

how'd i get here?

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about making meaning and the ways it shifts throughout one's lifetime while examining the Transatlantic Slave Trade, its aftermath and how it has directly affected my lived experiences.

Both fiction and non-fiction accounts of the aftermath of the Transatlantic Slave Trade have influenced this body of work. It moves from a personal archive of my life with a collection of quilt patches, *revisited*, and shifts to using textiles that respond to my exploration of historical facts. Written accounts of experiences from enslaved people directly influence two significant works (*traces* and *both sides of the door*). This thesis explores finding myself, how I have come to see the world presently and what it means to me to be living in the Black Diaspora. *how'd i get here*, a site-specific (or site-sensitive) installation that resides in Creston, BC is a way for me to connect with others. For as long as I want.

My work will continue to explore the narratives of those who have come before me and are forgotten, erased, ignored and unarchived. I want to remember their lives and bring meaning to those lives. It is important to do this so that our understandings of ourselves can shift.

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I was born within the Treaty 6 Territory and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4, also known as Edmonton, Alberta. I arrived uninvited in 2010 to settle on the land of the Yaqan Nukiy peoples of the Ktunaxa Nation (aka Creston, BC). It was a deliberate choice to settle here and align myself with this place, which I lovingly call the Empire of Dirt. I have a lifelong desire to understand what it means to belong here, and I will spend what's left of my life committed to developing a greater sense of belonging and sharing it with others. I feel rooted in the land, and I will continue to realign myself with such thinking here on Turtle Island.

Intentionally Black

Introduction: making meaning

Being the firstborn of a teenage girl who was given no choice to raise me, led to my adoption. With adoration, I acknowledge and honour my first mother of European descent, who endured extraordinary circumstances that led to my birth. I recognize and accept my biological father who is of African descent and a descendant of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. As a biracial woman, adopted and raised in a white family, it is vital to explain my genealogy because it has been a process of discovery that informs my work deeply and is ever-unfolding.

In 2022 I began reading the works of James Baldwin which caused a dramatic shift in my thinking. I began to write him letters, measuring my sense of being in the weight of Baldwin's words. The act of writing the letters sparked deep rooted anger and resentment. I felt I had been separated from folks who could see me and hear me in ways that the white community in which I had been embedded for so long could not. By writing letters I was engaging in a kind of conversation or communion with Baldwin and other Black thinkers - even if it was only through books.

My oppressed and silenced past no longer speaks for me and it matters that my lived experiences are shared. And it matters that I interrupt old ways of thinking to provoke difficult conversations about race and racism.

Specific and intertwined histories shape my practice: Transatlantic Slavery, the Black migration to Canada, and my adoption. Black women scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, Katherine McKittrick and bell hooks, who write about the Black experience, have enabled my voice and nourished my art practice.

I make every effort to silence the culturally prescribed ways of communicating I have crafted over the years so that I might fit in with the dominant white culture. There is an embodiment of freedom which is now nurtured and emboldened. McKittrick reminds me that methods and methodologies can be "act[s] of rebellion and [focus] on how Black

studies scholars have used and can use method to engender radical scholarly praxis.”¹ My art practice serves as a methodology for viewing overlooked and unarchived histories that are rooted in the past.

My work creates a space for viewers, including myself, to interrupt current thinking. Memories and deep-rooted communications to a past unknown to my consciousness but known to my subconscious, add to my research and my making. While it is not within the scope of this document to define the Transatlantic Slave Trade, I will expose the ways this historical event has shaped my work through stories, memories, theories, and geographical explanations. To be clear, this thesis is a researched journey about my Blackness² and is “not [nor is it meant to be] a guided tour of trauma.”³ It intends to interrupt ways of thinking and untether ourselves from a dominant history that allows us to reconsider that history.

The following pages are organized by titles of work; the description of the work; how it came to be; followed by an image of the work. There are three Blackplates interspersed to interrupt some thinking, which is meant to mimic the way I want my work to occur for viewers. The Blackplates do not inform my work but mean to interrupt and offer a moment of reflection.

So, how'd I get here?

¹ McKittrick, Katherine. *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Duke University Press, 2021. p. 35

² the state or identity of being a Black person is defined by some as “a person with dark skin, especially someone who comes from or whose ancestors originally came from Africa” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blackness>

³ Isen, Tajja. “Bad Impressions: The hidden racism of book cover design.” *Walrus*, vol. 21, no. 7, 2024, p. 63-65.

WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY

At the end of a long day, I was tired, and I engaged in a prickly conversation. I was offered an opportunity to reconsider my comment about not wanting to join for dinner and be a part of 'community' ... otherwise, my friend remarked that I would "find myself on the wrong side of history". I responded with, "I already am". One of us laughed.

One of us was arrogant enough to believe their interpretation of community and what it was to belong to a community was indeed the ONLY way to belong to a community – no choice. The other felt sheepish enough to consider that they should succumb to the expectation of being a part of the community. Both persons have been trained to operate as the 'all-knowing' and the 'follower'. There is no freedom for either individual, which results in a kind of conflict.

***revisited* (series, 2023 to present)**

My research at Emily Carr began by revisiting the life experiences that formed both me, as an individual, and my art practice. Although I was trained in painting, I chose to work with textiles.⁴ The influence of textiles began early in my mother's sewing spaces. My mother left her sewing projects throughout the house and everyone in the family was aware when she had a sewing project. Made mostly of wool and thread, *revisited* is a series of 25 - 20 x 20cm quilt patches accompanied by a separate text that shares a short story from my life. These patches were created throughout my house.

Investigating and unravelling decades of my memories helped to sort out an existence that made sense to me. The patches are autobiographical examples made in the spirit of what Saidiya Hartman asserts are "not about navel gazing, [but] trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them."⁵ Each patch is a collection of colour and texture to define and archive my lived experiences, using both a sewing machine and a needle and thread. The thread is better than a brushstroke.

revisited investigates how the construct of race places us in social positions and stops us from meaningful engagement. The construct of race supports a kind of cognitive dissonance at an early age that legitimizes our positions in society. For my entire childhood and adolescence, I developed a specific understanding of Blackness - a manufactured understanding of 'race'. This limited my ability to connect in meaningful ways as I consistently saw myself as an outsider and positioned myself with a fabricated idea of who I was when it didn't align with what I wanted to see myself to be.

In an Instagram post, bell hooks⁶ shares an example of a young Black girl who loved the cartoon character, Doc McStuffins. Doc is a Black cartoon character that takes care of animals and is loved by everyone. The girl is colouring Doc in a colouring book with a

⁴ Textiles have always been an important part of my making, but it didn't influence my BFA where I trained to be a painter in the late 80s. I chose to paint because painting was expected of me by my peers and by my instructors. Textiles were considered to be craft and was regarded as domestic labour.

⁵ Saunders, Patricia J. Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman. *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 6, no. 1:7. 2008

⁶ Whiteness Studies. video of bell hooks sharing a story from her book, "All About Love". *Instagram*, 15 October, 2024.

pinky ‘flesh’ crayon⁷, and her mother asks her why she is colouring Doc flesh tone instead of brown. The little girl explained that she didn’t want the character to be brown because that would be ‘nasty and bad.’ This example of cognitive dissonance with the little girl investing in white supremacy is demonstrative of the intrusive character of white supremacist culture. Globally, many children begin at an early age to value being white and create a social hierarchy based on skin colour - just like I did. This kind of dissonance appears in my work and is a fact for so many of us. These quilt patches ask us to consider our role in this bias and how we might both reconcile our grief about it – and find a new way to interact with each other.

revisited: sticks and stones (2023)

A patch titled, *revisited: sticks and stones* (figure 4), revisits my memory as a ten-year-old. It was a hot day in the village, and I was riding my bike on the newly formed concrete sidewalk in my neighbourhood. My bike had coloured straws on the spokes and tassels hanging from the handlebars. My striped t-shirt sewn by my mother is recreated with similar colours of wool arranged in a striped pattern. Near the center, there is an appliqued egg made of wool. My bike ride ended abruptly when a car of teenage boys rode by, threw eggs at me, and shouted ‘N*****’.⁸ My big brother left the house in pursuit of the boys, but I never knew if he actually confronted them. This experience for a Black person is not new and it isn’t reserved for TV or the newspaper. In *Ordinary Notes*, Black scholar Christina Sharpe, shares anecdotes on her own experiences of anti-Black racism and white supremacy. I struggled with an inner dialogue that attempted to minimize the significance of Sharpe’s accounts. A voice in my head was reminding me that I was reading ‘nothing important’, and ‘you’re making a big deal of nothing’ or ‘you need to get out of the past and move on’. But *Ordinary Notes*

⁷ Crayola discontinued the “flesh” tone in 1962 and replaced it with the name “peach”. It wasn’t until 1992 that Crayola introduced a multicultural package of crayons and expanded this in 2020 with the ‘Colours of the World, that included 24 different skin colours.

⁸ My relationship with the ‘N*****’ is simple. I will never use it as a word and will use the ‘N word’ to signify its presence. It is worth noting here, that Sharpe doesn’t use ‘N word’ at all, she uses a blacked-out line to represent the word. Erasing it? Surely not. Giving it power, likely not. Unfortunately, it will never go away from our language and will likely continue to be a contentious term for decades to come. What’s next? I don’t know – but the term isn’t going to go away. It sits beside another fabricated social construct – ‘race’.

caused a visceral reaction for me – a pang in my stomach reflected a sense of sadness, that dissolved and produced anger, and later – kinship. Sharpe’s recollection of being called ‘N*****’ as a child and spat on after getting off the school bus is familiar. Sharpe watched her father get into their car to pursue the bus. “In my memory: my father saw, but he and I never spoke of it. In my memory, we were mutually shamed by it and, somehow, also mutually sympathetic to each other’s untenable position. Mine, for it having been done to me; my father’s, for having been witness to it.”⁹ I feel comfort knowing that I was not the only child to experience this, and perhaps the hard feelings I harboured for decades about this name-calling are warranted. An experience like this crosses borders.



⁹ Sharpe, Christina. *Ordinary Notes*. Alfred A. Knoff, 2023. p. 12

Fig. 3. Marnie Temple, *revisited: sticks and stones*, 2023. Natural-dyed wool, thread, accompanied by a story on cardstock. 20 x 20cm.

revisited: just like snow white (2025)

Another patch from the series, *revisited: just like snow white* (figure 5), is inspired by an interview I had with artist and scholar David Garneau (Métis) in March 2024. David and I completed our BFA together and we would occasionally find ourselves engaging in conversations about our identities. During the interview, David reminded me of a childhood story I shared with him in our final year of school, and it was that conversation that influenced his work *Attempted Enlightening* (2019) (figure 6). It is an oil painting that illustrates a bar of Sunlight soap sitting on top of a stack of books. In response to the interview and to *Attempted Enlightening*, I created *just like snow white*. Below is an excerpt of the interview.

Garneau: So, the story I remember about our time at school, and I am positive it was you, because you were the only Black woman that I remember from that time, was about soap. I don't remember if you made the piece, or just talking about it, but it was about trying to wash the Blackness off your skin. Five years ago, I made a painting, *Attempted Enlightening*, acrylic on panel, 50.5 x 40.5 cm, 2019, that recalled your story, and similar stories I've heard. It shows a bar of Sunlight soap on a stack of books (the Truth and Reconciliation Report). Many Indigenous kids have also tried washing the colour from their skin. There is this parallel with Indigenous and Black kids having this desire to be white. That story was moving and terrifying.

just like snow white is made of wool, illustrating the 1960s version of the household powdered cleanser, AJAX. Getting the colours and the AJAX label right were important

for me to get an accurate reflection of the late 1960s era.¹⁰ This label for some brings about nostalgic feelings defined as a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a past that is typically connected with happy personal associations. This label does not do this for me. And perhaps there are many objects from that time that do not arouse feelings of sentiment for me or for *others like me*. The patch was a laborious creation in many ways and does not compare to the years of keeping that memory hidden. I was five when my mother caught me washing myself with AJAX. I remember listening to Angela Davis¹¹ describe Black children trying to wash the Blackness from their skin in *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* audiobook. I was saddened yet comforted in knowing that I was not the only one, and now feel the distress as a parent trying to help their child make sense of wanting to have white skin.



¹⁰ My use of colour is connected to an inner expression of myself that I have long since buried. Now uncovered, it sometimes acts as a resistance to contemporary colour usage. *I no longer need/want to follow the norm. Perhaps, it is the norm that needs rethinking.*

¹¹ Davis, Angela Y., *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Narrated by Angela Y. Davis and Coleen Marlo., Tantor Media, Inc, 2016. Audiobook.

Fig. 4. Marnie Temple, *revisited: just like snow white*, 2024. Natural-dyed wool, cotton, polyester, thread, accompanied by a story on cardstock. 20 x 20cm.



Fig. 5. David Garneau, *Attempted Enlightenment*, 2019. Acrylic on panel, 50.5 x 40.5 cm.

The *revisited* quilt patches explore what it means to me to be human. They provide me and the viewer an everyday lens. I became curious about the work of Carrie Mae Weems while developing *revisited*. It was important for me to locate a Black artist that could achieve that.

revisited is intended to be much like Weems' *The Kitchen Table Series* (1990), a series of 20 photographs that reveal intimate moments of a fictitious everyday life in the artist's kitchen. The photographs capture Weems spending time with neighbours, in conversation with a lover, sitting with her daughters, or consuming a drink alone. It is important to consider that her work is also about being a woman who happens to be Black. If the viewer primarily focuses on Weems' being a Black woman, the work can be centred around race rather than the work exploring the heart of the kitchen and what goes on in

such a space. The work is meant to share universal experiences of life and is not meant to be an all-encompassing expression of Black life.

Over 30 years ago Weems was “thinking about whether it might be possible to use Black subjects to represent universal concerns”¹² with *The Kitchen Table Series*. I am left wondering if we are any further ahead today. Weems told *W* magazine,

“I think [the series is] important in relationship to Black experience, but it’s not about ‘race’. I think that most work that’s made by Black artists is considered to be about Blackness. Unlike work that’s made by white artists, which is assumed to be universal at its core.”¹³

The kitchen is a universal space recognizable to most people, *and some viewers* would additionally see the work as a voyeuristic opportunity to view Black life. The work was largely viewed (via a white lens) by art critics at the time, as Black art.¹⁴ It is important to understand that this work is about everyday life and that the photographs happen to capture the lives of Black people. As viewers, we are given the gift to rethink our perspectives and consider what connects us, without making meaning out of our physical differences. *The kitchen is not the place to make meaning out of our physical difference.* Here, I think of American video artist and cinematographer Arthur Jafa, whose work reminds us that “Hey, Black people are humans too.”¹⁵

¹² hooks, bell. *art on my mind: visual politics*, The New Press, 1995. p. 76

¹³ Eckardt, Steph. “Carrie Mae Weems Reflects on Her Seminal ‘Kitchen Table’ Series.” *W Magazine*, 7 Apr. 2016, www.wmagazine.com/story/carrie-mae-weems-kitchen-table-series-today-interview.

¹⁴ hooks, bell, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, The New Press, 1995. p. 74-93

¹⁵ Arthur Jafa: Sequencing the Notes | Art 21 “Extended Play”. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpLgt_yo1Ek

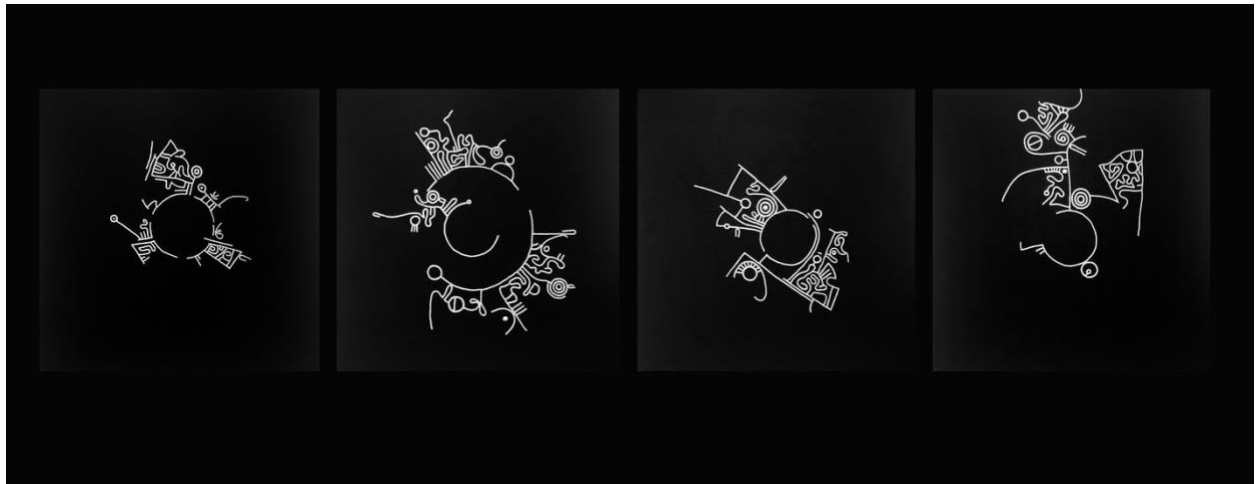


Fig. 6. Marnie Temple, *interruptions*, 2024. Wool strips on fleece. Four of five panels, each measuring 120 x 120cm.



Fig. 7. Marnie Temple, *interruptions (details)*, 2024

***interruptions* (2024)**

My persistent exploration and curiosity about Euro-centric social interactions and constructs continues with *interruptions*. The textile panels investigate my ways of being during conversations when I experience a type of ‘double-consciousness’. W.E.B. Du Bois coined this term in 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk*, which identified a struggle that Black people have while navigating within the white dominant culture in the aftermath of slavery. This double-consciousness makes it difficult for Black people to embrace their culture and create a strong sense of self – a self that did not look at oneself through the eyes of another.¹⁶ Although Du Bois never wrote again about double-consciousness, his words did influence others. For example, Black Sociologist Paul Gilroy further examined the concept in *The Black Atlantic*. Gilroy’s theorizing of “double consciousness” deepens Du Bois’s work and explores the feeling of a Black person who might identify with more than one social identity. In turn, these experiences make it difficult to develop a sense of self, autonomy, or agency.¹⁷ *interruptions* is a representation of my preoccupation with my duality of thought and shying away from speaking freely when engaging with others. The panels show a mix of conversations that shape my uncensored expression and capture visually a type of internal dialogue. The work is a window into my double consciousness and a source of refuge and comfort for me. Both the process and its completed state reduce this duality of thought and contribute to a sense of agency by making that which is silent and invisible into tangible material.

interruptions (figure 6) comprises of four 120 x 120cm polyester fleece panels with 5mm strips of felted wool. I begin each panel by placing strips of wool cut using a rotary wheel on the unstretched fleece panel. These lines create a kind of indecipherable scrawl or doodle. Each panel begins with an incomplete circle at the center followed by intuitively placed wool strips. They are pinned and attached by sewing each strip with a needle and thread. Smaller circles emerge that suggest a lack a maturity or an

¹⁶ Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Edited by Brent Hayes Edwards, Oxford University Press, 2008

¹⁷ Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993

incomplete understanding - a missing truth or a starting point. The lines meander freely with curves and soft edges like uncensored words in a conversation. Like the nuances of a conversation, there are spaces of chaos, controlled emotions and thoughts, collections of words that make sense and don't make sense, times of frustration, moments of not being heard, and so on. The lines are invariably interrupted by the black fleece.

It is important to know that these raised wool lines came from wool jackets. I washed the jackets several times in hot water and then cut up them up to make lines. These repurposed jackets play a secondary role of providing cover or protection - creating a tactile surface that embodies an unresolved knowledge. The work explores my relationship with myself and others, and specifically the ways I navigate in white and Black spaces. Said in another way, there is a 'twoness' - an awareness of myself through the eyes of another. Black scholar Debra Thompson suggests that this double consciousness *"is an utterly exhausting tactic of Black survival, defined by the necessity of being neither here nor there and yet nowhere and everywhere at the same time."*¹⁸

¹⁸ Thompson, Debra. *The Long Road Home: On Blackness and Belonging*. Simon & Schuster, 2022. p. 5



Fig. 8. Marnie Temple, *traces*, 2024. Wood dowel and PVC dome structure, polyester fleece, natural-dyed wool, thread. ECU Grad gallery: 6m x 6m.

***traces* (2024)**

My research further explores these internal conversations in *traces*, an experimental installation that I created during my first summer residency at ECU. The installation was comprised of a dome covered in black fleece with white wool strips. The dome was meant to figuratively represent the hold of a ship. While spending my days in solitude

constructing the dome, I contemplated the construction of slave ships and what might have gone through the minds of the builders. The white wool lines on the dome are placed there as a metaphor of survival – mirroring words exchanged in the hold. The black line that leaves the dome, makes its way along the floor and up onto the wall to begin another existence. This solitary line reaches another imaginary place of comfort – connecting with others. And so, a collection of lines begins on the wall to recreate itself in relation to others. The lines no longer find meaning in the double consciousness.

Tina Campt, a Black feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art, wrote *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing the Way We See*. In the book, Campt refers to Harriet Ann Jacobs' description of her life while living in a confined attic space. The space is "claimed as simultaneously an enclosure and a space for enacting practices of freedom-practices of thinking, plotting, envisioning, and realizing alternative forms of possibility."¹⁹ In the early stages of developing my line drawings, I imagined an existence centuries ago trapped in a reality that I did not ask for – like being captive in the hold of a slave ship or hiding in an attic. It dominated my thinking. It reminded me of the words of Harriet Jacobs, an enslaved woman during the mid 1800s.

loophole of retreat

the dark enclosure of an attic space where she plots and plans

she dreams of possibility from within impossible strictures of confinement

her escape is immanent, as her imagination is boundless

her enclosure is an incubator for a practice of refusal and a roadmap to freedom

- Harriet Ann Jacobs, a sampling of one of Jacobs' registers in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 1861

Simone Leigh, an artist examined in *Black Gaze*, explores Jacob's life during a seven-year period of living in a garret. Leigh's exhibition, *The Loophole of Retreat*, includes an installation of three monumental figures ranging between eight and ten feet high to face

¹⁹ Campt, Tina M. *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See*. The MIT Press, 2021. p. 146

each other and hold space for Black women, their work, and their power. It is a contentious installation that has some critics question the three figures' presence within the space. Perhaps the work is before its time as it represents an overlooked history not yet embraced, like Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* that took decades to be widely acknowledged.²⁰ Leigh's work is committed to honoring the agency of Black women, an agency that has been a part of a shrouded and overlooked history. Although my work is not as much about centering Black women, it is about agency and finding a voice without the interruption of another and this examination happens through my experience with Blackness. Leigh goes on to create the Loophole of Retreat symposium at the 2022 Venice Biennale that creates a platform for dialogue, performances, and presentations that center Black women's intellectual and creative labor.

Like Camp, Katherine McKittrick prompts us to grapple with Jacobs' experience in the garret in *Demonic Ground*. McKittrick asserts that "Black women have always had a meaningful relationship with geography... Black women's lives are underwritten by ongoing and innovative spatial practices that have always occurred, not in the margins, but right in the middle of our historically present landscape."²¹ Jacobs' loophole of retreat, like *interruptions* and *traces*, supports my experience of being in another place. Jacobs' writing for Leigh and myself explores freedom, alternative forms of possibility and envisioning that underpin a place of power and resiliency.

By the end of my time at ECU, I came to understand that in *traces*, the Black line leaving the dome make an imaginary place of solace and comfort. The lines begin to create a deeper more meaningful experience – one that explores a place that I was becoming more familiar with. I was investigating a language and redefining a mode of communication.

²⁰ Harriet Jacobs book was published under the pseudonym Linda Brent. Her book was the first book written by a woman to chronicle the life of an enslaved woman. She couldn't bear to face the shame she felt for the stories shared in the book, so she published under another name.

²¹ McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds*. University of Minnesota Press. 2006. p. 60

not so distant strangers (2024)

While continuing my inquiry of Euro-centric social interactions and constructs, I chose to create a pair of large-scale boxing gloves, *not so distant strangers* (2024), that illuminates the punch that microaggressions pack. The gloves espouse the “I meant no harm” comments from the social and cultural dominant group, such as the use of “kind and thoughtful”²² utterances of oppression, or “harmless jokes”. These phrases and comments are commonly understood as microaggressions.

I responded to these utterances with the use of humour in *not so distant strangers* to locate how they have shown up in my past. I remember meeting with my Department Head while on a substitute teaching assignment. My day included a spare in the afternoon. I asked my Department Head if there was anything I could do to fill the time and she smiled and said that “I could grab a mop and clean the floors like my ancestors did.” These kinds of experiences substantiate for me Gilroy’s theorizing of the double consciousness. It leaves a human being evaluating and undermining their sense of self. I saw myself one way and my Department Head saw me in another way.

not so distant strangers (figure 8) is a commentary on social class and ‘race’ that is reminiscent of an era in our not-so-distant past. Fine upholstery fabric is used to create two large boxing gloves each measuring 40 x 40 x 75cm. The pale ocean blue satin for the palm of the glove and the assembly of synthetic blue and green upholstery swatches are carefully chosen and mimic the colours reminiscent of the cultural ruptures of colonialism. The pieced together fabrics could have been afforded by very few, and it is that class of individual that wear these boxing mitts in the afterlife of slavery. The gloves are stuffed with pillow material, strung with white silky rope, knotted, and hung from a hook that I had collected while renovating an old house.

²² I have always noticed a kind and thoughtful correction that the dominant culture offered me. I always believed it and that I should abide by those kind and thoughtful words. Now, it occurs to me whether these words were intentionally meant to keep me oppressed or not - they were words that kept me oppressed.

Under the gloves is a painted grey wall inscribed with a letter I wrote to James Baldwin. My 'unsilencing' began with James Baldwin and it was his writing that helped me to make sense of myself, and myself in relation to others. I heard my voice in his voice and his thoughts in my mind as he wrote about love.

Boxing inside a ring is a combative engagement that supports an agreed upon set of rules and regulations. Boxing mitts are used to protect the fighter and the opponent from extreme harm. Although I created this work with certain lived experiences in mind, the boxing mitts take on their own meaning for the viewer. These gloves were constructed to symbolize all the women from the Euro-centric and dominant culture who wanted to define me, put me in my place and keep me quiet – and they did so with much civility.



Fig. 9. Marnie Temple, *not so distant strangers*, 2024. Assortment of upholstery fabric, thread, rope, gromets, paint, felt marker, coat hook. Each glove measures 40 x 40 x 75cm. Frame one: installation view, Frame two: detail.

Implicating the viewer with their relationship to boxing and 'race' can be explored in *Skin Tight* (1995). It is an installation of eight punching bags created by American text-based artist, Glen Ligon. In 1993, Ligon was invited to work at The Fabric Workshop and Museum. Fascinated with the iconographic power of boxing, Ligon constructed eight punching bags, each with a different expression that represented the Black male body and his position in the white dominant culture. The bags were created to share a cultural relationship between 'race' and class. In an interview about the work, Ligon says, "Boxing is the space of hyper-masculinity. It engages notions of sexuality and relies on the mythology of the brutish Black man. It shows the ambivalent relationship white Americans have to the Black body."²³ Ligon wanted to make the bags look like authentic bags, but he also wanted to create a statement about the Black male body. The gloves, although not a statement about the Black body, male or female, are meant to create a statement about the civility and deference of the white dominant culture and its interaction with people who look like me or more broadly, minoritized people.

<https://fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/collections/skin-tight/>

Fig. 10. Glenn Ligon, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, *Skin Tight* (series of 8 punching bags), 1995. Ink, pigment, vinyl, clear acetate, silk, canvas, leather, and metal chains. Each bag from 45-50 inches high x 13-inch diameter. Edition of 7. Bequest of Marion Boulton Stroud.

²³ Boulton Stroud, Marion. *New Material as New Media: The Fabric Workshop and Museum*. MIT Press, 2003.

how'd i get here

In the summer of 2022, I travelled to Las Vegas, the ancestral and traditional lands of the Southern Paiute people, with my two adult children. We attended the funeral of my late husband's brother, Michael who was 58 when he died of heart failure. My son, who was and still is adventurous, insisted that we do a tourist activity. He chose the Shark Reef Aquarium, an underground aquarium beneath a casino on the strip. Thousands of captured sea animals were there and after passing through a long glass-walled tunnel of fish, we arrived in a very dark space. We were surrounded by water, ocean life and a large wooden structure that mimicked the hold of a ship. There were cargo items strewn about and benches for tourists to comfortably sit and view the fish. I wanted to leave immediately but asked myself not to wreck it for Drew. I sat down and pondered what the belly of a ship was like 300 years ago. I wanted to ask folks to crowd up against me, against the walls of the ship and close their eyes. I wanted them to imagine a different moment in time. I didn't know then what I know now about myself. I didn't understand the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the same way as I do now.

how'd i get here (2025) is a site-specific (or site-sensitive)²⁴ installation in progress of my maquette of a 17th century slave ship. It measures 4.5 metres tall by 3 metres wide by 3.5 metres deep and emerges from a field on a mountainside at Empire of Dirt Residency (EoD) in Creston, BC, the unceded and traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation.²⁵

²⁴ I first heard of the term site-sensitivity through Dr Taru Elfving, a Finnish curator and writer, who gave a talk titled *Towards Site-Sensitivity* in February 2025 at Goldsmiths University of London. I've been curious about Elfving's work since we started the artist residency in Creston, BC. Elfving describes site-sensitivity as shifting emphasis from the objects or sites of attention to the practices of engagement, to perceptiveness rather than perception, to responsiveness and sensibilities. Site-sensitivity is neither an alternative notion to site-specificity nor as a particular applicable methodology as such, but rather as an emergent approach that can only arise out of processes and practices of entanglement with specific sites. Although I was not able to attend the talk, this definition of site-sensitivity deeply influences how I might discuss *how'd i get here*. <https://contemporaryartarchipelago.org/event/seminar-towards-site-sensitivity/>

²⁵ EoD is situated on 30 acres of previously logged land and is the last address up Goat Mountain Forest Service Road on Arrow Mountain. After Andrew, my husband, died in 2007, I was aimless. But his departure gave me license to discover the person other's saw me as, but I had not yet seen myself to be. It's a terrible experience to lose a life and find a life straight away – time is not part of the equation like people say. In 2010, my partner Jim and I, began to settle on the mountainside as we set out to make EoD. Andrew's time here would not end. Sometimes we find ourselves in spaces making things and we are not aware of the significance of our actions – until time passes and we settle. With our own hands, Jim and I made EoD and I began to dream about making connections with a community I did not yet know. Fifteen years later, I am gifted with spending time with people like me at Black Artists Gather residency. I share this as this is a part of my creative practice – to coalesce with others *like me*.

The structure is made from fir deadfall that was milled onsite. Using Yakisugi,²⁶ an ancient Japanese method to preserve the wood, I burnt fir planks over a large firepit and then assembled using screws as fasteners. The burning of the wood was a contemplative and quiet process. *Hours were spent around the fire pit as I considered the oppressive past of this country that extends far beyond the oppression of Indigenous people. This past includes the history of Japanese internment in the Kootenays. All the while I expanded my understanding of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is all connected.* There are three ship masts that pierce through the grass as though the hold rests below the field. The ship looks as though it is sinking, but also appears to be emerging from the tall grasses simultaneously. The structure faces north leaving the destruction of the south in its wake. Approaching *how'd i get here* first occurs while driving down the laneway. Once the trees part, there is a view to a small pasture where this large form emerges from tall grass. The viewer is confronted by a large organized black mass that seems out of place. Coming around to the other side of the ship, the viewer can see the inside of the bow, but unable to access the hold. The hold is beneath the earth – inaccessible and held by the land.

how'd i get here will live with me over the course of several seasons and perhaps over many years until its fate is otherwise decided. The burnt wooden structure embodies what I now know myself as, what I have yet to discover about myself, and my ancestors, a Japanese interment history rooted here in the Ktunaxa territory, and of course the land.

²⁶ Yakisugi, more commonly referred to as Shou Sugi Ban in the West, translates as “Yaki” literally meaning “burnt” and “sugi” referring to the Japanese cypress tree. The proper term Yakisugi was lost in translation when westerners began to use Shou Sugi Ban. I use the Yakisugi process to create ship boards.
http://nakamotoforestry.eu/what-is-yakisugi/#elementor-toc_heading-anchor-4



Figure 11. Marnie Temple, *how'd I get here* (site prior to installation), 2025, Creston, BC.

It is difficult to pinpoint the conception of *how'd I get here*. A composite of feelings uncovered throughout my life of unknowingness or some other world experiences root this work. However, one memory at the age of eleven stands out in my mind that started many internal conversations about my place of origin. At eleven, I watched *Roots*, a television mini-series based on Alex Haley's 1976 novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. It was the summer of 1977 and after dinner, my family sat down to watch the first episode. I wanted them to say something, but they didn't. It occurs to me now that they probably didn't know what to say. It was shocking to see Black people portrayed the way they were. *Roots* became my only access to any history of slavery until my adult years, and by that time, I had chosen to bury the uncomfortable emotions that arose that night while watching a television show. It was a mistake to be watching

the series without talking about it as a family.²⁷ I felt a lot of shame and I felt like I was a lesser human being than my family members. It was after this tv series that I was subjected to new nicknames like Kunta Kinta and Kizzy - *more 'sticks and stones'*.

Roots was the foundation for many painful thoughts and the germination of the double consciousness in my formative years. I have always been curious about the history of slavery but did not have access to it until my adult years, and by that time, I chose not to subject myself to it.

After receiving the results from a DNA test in 2024, I came to terms with 'knowing' that I was a descendant of enslaved peoples. *Roots* was more than a tv series. A deeper examination of the Transatlantic Slave Trade was triggered. I became more curious about the life of my ancestors and wanted an understanding that reached beyond *Roots*. I began reading about the middle passage and found it disturbing. I kept wondering about the journey and how a person could survive such conditions?! I began to create some thought experiments that began to inform my work. It is not within the scope of this thesis that I will examine this part of history. This examination is in the early stages of exploration in my work. The discovery of this history for the reader will be up to the reader of this thesis to do on their own – just like I did. I seek a connection to my family and ancestors. *Where did they come from and how did I make it as far north as Canada to my current home in rural B.C., in the "afterlife of slavery?"*²⁸

Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* situates us all in the afterlife of slavery. No matter our skin colour, we are all having to live with this history as it lives on and reduces some of us through feelings of shame, guilt, ignorance, and avoidance – all ways of being that

²⁷ Discussing the series as a family to provide a digestible context would have made a difference to me. Without the conversation, I was left to make meaning on my own. It was challenging to talk about slavery then and it still is. I intend to make space for these difficult conversations with my work. Thus far, I have engaged in several conversations with folks, and we all have different experiences with the series. It made a lasting impression, either knowingly or unknowingly.

²⁸ The "afterlife of slavery" is a term coined by Saidiya Hartman to describe the ongoing devaluing of Black lives and the continuation of slavery's effects on Black Americans. Afterlife rather than the aftermath centres our humanity not the circumstances around our humanity.

present no possibility. It is at the core of erasure.²⁹ Sharpe writes, “It was with this sense of wakefulness as consciousness that most of my family lived in awareness of itself as, and in, the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation”.³⁰ Unfinished emancipation is explored further in Canadian scholar Rinaldo Walcott’s book, *The Long Emancipation*. Walcott asserts that the Black community has yet to be emancipated and that the struggles that existed in the past still exists but under different pretenses. But there must be something else that we can create – something hopeful. In an interview, McKittrick says “Thinking beyond identity-self moves us toward other, more interesting questions, which attend to how freedom is imagined and enacted through our extra human worlds. For me this is also about what songs, environment, ecology, water, poems, and theoretical leaps tell us about exploding coloniality and ‘race’ thinking.”³¹ *how’d i get here* requires the viewer to ponder such thoughts - the existence of this ship in the afterlife of slavery. I’m not sure that the slave ship has shed itself from my consciousness as the meanings I have made from my many memories are not free from racist interactions. In other words, my imagination still exists in the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation.

The slave ship has many meanings for Black artists and responses to the slave ship vary. Charles Gaines created his first large-scaled work called *Moving Chains* which resembles the hull of a ship with nine sizeable chains overhead within the structure. The monumental installation at Governors Island, New York occupies 110 feet of the shoreline overlooking lower Manhattan, the unceded territories of the Lenape people. It is meant to unroot overlooked histories. *Moving Chains* will move to Cincinnati³² where Gaines will continue “to reveal those uncomfortable stories” about slavery and capitalism. The history of the site is important to Gaines and serves as a place to

²⁹ I have been pondering this and wonder if I can make such an assertion? It is a theory I have. I haven't found evidence of this theorizing, nor have I tried to research such a claim. Maybe I should say white supremacy and erasure. Maybe it doesn't matter enough to be explored. Maybe Erasure. A curiosity of mine.

³⁰ Sharpe, Christina. In *The Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press. 2016. p. 4

³¹ Prescod-Weinstein, Chandra. *Public Thinker: Katherine McKittrick on Black Methodologies and Other Ways of Being*. Public Books. 2.1.2021.

<https://www.publicbooks.org/public-thinker-katherine-mckittrick-on-black-methodologies-and-other-ways-of-being/>

³² At the time of writing this thesis, *Moving Chains* has not been relocated to Cincinnati, the ancestral land of the Shawnee, Miami (Myaamia), Delaware (Lenni Lenape), and Wyandot.

critique “American capitalism and American economic development but also America’s investment in slavery and a critique of Manifest Destiny and imperialism, introducing quite provocative critiques that have been obscured in the education that I got” says Gaines in an interview for Art in America. “I want *Moving chains* to refer to more than one thing. I don’t want it to just refer to slavery; When you walk into it, you enter a really kind of intimidating space where these chains are above your head, and you can see them and you can hear them. They make this sound of what it sounds like to be in the hull of a wooden ship. But it also feels like you’re in the hull of a slave ship. So through analogy, we’ve tried to link these separate narratives, which is the personal intention that I have in the formal critique of this work.”³³

What makes my work different from Gaines is the significance of the site. *Moving Chains* is very public and temporarily resides on the former slaveship ports. It is also in sight of the Statue of Liberty. In addition, Gaines’ work engages the viewer’s auditory sense.

how’d i get here sits quietly and alone on a mountainside.³⁴ I am a ‘displaced person’ defined by an intersection of having ancestors of enslaved people, having ancestors of the English colonizer, and adopted and raised to live an assimilated life. *If I choose to embrace this intersectionality defined by others, then I am lost - displaced. If I choose to live on this mountainside, embrace and love the land, I can come to accept that I have arrived.* Dionne Brand in *A Map to the Door of No Return* discusses what it means to inhabit a space. While living in a rural Ontario, Brand addresses how she ends up in Burnt River. “End up is not the right phrase.”, she writes. “My life is not over. Land may be a better word. Landing is what people in the Diaspora do. Landing at ports, dockings, bridgings, stocks, borders, outposts. Burnt River is another outpost, another destination.” (Brand, p. 150 Map). Creston is another destination. I have arrived here – I

³³ Duron, Maximiliano. Charles Gaines’s Monumental Installation on Governors Island Marked a Meeting Point for Hidden Histories. November 2, 2023. Art in America.

³⁴ The ship is situated on land ‘owned’ by Jim and myself on unceded territory of the Ktunaxa Nation. Land ownership is a difficult construct for me as it is wrapped up in capitalist and colonialist ideals. It is important for me to acknowledge this and it’s complex nature while I exist in this capitalist context.

have landed here. This is what defines *how'd i get here*— it is inherently personal, not unlike *Moving Chains* is for Gaines.

***both sides of the door* (2025)**

both sides of the door is a response to reading *The Invention of Wings* (2014) by Sue Monk Kidd. The story begins in Charleston in 1803 on the day 11-year-old Sarah Grimké is given Hetty³⁵, a 10-year-old slave girl as a birthday gift. Hetty was expected to always remain with Sarah, except at night, when she slept outside Sarah's bedroom door on the floor – with nothing.



Figure 12. Marnie Temple, *both sides of the door*, 2025, Assortment of fabrics, wool, zippers, thread, and pillow forms. mock up installation in artist's studio, Creston BC.

I recall now that my experience while reading the novel was frustrating. I wanted to hear more about Hetty but that never happened. It was disappointing. Did I want more

³⁵ Who is Hetty Grimké really?

because I needed more? Or was there simply the absence of ‘more’ about Hetty? I found myself challenged by this absence of ‘more’. Kidd was missing something unshared, underdeveloped and more importantly - unknown. It wasn’t until I read Dionne Brand’s *Salvage* that I began to fully comprehend why the absence of Hetty’s side of the story was disappointing. Brand asks *readers like me*³⁶ to consider that

“We were trained in reading, and trained to read, those seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary texts. These texts had, and have, a pedagogical function in colonial and imperialist practices. These fictions were the not-so-soft legitimating apparatus of colonialism and imperialism across many subordinated territories and peoples. These fictions became canonical, they achieved a kind of untouchable status, and they are now attended by acres of criticism which somehow, nevertheless, leaves intact the untouchable status.” (Brand, *Salvage*. p. 60)

Whether or not it was purposefully done, Kidd wrote what was available to her. The archived words and thoughts from enslaved folks is buried. I also maintain that Kidd writes what she knows how to write – a colonial aftermath perspective. My criticism then is more about the system, rather than of Kidd. Kidd leaves intact the untouchable status of the enslaved.

both sides of the door (2025) is an installation that depicts Hetty’s nighttime. It consists of a 13’ x 23’ interior space with line drawings made of white fleece on the floor that surround 15 pillows. The fleece lines continue up the grey-blue walls, reminiscent of a wall colour from the same era, and create an outline of a door among other lines sharing a secret message. There is a pile of 15 pillows of various sizes adorned with carefully chosen fabrics. Each pillow is considered individually and is connected to someone in my life. Each is pieced together with fabric from my 20-year-old fabric stash adorned with the woolen strips that have appeared in prior work. There is a 5mm wide

³⁶ Brand uses this term throughout the book to signal and speak directly to Black readers. I will refer to the ‘*readers like me*’ when I say ‘*with me in mind*’ – a signal, a call-back, an echo, which occurs later in this section.

line made of fleece that travels along the floor from the pile of pillows and makes its way up the walls creating a shroud of comfort. The installation is completed with a letter from me to Hetty buried beneath the pillows.

One of the pillows (figure 13) I created *with me in mind*. I chose the blue flowered fabric from my stash for one side. The gray-blue flowers on an off-white linen is mnemonic of an imaginary time and place, gives way to the other side of the pillow made of medium-gray wool. The midnight blue line drawing is most purposeful and is a message to two ten year old girls – Hetty and Marnie. These meaningful drawings that appear on the pillows are from a created language. It is what the lines mean when they are all together that gives them meaning - a meaning I have not yet been able to articulate. These drawings I am exploring resemble Nsibidi writing³⁷, one of the writing systems from the west African region.

³⁷ Nsibidi is a semasiographic script comprised of ideograms and pictograms that were used in southeastern Nigeria among the Eja gham, Efik, Igbo, and Ibibio societies. Nsibidi records, transmits, and conceals various kinds of information using a fluid vocabulary of geometric and naturalistic signs depicted on a wide range of mediums; from pottery dated to the 6th-11th century; to manuscripts; textiles; and inscribed artwork from the 19th century.

<https://www.africanhistoryextra.com/p/the-nsibidi-script-ca-600-1909-ce>



Figure 13. Marnie Temple, *both sides of the door* (one of 15 pillows), 2025.

The pillows lie in front of an imaginary door that is inferred by the fleece lines. On one side, there is no access for the viewer – the door is nothing but a drawing on the wall. *Invention of Wings* offers more insight into the world of Sarah Grimke the abolitionist, then of Hetty, an enslaved girl turned woman. The book speaks of freedom in a way that makes it something to forever seek, but freedom looks different through the eyes of the privilege and the eyes of the oppressed. This distinction was not made and nor did it need to be made, but I wanted it to. It is the central motivation to the creation of *both*

sides of the door. My installation offers the viewer my need to focus on Hetty's world of the historically silenced, undeveloped, and unarchived voice – the voice I wanted to hear while I read the book.

I relate to Brand's recollection of her time at school with her siblings. She writes "we [were] schooled in many things, but most significantly in the racial work of literature, whose most abiding feature will be our absence, on the one hand, and our eternal subjugate presence, on the other hand." Brand, *Salvage* P.186. One must consider the problematic nature of *The Invention of Wings*. I consistently find myself looking at whose voice is being centered and why. *both sides of the door* asks the viewer to look elsewhere to consider other voices.

Conclusion: making meaning revisited

“Racism created race, and the development of racial hierarchies was then used to justify the existence of racism. And, because race is a relationship of power and not a biological or physiological marker of identity, these same efforts to draw distinctions between populations also created the grandest, most dangerous hoax of all – whiteness.”³⁸ Debra Thompson

This quote reminds me that we make things up and we start to believe them so powerfully that we forget about what matters most – love. I return to James Baldwin. Although my journey through a dark and troubling subject, I emerge with a need to focus on acknowledging our differences and moving beyond the conversation that makes our differences hierarchical and troublesome. Leaving behind any concern of inadequacy and remaining unapologetic about what can be shared remains important to me. I will continue to explore the narratives of those who have come before me and are forgotten, erased, ignored and unarchived. I want to remember their lives and contribute to re-imbuing meaning to them.

Upon completion of my studies at Emily Carr University, I have come to understand that my work is not accessible or of interest to everyone, and this became clearer to me during the installation and the days following. Regardless of its universality, it does not reach everyone. Nonetheless, those that did engage with the work was of interest to me. Most of the curious viewers outside of the ECU faculty and students were from the global majority – Indigenous, Black and people of colour.

Since 2022, my research included an insurmountable task of positioning myself among my Black peers and understanding Blackness. Understanding the Black Diaspora and the aftermath of the Transatlantic Slave Trade is and will continue to be, a significant point of departure from my past. It is clearer to me that my *inescapable position* in

³⁸ Thompson, Debra. *The Long Road Home: On Blackness and Belonging*. Simon & Schuster, 2022. p. 71

society is defined by others. This hypervisibility, a term coined by Saidiya Hartman, does not allow me to hide or otherwise escape my genealogy. I have come to understand that when folks say, “*I don’t see you as a Black person*”, that Blackness is being explored – it is made visible, it is what matters. I never understood that before. Since the defence, I have begun to focus on Black radical aesthetics with a critical attention to Black contemporary artists in Canada and additional Black contemporary writers from afar, such as Fred Moten.

Exploring this history and contemporary work of Black writers, theorists, and artists, began during my studies, but was complicated by the small number of Black academics at Emily Carr University and Black artists in Canadian institutions. It was much easier for me to research Black artists south of the Canadian border. I suspect that my exploration of Black contemporaries who attend the Black Artists Gather Residency in the coming years will continue to shift my thinking and art making.

Critical optimism was discussed at my defence. It was a term I was unfamiliar with at that time. Unknowingly, my work explores the mindset that surrounds critical optimism and I have since begun to explore what new work I can create to further investigate this concept. More importantly, it challenges my understanding of Black life in the aftermath of Slavery.

Perhaps the most significant reflection focuses on what is next for me. I am an artist, and I am deeply committed to relationships that foster fluid reciprocity. Reciprocity that is not measured and is organically created.

I want to remind the reader of *how’d i get here*. It appears to be idle, but patiently waits for my attention. It does not follow the construct of time as we know it.



Figure 14. Marnie Temple, *Blackplate #3: Untitled (work in progress)*, 2025. Digital print. 21.5 x 28cm.

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