight as I dip my hands
in the water basin of pulp,
couching my final sheet from the wooden mould and deckle, pressing them of water
leaving them damp,
Stacking them between sheets of blotters and cardboard

Hosing the concrete floor
rinsing my hands clean
falling out my squishy boots
into worn crocks before stepping into the cold night

Tonight as I wind down the routine route
home making a right on MLK street
only 1 thought occupies my mind
I can’t wait to take a bath when I get home.

Unknowingly as the water pours
from the faucet,
halting with the turn of the knob,
as I dip a toe/then a foot/ and soon my entire body
in, sinking further in its warm embrace
my back leaned against the cool laminate,
I’ve become indoctrinated into an unspoken truth:

Black women/most specifically my mother
and grandmother love baths
because they are weightless here

I stand because I want to,
for them it wasn’t a choice

the purple bruise on my kneecap
the tender knob of my ankle
hard calluses in the slight center of my palm,
tiny scraped skin along my knuckles,
and the slight pain in my lower back from
bending one too many times today
tells a life my mother and grandmother did
for the entirety of mine.

No one sees these details, not even I
until here

Imagine a body feeling this way for so long.

Bone-tired

I curl into a fetal position
letting myself slip beneath the water’s surface.
And for a moment/if only for a moment
I succumb/I drown willingly
I release.

Four hundred years ago
when my grandmother’s mother’s mother’s mother and so on
stepped off the ship, leaving the rocky lull of the boat
could she imagine how exhaustion would brand itself
into her daughters’ bloodlines?

During bathtime, was her nudity only nakedness?
Did water ever soften her?
Did she remain weighted even as she washed?
When did she breathe? Where was her reprieve?

I lower myself deeper/water closing over my ears
muting the room.

The world thins to pulse, breath, stillness.

Then the pressure shifts/water nudging at the edges of me
rising into places too tender.
a quiet insistence of being beneath a little too long.

I break the surface—slowly this time—pulling in air
like a first breath.
Inhale. Exhale.
Hands finding the porcelain edge, weak and wanting.
Goosebumps and a chill puckered along my arms.

Tears slide down to my collarbone
settling in the valley of my breasts
before the water gathers them back.
Gentle ripples move away from me
with every breath
The surface calms again.

Floating here
unburdened in this poignant midnight hour,
I understand the desire to feel light
to let Mami Wata help me hold the heaviness
even temporarily, before I must stand and make my exit.

I understand why she turns from the harsh spit of a showerhead and seeks instead
the steady cradle of bathwater.

After an entire day—an entire lifetime—of this, my skin, my body, deserves a lullaby soft delicacy

Our bodies deserve bath time.
We deserve stillness.

rest and release

let go/ un - wa/we (y)d(it)/e
un - wade/ wind/ way/ wade/ wait

This final section positions rest and release as a necessary and radical practice within Black feminist and womanist thought. Drawing on scholars such as Audre Lorde, Sylvia Wynter, Byung-Chul Han, and bell hooks, rest is framed as a form of resistance against systems that have historically demanded relentless labor, endurance, and self-sacrifice from Black women.

The artworks in this section transform domestic objects, printmedia, and writing into architecture and rituals of pause, protection, preservation, and contemplation. Reimagined wicker chair, *Seat to My Sistas serves* as an altar of naming, a gathering space where Black women are called into presence, honored, and held. Through the inscription of their names, the work restores individuality, collective kinship, and relational inheritance.

Accompanying writing including letterpress print, *Take a Seat Sweet Sadie* and *Fem-me-now-all Wombikin* reflect on moments of stillness and unwinding, suggesting that rest itself can function as a generative space. The poems contain a ritualistic, mythic, and spiritual aura, echoing the implicit embodied ways of knowing I was indoctrinated alongside a shedding and reshaping of new forms of self.

As the closing movement of the thesis, this chapter shifts the focus from inheritance toward possibility, envisioning environments where Black femmes can exist beyond histories of labor and resilience within self-defined spaces of refuge, stillness, spiritual and creative renewal.

Historically Black women's value has been tethered to our capacity to labor, perform, and provide. Our productivity, self-sacrifice, and adaptability, and have been praised often at the expense of our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The cumulative weight of gendered anti-Black racism erodes Black women's health, shortening our lives, compromising our quality of care, and leaving our bodies disproportionately vulnerable to both physical and mental health crises. (Kelly F. Jackson). Within this context, the image of the Black women at rest becomes both foreign and disruptive. In Scenes of Subjection Saidiya Hartman reminds us that the violence of slavery extended beyond physical brutality to include the theft of "leisure, denial, and self-possession." (Hartman 85). This raises persistent questions: Whose bodies were permitted to occupy stillness in history? Who is allowed to pause with dignity and integrity, without consequence?

As a child one of my favorite books was A *Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams. I fondly recall rereading it during summer afternoons at the library vowing that one day when I was old enough with some heavy pockets I would give my mother a chair of her own. A return to from a day's work as an unspoken gesture of gratitude and a daughter's acknowledgment of her everyday endurance. The resulting works, Seat to my Sistas, Take a Seat Sweet Sadie, and the backstory of the children's book itself follows this sentiment. In her adolescence when Vera asked her mother why they didn't wait until they had more money to purchase a chair, her mother responded, "I don't intend to work all my life and have nowhere to sit down." That statement, simple yet resolute, embodies the phrase of Bread and Roses and echoes the struggles of working class women and mothers finding and creating beauty in their demanding lives. Looking back, it's incredulous how much wonder and joy my mother enfolded into our lives despite the middle class status she was struggling to maintain in a poor state. As a single parent my mother moved mountains to give me the things she herself did not have and wanted for her daughter while also safeguarding my reality of scarcity through our routine exposure to books, art, museums, and creative imagination.


Hours Worked
Out of Work
Alice Cochran
Zora Neale Hurston
Augusta Savage
Dr. Angeletta Gourdine
Elizabeth Catlett
Dr. Sandia Lewis
Alice Walker
Natalie Hall
Dodd Tribe
Ms. Gaylynne Mack
Mary Solice Solix
Dr. Barbara McCaskill
Sa'Sa Ms. Sandra Boyd
Solange

Seat to my Sistas is a chair for my mother and all the women who have shaped me. The wicker chair with its peacock fanned backrest holds their names letterpressed on handmade paper housed in diamond enclosures. My relationship and proximity to these women span biologically, academically, artistically, and locally, reflected back in the spatial arrangement of their names. The reimagined chair functions as a site of rest and memory, while also carrying historical tensions. The distinctive curricular backing recalls both the architecture of a church fan and stern of a slave ship. As Sharpe theorizes, the slave ship is an ongoing metaphor for systems that oppressive systems that move, control, and endanger Black life. The hold (hull) by extension was a non-place of forced containment and premature death where Black humanity was severed as Black bodies were rendered from person into property. The tightly sequestered names enclosed by the fanned frame evoke the stuffed Black bodies situated in the belly of the ship.

Philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes contemporary life as a “burnout society”, shifting from Foucault's “disciplinary society” of submission to external repression where individuals internalize the demand for constant productivity, becoming both the agent and victim of their own cyclical exploitation. Hence the Panopticon. For Black subjects, burnout society is inherently anti-black because the hyper-demand to produce is not merely internalized, but historically enforced. From plantation economies to present day Jim Crow, Black labor has been extracted through coercion, surveillance, and threat of punishment, displacement or death. This paradox to overperform while Black humanity is negated renders rest not just as a biological necessity, but a necropolitical act. Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics further sharpens this understanding, describing how power operates through the regulation of life and death.For Black communities, proximity to death is not abstract but structurally embedded, a condition Christina Sharpe describes as living “in the wake.” Within this framework, exhaustion functions as a mechanism of control. From this lens, rest functions beyond recuperation but also a form of defiance against historical punitive systems that have long depended on Black expendability. “It is to reject the commodification of one’s time, creativity, and breath.” (Legrand 25)

This aligns with Sylvia Wynter’s call to reimagine the human outside colonial definitions that equate value with productivity and control. Rest, as an ongoing relational practice of being rather than doing, gestures towards Wynther’s re-enchanted humanism grounded in interdependence. To rest is to assert one’s humanity beyond utility and to exist outside the narrow terms imposed under colonial and capitalist logics. Sharpe insists on a different kind of holding for Black life, “an alternative kind of care and a violent lifesaving kind of aspiration … .of keeping and putting breath back into the Black body.” (Sharpe) Rest now shifts to restoration and renewal that is reconfigured into materials and process of the

chair. In response to the non-being transformation of Black bodies in the hull, I inverse this by naming, identifying, and gathering. These women carefully and hand printed on handmade paper are permanently impressed in the care, but the "hold", historically a space of dehumanization is reconfigured as a site of care and reclamation. Through this act the chair is transformed as a site of wake work and operates as a womb-space of return. The letterpressed names across the backrest form a visible genealogy, an altar-object of maternal-kin, foremother influences from which I have been birthed, biologically, creatively, intellectually through inheritance and their presence. In doing so I'm not only attaching their personhood as women but transcribing an elevated status as legitimate reservoirs of knowledge and creators (return of the womb of theory by joy james in the captive maternal) . As bell hooks states in Sisters of the Yam, "we recover ourselves in the presence of others." Not only is it a physical holding/embrace of these women in temporary time and space, but spiritual reverence that is witnessed and celebrated in activated stillness. This reorientation of stillness emerges in response to contemporary conditions. In the wake of the 2024 presidential election, Black women around the United States collectively withdrew after shouldering the moral and civic labor of a nation that continuously fails to reciprocate safeguarding. This moment of collective inwardness marked a subtle, but significant shift: choosing of self and a refusal to continue carrying what has historically been imposed. Breath over burden.

As Audre Lorde asserts, "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Rest is not to be confused with indulgence, but a self-prioritization by refusing depletion, extraction, the expectation of limitless availability. This refusal must be understood within the broader structure of misogynoir. As Moya Bailey articulates, "misogynoir circulates controlling images that normalize Black women's exploitation." Figures such as Mammy, the "angry Black woman", welfare queen, and the "strong Black woman" construct a visual and cultural logic in which Black women's labor is expected while their exhaustion is simultaneously rendered invisible.

Our bodies cannot only and forever be expendable flesh.

In my work, rest is staged, practiced, and activated. The chair acts simultaneously as an object, altar, and architectural site of temporary suspension and release. The women whose names are inscribed are invited to sit, transforming rest into a participating ritual and embodied practice of power. To sit is a spiritualized, meditative act allowing one to feel grounded, to breathe, and just be. The choice of the wicker chair intensifies this gesture. Historically the peacock chair entered global circulation through colonial and carceral

systems while functioning as an instrument for caning inmates. By the 1970s, the wicker chair received acclaim due to its association with Huey P. Newton, the president of the Black Panther Party, solidifying it in Black American visual culture as a symbol of Black nationalism, regal pride, and the wicker chair represented Black power, pride, and regal identity. What began as an object of containment, became in the Black American imagination, a throne. Today it lives on in traditions of family celebration, featured in baby showers, graduations, and other momentous rites of passage.

Materially the chair is also a meditation on craft and inheritance. Rattan and weaving gestures toward traditions of craft and making that are utilitarian and sacred such as the Gullah Geechee women sweetgrass artisans in the lowcountry south. I've had repeated engagement with. The sweetgrass baskets known for their coiled forms are functional vessels utilized to carry rice, grains, church offerings, flowers, and children. The woven horsehair seat nods to this lineage, and also a weaving of knowledge, customs, and rituals passed through generations of women.

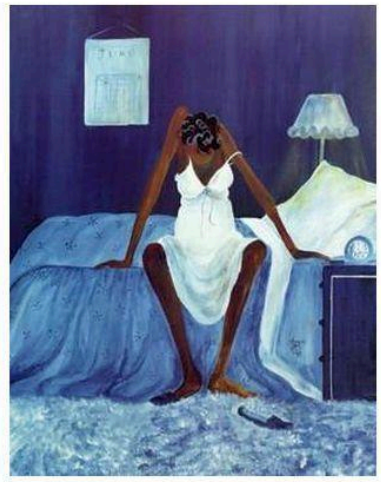
During my recurring visits to the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, I conversed with sweetgrass basket artisans. Who described the generational lineage embedded within their craft. Master artisan, Ms. Jerydine Taylor, spoke of how sweetgrass basket sewing techniques vary from family to family and the transmission of specific techniques reserved across familial relations, preserving a family activity and industry. Basketry and quilting remain the two primary art-crafts in the Sea Islands particularly among African American women who have served as "commentators of family events, teaching, and practicing artisans act as conservators of the ethnic culture". (Twining 139) These domestic arts or "women's work" despite little scholarship of Sea Island material culture are representative of familial and social life of the Sea Islands as well as continuity of material traditions transmitted from West Africa to the Americas. These craft technologies testify to bodily knowledge that

survived forced migration. Typically passed down matriarchally, basketry remains a communal mode of creation and a space of kinship where knowledge circulates. Route 17 in Mount Pleasant is a historic site of evidence.

Yet in thinking about vessels, I began to think about the body of Black women historically as vessels themselves and resisting this positioning in my work. Like weaving, we've been made to hold everything together: the family, our communities, economies, and the emotional residue of others. In this work, I also began asking what it would look like to release ourselves from this inherited expectation? What if it's permissible to ourselves to become/be undone? In doing so, the chair is continuing to hold, but different in this way. The seat remains intentionally unwoven, signaling unraveling as an additional layer of rest. To come undone, a loosening of what has been tightly bound is released. At its core the chair's power lies in both its activation and stillness. An untouchable relic to the larger public, but one to be inhabited by those named and invited for participation to sit on the braided seat formed through my own hands. The act of sitting aligns with Sharpe's "wake work" of holding Black life with care, attention, and insistence. To sit is to linger in that insistence and to claim space for breath and presence within a history that has denied both to the Black femme body. Lastly returning to earlier chapters of the divine maternal and Black Madonna, in this instance the everyday Black women is elevated to divine status or reverence by sitting on a reimagined throne constructed with found and embedded womanist materials.

In thinking through womanist, Black/femme aesthetics as method-making, Weaving an otherwise: In-relations methodological practice asserts the concept of onto-epistemological kinship space. The "onto-epistemological and material ways we have come to know and experience community shapes how we conceptualize and engage in relationship building and interactions" with participants in research. (55) Essentially a researcher who views community through a lens of mutual care where knowledge is a gathering of relations versus extraction and research is not objective but deeply personal and relational. "*It is kinship and futurity and home and writing and world-making.* For these

Black queer storytellers, it is towards this consciousness that birthed the "onto-epistemological kinship space" (p. 45) that they affectionately refer to as Bella Noche's – a response to Toni Cade Bambara's famous idea that oppressed people have the responsibility to be well. Bella Noche's is the answer of self-created environments and worldbuilding designed to foster healing, joy, and liberation in their/our own terms. "If you can't go to Bella Noche, where the hell can you go? A viral news interview in Baton Rouge, Louisiana about a Black-owned LGBTQ nightclub after a shooting occurred outside the venue. Despite the unsettling incident, the club is framed as a site of "fugitive joy" and world-making. As a researcher I'm always thinking about ways to create similar kinship spaces in my own material, methodological praxis as an artist-reseacher.



Continuing the motif of chair and power of the sitting into a broader visual and emotional landscape, I'd like to introduce another relic ingrained deep in my childhood consciousness. Blue Monday by Annie Lee. The true picture of fatigue and weightedness. Seated at the edge of the bed is a faceless Black woman, her dilapidated body folded inward with other key details. The vertical strokes of indigo wall behind the subject/ cascading folds of the bed linens sinking into the carpeted floor/ the pooling drapery of the subjects dress / the hanging strap she's too tired to fix and the most climactic part of the painting, the high peaked shoulders, a point of stress in the subject's body but central arresting spot of the viewer. Although faceless, bowed head, and slumped body she is descript and familiar. She is my mother. She is many many women and mothers. She is the painted posture I have witnessed many times over, an unspoken language of fatigue that requires no translation. As a girl, I was always at a loss of words whenever I was met by this posture.

What could I tell her to ease her shoulders to lift her head and stare into her eyes, to renew her spirit, and infuse some other color in her blue, melancholy world. How do I soften and relieve the weight? She must feel heavy.

Came forth was Take a Seat Sweet Sadie. Derived from the song Sadie by the Spinners the work translates my writing into a letterpress letter to my mother and the many Sadies of the world plagued by the everyday weight of existence. The text encircles a chair in dense, rhythmic layers, mirror the unrelenting, nonstop pace of work that structures my mother's life. Language itself becomes weight, crowding the space as work crowds the home. As an educator, my mother carried the classroom home with her, papers haphazardly peeking out the schoolbags strapped to her shoulders and the overflowing rolling cart as she spilled through the door. Papers, files, reports, books spilling across couches, tables, and floors until one day there isn't any remaining spot devoid. The house is an appendage and interior landscape of the workplace she never left and one I was unsure how to unearth her

entrapment. Against this density, the printed negro speech forces the slow action of reading by the viewer. In a poem where there isn't a moment of space, it insists on pausing through layered language. Woven through are echoes of Dear Mama by Tupac Shakur and Sadie, both popular culture musical tributes to maternal endurance and love. Following suit in their lyrical storytelling, I draw from music, personal memory, and Black vernacular tradition to chronicle my own mother's personal struggles of holding it all together and ultimately asking her to take a seat and return to herself. Addressed from the perspective of a daughter acknowledging the sacrifice of pursuing higher opportunity at my mother's expense, that privilege desire and burden yet ironically follows in my mother's influence as she is a first generation and only master degree holder in my immediate family. Personal memories grounded in the poem include a flood and the departure of her daughter leaving both the home and the mother a hollow vessel. "Mama you a shell now".
I thank my mother for instilling her creative interests in me, for I would not be the artist I am today and call forth her to return to those hobbies she inherited to me in opposition of the "addictions" she's picked up to cope with complex life circumstances. The poem ends with a ritual "dream mama dream, be mama be, laugh mama laugh." the poem becomes both archive and offering documenting my mother's sacrifice while calling her back to herself, an invitation to rest and finally take a seat. For me writing serves as restoration and bodily surrender where oftentimes I'm transported in a different place, body, or voice or in many cases a spirit comes over and speaks through me. This unspilling or relinishing of words feels like both a baptism and catching the holy ghost, of a spiritual experience marked by an outpouring. Like sitting, the power of writing is a space of refuge allowing for emotional and spiritual processing, a recording of personal and communal history, and engaged conversation and transportation across time and space. Oftentimes my writing is predominantly centered, addressed to, from my own personal life or immediate observer based on my intimate conversations with women and people in my life. This lineage of writing as survival and self-definition echoes the epistolary structure in the Color Purple.

At the novel's onset, Celie writes letters to God as a survival mechanism. These letters were private confessions where she processes the sexual abuse she endures from her father addressing what functions as a "shadowed confidant". Over time, Celie begins to question the image of God she has inherited. This epistolary tradition resonates deeply in Black femme/ women communities where letters have long functioned as tangible remnants of care, intimacy, and continuity. Although my mother is not initially named or addressed in Take a Seat Sweet Sadie, it gradually turns towards her much like Celie's letters evolve in address. But rather than appealing to an omnipresent God, I call my mother back to herself to a power she once personified and poured into me. The poem printed in indigo carries the weight of grief and renewal. Indigo tends her as a baptismal color, holding sorrow while signaling transformation. Writing required relinquishing as did reading. When my mother encountered the poem, she too wept. This shared release becomes an act of care, an

unburdening, emotional, and bodily undoing. It acknowledges a difficult truth and practice: the work is never finished, but survival cannot be the only mode of living. Writing and rest converge as the final practice of rupture and rebirth. Rest like the blues is not simply a state, but a condition, mood, and method. Color psychology in my work exists as a feeling, rhythmic, and sonic register. Within Black expressive traditions, Imani Perry assert the "soul" emerges as an "intersectional stylization of survival [that] is conditioned by pain…and driven by imagination, innovation, and craft." (5) Similarly, Alie Walker's Celie can be read, as scholars suggest as a biographer, documenting and re-narrating the lives of women like herself, her sister, and Shug Avery in ways that resist their reduction. In *Fictional Blues*, Mack studying fictional blueswomen, like those found in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), who combat the "racist, patriarchal, and classist categorizations and limitations" informing their often "negative biographical representations" (69). *The Color Purple*, in Mack's account then, becomes yet another example of Black feminist interruptions of the patriarchal structures of the blues.

Writing becomes a method of world-building, speaking against imposed narratives. These traditions position creative practice as personal and political. Black women's cultural production grapples with layered forms of oppression while imagining alternative ways of being. bell hooks states we must learn not only to see, but to sense, to engage the world through embodied awareness. This distinction, repeated in Wynther's rethinking of knowledge and aesthetics opens space for storytelling, feeling, and relationality as valid modes of knowing tied to our humanity and being human. Creation is not separate from restoration; it is one of its conditions. Powell underscores how Black women's artistic production has historically been intertwined with Black politics, serving as a medium through which cultural survival, collective memory, and liberation are enacted. (2022) Community-embedded art can nurture collective grief, imaginative truth-telling, and emancipatory care (Jackson, 2025). Writing was the first form through which this work took shape. Whether it's long form poetry or reconstructed texts, my writing serves as an embodied archive of method and material,articulating emotions, thoughts, and theory as the conceptual scaffolding before I understood how it would physically and materially manifest.

To rest, is not just rupture but reorientation towards slowness, care, and the uncommodifiable self. Han describes this as a "deep, contemplative attention" and refusal of the constant demand to produce. Within my practice this manifests though slow, tactile bodily processes: layering, weaving, and writing that repels urgency. Within this body of work rest operates as a radical, political, personal, and spiritual framework grounded in intentional slowness and recurring engagement with my kinship environment, and material experimentation. My process honors the generational creative/work of Southern Black women as artisans, craftswomen, quilters, gardners, washerwomen, house keepers, cooks,

and so forth whose work was slow, meticulous, and ritualized as they juggled countless day to day demands. Every stage from preparation to final execution required presence and care. In my own practice, slow ritualistic processes allow me to fully inhabit my materials and voice while I reflect. During these prolonged periods, my mind wanders elsewhere thinking about these women, home, and snippets of gestural care. By touching every fiber, setting every type, and shaping every form with intention, I engage in the embodied practice of care that my mother and foremothers exemplify, reminded of those moments: the rocking chair, the snapping of greens, folding of sheets, the greasing of a scalp where these repetitive actions intertwine "work" and tenderness. Within an academic environment, where productivity feels measured through output and efficiency, this has often created self-doubt, unmet personal expectations, and frustrations against time and my performance. However, engagement with Black femme epistemology made me realize slowness was not a case of inefficiency, but heritage. I naturally gravitate to slower processes of making: lithography, letterpress, papermaking, weaving, and relief printing. These mediums require prolonged periods of countless incremental gestures. Each mark, impression, and thread accumulate time and space until a larger whole manifests. In this activated space, creating becomes a form of resting, reflection, and presence. I invite viewers and my subjects to unravel from Han's critique on neoliberal exhaustion. Together rest is repositioned as healing, ritual, and reclamation, not just a necessary condition for survival, but more important a tended site in which Black women/femme/ girls access interiority, creativity, and self-possession. In this space, writing is akin to breathing, Rest is to return.

Fem-now-me-all Wombikin

I am forever wading
waiting
forever wandering
wondering
within these waters of my own making
swimming/ sinking/spiraling yet again
until I've sunken and risen forth anew

I am no longer in ctrl, was I ever really?

All that lives here now is a sticky coldness
a funky darkness submerging me
I float/ drowning relentlessly
somehow, I have forgotten how to
breathe/how to release

there's a weight always pressing onto
me/into me/from all sides and
I'm unsure how to dig myself from this
earthen absence
not even a slither of light as a beacon

Hope, how do I reach you?
How do I reach myself again?
How do I breathe/dance/laugh as giddy
and light as I once did
when there were only daffodils and rolling
hills

Who can I grasp onto when I no longer
have myself?
I want to be the uncaged bird that sings
sweetly and soars electrically into the
indigo night
to be the honey suckle remembered on
supple lips
I want to be dearest nestled between
warm thighs
To be considered

I want to be the fem-now-me-all
wombikin I know myself to be
I want to fold/ fall/ dilapidate inside of
my multiplicity
Fluid and free
There was a time when my branches grew
beyond the chain link fence and wrought
gates
beyond the shoe-laced power lines
stretching into infinity
but as the seasons changed

I was no longer the lean limb thing
bending every which way
in awe/ yearning to expand/I matured
my roots stilted
leaves crinkled until one by one they left
me
small and brittle
a stump I became, no longer recognizing
the wispy willow tree or the milky
magnolia I once thought myself
To be
I want to reach HER
That beautiful mountainous silhouette
Whose nile rivers beam brightly where
the valleys dip in greeting
I want to be HER
Whose strides are miles wide/ Hips
sa-shaying in steady stride
But how do I reach a version of myself
that has yet to exist, a self that seems
familiar but completely foreign/forgotten
Is she simply a mirage, an impossible
figment, an allusive mermaid or mythic
Medusa
No map, hotline or SOS and I fear she/I
will disappear to the waters before I reach
her yet again, giving in to choppy
currents and tidal interventions
What remedy can solve this conundrum
or is it simply just pushing through one
strike after the others in hope she will
remain for me
Bc I believe it so and nothing else

Blind faith, determination, perseverance,
sheer will, hunger
Desire
I will be HER once more
Peacock feathers, pearly glimmer, and
iridescent tail
Leaving love in her wake
The roaming wildflower in an open
pasture
She/ I is lost/ lonely nestled in her
womb-like shell but
she/ I is lost wandering/ in translations
when she emerges from this baptism
she'll be healed and liberated from the
depths of sodden solace
To see light rays crackling through
Now A blossoming seed in still haven, able
to take her first exhale
She'll be wombikin.

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