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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Let That Window Be A Door

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Alexis Hithe

Committee in charge:

Professor Nicole Miller, Chair
Professor Dennis R. Childs
Professor Zeinabu Davis
Professor Danielle Dean
Professor Anya Gallaccio

2026

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University of California San Diego

2026

DEDICATION

To my friends and co-conspirators, my advisors, my committee, my supporters, and my loved ones. To my ancestors and benevolent guides. Thank you; I will forever be grateful.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cast images so that they might be fractured, reflected, merged or refracted into something that has more nothing. And by having more nothing I believe they have endlessly more to give way unto. In other words, I clear and prepare a garden bed from which the new image can emerge. My mother's people were Southern Baptists and country folk and we always have been, as I've been told. Of course that was after we were someone else, and somewhere else. Who we are now is, in part, yet to be known. We humans change so much and so little. We remember even when the story comes out a little different this time; a beautiful leak and not an error. We are unfolding confusingly but steadily, like twisted sheets from the wash as they're being stretched out to dry in the sun. I hope the wind comes and twists them up again.

I began my master of fine art studies believing that I would research and make work that was very directly about my maternal relatives, about the south and about myself. I am here now at the end of this timeline smiling at my younger self. She had no idea it would be like this, though she had seen so much of it already. I am proud of her for cultivating support networks in her friends and loved ones; for redirecting so much of her focus to prioritize her own well being and joy. I am a better artist when I am taken care of. When my spirit is given the attention it needs, when my body is fed and warm, when I am safe and when I am being loved and when I feel grateful for everything. Being taken care of in the midst of pain is also possible. It is from this place of being in deep care and support that I conceive and deliver and nurse and bury all the parts of my practice. These theoretical, applied and executed responses sound out like the call of a horn, announcing a return.

I remember walking around my home as a child with a body length mirror held in my hands facing straight up at the ceiling. I would walk on the fans and clouds and rafters dizzied but so entranced and so transported. And I remember often reading *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, and spending hours studying the original illustrations of Alice passing through the mirror onto the other side in Wonderland. I have always wanted to step through a mirror and feel what I imagine to be like a cool rush of water falling over me. The mirror has chased me back in this era of my life, and for that I have many to thank. Among the first books I checked out to begin my master's studies were volumes on Adrian Piper, David Hammonds, and the "Art In The Age of Black Power" exhibition. The many I purchased about African American Hoodoo and conjure have helped to reshape my domestic rituals and routines in conjunction with my art practice. I acknowledge all the time and energy and labor and offerings that it has taken to usher me to this point. I have found a profound gift in this work; this work has brought me home, back to myself, over and over again. The great mercy of the universe requires that I only give it time. Ashe and amen to that!

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Let That Window Be A Door

by

Alexis Hithe

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2026

Professor Nicole Miller, Chair

A thesis introducing briefly the diverging image among other conclusions drawn around art and art practice, as it pertains to the work of alexis hithe towards the completion of a master's degree of fine art. Discussed at length are the compelling forces, strategies, theories and practices that guide and shape the work, which typically consists of experimental moving image, light and conceptual installations. This writing may also serve as a non-linear recollection of a temporal experience of the graduate program in Visual Art at University of California San Diego. Do not think of this document as a graveyard, but perhaps a carving or a whisper.

PROLOGUE

Let That Window Be A Door

Cast a spell

Cast away

Cast a play

Cast a wide net

Cast your rod

“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you”

Cast the light

Cast the shape

Cast the broken bones to mend

The fragments of which we will use for music and dance.

I hear stories of the house my grandfather built, and fill in the gaps between the passing cars I see on Pearblossom Highway with visions of the big green structure sitting proudly on the hard desert plain. It's not an estate but it glows with the confidence of a thing built by love, and love alone. I get motion sickness too easily- especially in the car- so I close my eyes and see the house but the view is not better. Things that I certainly have seen before (a room, a face, a memory) overlap and interrupt one another until I lose track of their edges and open my eyes again to start over. Yet somehow I see one thing best when I am looking at something else, and

it's usually better when both of them are moving. Even when I look at nothing happening, things have a way of appearing anyhow. This has been given to me, like a name.

The last time I visited the house there was only the blue sky to interrupt the great brownness before me; I don't know if it was repainted before or after the house and surrounding acres were sold. I don't even know if they make that paint color anymore. It was such a peculiar shade of green; something that could only be explained by the 1970s' flair for green in every shade and fabric and food. But now the only green nearby is the almost-black needles of the pine shrubs that perhaps used to be 12 foot hedges. I fear that someone is always looking down at me from the second story window that sits high above the front door and porch, though I know it hasn't had people living in it for over a decade now. Still, when I took Asia to see it for the first time she can remember, I don't let us cross the street to approach the fence. When we leave back down the road before the sun gets too low, she tells me she thought someone saw her from inside. My stomach does a warm turn and I have a sudden rush of compassion for my child self, who didn't get to tell anyone how afraid she was to see something that wasn't there.

I try to imagine the house when there was life in it. Cows, chickens and a black pot belly pig named Big Mama snorting and honking and chomping away sweetly in the barn that my grandfather built to match the house. The dog asleep on the back porch and a mean old goose guarding on the front porch, making the choice of going back inside less than tempting. My mother and her siblings- and at some points her siblings' children- running about, and also something about an indoor jacuzzi. The youngest, my Uncle James, gently curling up my Grandmama's hair for church on Sundays after carefully selecting and styling her outfit. The road to the house was hard, uneven dirt until Grandpa paid the county himself to pave the entire

public stretch of it. I want to say it's a miracle he made things grow from the tan dust; but my grandfather was a working man as much as a praying one, so I know that someday before I have any memory or trace on this earth, his dirt was beautiful and brown and full of living things. The dark river of asphalt that still remains, that my grandfather had the choice to name but didn't, certainly envies the thought; the road feels like an open trench- loud and luring with its waiting.

And its longing.

And its deep.

My theoretical position as a filmmaker is led by my feeling that the image should be a co-conspirator to the artist; that the material of light and filmmaking and installation itself is a sovereign collaborator. I imagine that each time I work in a medium, that I may be on a train platform greeting my cousin who I haven't seen in years, or maybe I am fighting with an acorn squash to be cut open, or maybe I am draping fabric on a dress form to design a new costume. I am dedicated to working with the material in such a way that I am offering respect and understanding for what images and installation can do in their aesthetic, symbolic and conceptual abilities.

Materials do have ability and agency... a film about West African wood-carved fetishes in museums made me remember being sad when I saw African artifacts in a glass box in a museum in Athens. Sad that no one had touched them without gloves or seen them in something other than the glare of fluorescent bulbs in a long long time. We have the responsibility to listen and believe the material when it shows to us that it is not unalive, though sometimes it has deadness. Film, light, dirt, are speaking all the time in their quiet voices. So it is also my theoretical position that I must cultivate a space where my material can have the agency of being alive and dead all at once, swaying in an active dance of equilibrium. Though Alive and Dead are not only a pair of two, and they are not a binary. Plants can teach us that all living things exist in constant cycles of birth and transformation and death. Microbes remind us that resurrection happens every day. How is the need for ecosystems to be sustained any different than the need for conceptual gesture and theory to be cultivated? Treating the material can be like caring for

the material; the material can tell me “no” or “maybe,” and the material can care for me back by affirming me to feel, and be well, and to have what I need.

The affinity of my work for material light and shadow, for reflections, fragmentation, and abstraction, for the non-linear and the multidimensional, echoes my desire to make art that possesses the ability to read the audience back. There was a show I used to love watching with my mother as a child, called “If Walls Could Talk.” I thought the phrase to be so curious and followed it into each episode like a lightning bug at dusk. It was just my luck that it came on television on Sundays a few hours after church- enough time so that my mother had already watched at least 2 Lifetime Network original films and was too sleepy to bother with a show about ghost stories and the beautiful homes that held them. A work of art as a thing that can be alive, is something like a West African masquerade; New Orleans Mardi Gras; Caribbean Carnival. And in fact, materials possessing an ability is not quite as interesting to me as materials being possessed by ability. What if the mask is possessed with the ability to show, even as it conceals? What if blank/black space is possessed with the ability to contain, even as they stand empty? Perhaps the body is possessed with the ability to be legible to the material, even as it negotiates illegibility inflicted by otheredness? A work of art can read you back; you can listen to what the materials say and know.

Theory that centers the position of the dominant white, western gaze, would have me be a ghost to relegate me to the position of the other. I am interested in ghosts but I am not interested in adhering to the rules of that position as colonialism has assigned them; it is something I must escape but sometimes can’t, like my shadow. I pursue instead to decenter the colonial gaze not into an otherness of its own (which would be revenge) but into obsolescence (which would be

vengeance). When Angela Davis asks us “Are Prisons Obsolete” perhaps she is calling for a response- a loud and resounding “YES” from the field. In her work “Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms” when she tells us that sexual freedom was the confirmation that the enslaved now were truly free, or when Alice Walker shows us that it was a kiss from another woman that finally liberated Cielely, perhaps they are calling for an acknowledgement that sovereignty is what survives us- not representation. Slavery is also a place. I make art to testify to the centering of a queer, trans, Black and Indigenous canon that is, and has been, abundant; that has survived disbursement, and outlived it even. A living and growing archive, for archives, too, can come up out of the dead. Death is a noun; and a place too. There is something about prophecy in this work. Death is certain but the rest is always waiting to be manifested, to become. I think about theories and artists and works of art that demonstrate to me how art can prophesy, or remind us to witness.

In March we piled a number near 15 of us MFAs into our cars and headed to a small desert town near Joshua Tree National Forest for a vacation retreat between winter and spring quarter. On the way home, some of us drove down some dusty roads into the Noah Purifoy Foundation outdoor art museum: sculptures and structures and objects placed into the land to live on as a monument, as a marker of many many things. Certainly it is fitting that here, walking through the hot plain and remembering exactly what it feels like to be from the desert, I found a green flash in a small panel of stained glass window, erected high up like a boat sail, or a highway sign. It was also something like directions, or a deacon’s cry for a witness. I think about the songs and spirituals my ancestors reverberated into the atmosphere, and ask myself if this was their way of touching each other, witnessing each other. When it was punishable by death

and being sold deeper into slavery to choose touch, they sang to each other. The beautiful thing about sound is that it can be physically heard, felt and seen, and even touched. Pressure waves of sound reveal themselves in the body and in the material of the earth, teaching me that it is possible to be seen and unseen at the same time by nature; reminding me that my ancestors knew this already: that opacity is a place and not who we are. I titled an earlier work of mine “FREEDOM IS A PLACE.” I believe the theoretical foundation for my art practice, in a way, is to make a home out of all the things we can’t touch but know to be there.

2. PART TWO: INHERITING STRATEGIES FOR ART MAKING

The following are a series of journal entries from year 3 of my MFA studies in no particular order. The entire are loosely named and numbered only for the purposes of this thesis.

#1 EARLY JANUARY: 2022 “IN” LIST

1. MAKING IT A LIFESTYLE
2. LOVE WITHOUT FEAR
3. BUYING BOOKS FOR PEOPLE WHO AREN'T BORN YET 4. MONEY MOVES
5. FEELING ALL OF THE FANTASY
6. READING FOR PLEASURE
7. ACUPUNCTURE
8. KOMBUCHA (SURPRISINGLY)
9. DAILY STRUCTURE
10. DAYDREAMING ABOUT KISSES
11. MEANINGFUL “MESS”
12. USING A GENEROUS AMOUNT OF PRODUCT (ESPECIALLY LOTION)
13. “GET THE SHOES” (-CARRIE BRADSHAW)
14. BUYING FROM INDEPENDENT CRAFTSPEOPLE/ARTISANS
15. BEING GOOFY/LOUD/OBNOXIOUS ON FACETIME IN PUBLIC
16. KNOWING WHEN IT'S NOT MY FAULT
17. GETTING DOLLED UP

18. BIG HAIR AND UPDO'S
19. BUYING THAT GOOD JEWELRY
20. WAKING UP WITH A SMILE
21. LISTENING
22. BEING EXCITED THAT I GET TO BE ME

#2 EARLY JANUARY: 2022 "OUT" LIST ("REDACTED" VERSION)

1. CONFUSING BEING CONSIDERATE WITH BEING ANXIOUSLY ATTACHED
2. FEELING LIKE THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO THAT'S REALLY USEFUL
3. CONFUSING USEFUL WITH MEANINGFUL
- 4.
5. BAD ERGONOMICS
- 6.
7. TURNING DOWN KIND OFFERS FROM FRIENDS
8. RUSHING & DRY HAIR
9. MANAGING PAIN THAT CAN BE PREVENTED
10. NOT HAVING ENOUGH SOCKS OR GOOD UNDERWEAR
- 11.
12. THINKING THAT MY VISION IS COMPLETE IN MY HEAD
- 13.
13. ALLOWING DISCOMFORT TO SLOW MY ROLL
14. GETTING TOO SLEEPY BEFORE SKINCARE TIME

15. SKIPPING BREAKFAST

18. SHOWING UP ON TIME WHEN I KNOW IT'S ABOUT TO BE SOME
BULLSHIT ANYWAY

19. TAKING TIME FOR GRANTED

20. KEEPING FOOD I COOKED THAT I DON'T LIKE

22. SAVING THE LINK AND NEVER READING/WATCHING/GOING BACK TO IT

#3 MEMORY BANK

PORTALS FROM MY CHILDHOOD

- The smell of white lilies
- Car rides/looking out the window
- Maw Maw's 1970s green kitchen window curtains catching the afternoon light

THINGS THAT MADE ME BELIEVE IN MAGIC

- Uncle Bubba's voice telling stories
- The Wizard of Oz and Alice in Wonderland
- Halloween
- Grandpa (when he told me that his sisters and mother and me and the other women in

our family had special spiritual gifts)

PLACES THAT HAVE ALWAYS GIVEN ME TINGLES

- New Orleans
- Uncle Harold's house
- Grandpa's basement at the house in Atlanta
- Grandpa's house in the desert
- The front bedroom closet at Maw Maw and Paw Paw's
- The back stairway at Auntie Linda & Uncle Bubba's Indiana house that I remember

WHAT I REMEMBER DOING AS A KID IN MIRRORS

- Looking into my face and watching my hands move
- Pondering/wondering
- Carrying it around the house to play with the reverse image (made me laugh)
- Dance, pose, model
- Try on clothes, look at my body
- Crying

#4 FORAGING

I like using things that are found and often familiar, even when they are new to me. When I think of foraging I think of pigs sniffing in the forest and of my friends who walk the small wildernesses that survive between the roads and neighborhoods to gather fresh rosemary for me, rocks for their bedrooms, dill for their bread. But the kind of foraging that I have best learned how to do myself is the kind my mother taught me early on Saturdays. She would wake up while most of our town was still asleep and go soaring through the makeshift aisles made of thrift store clothing racks, collections of gently used items on driveways, and furniture on sidewalks. She had a sharp eye for good material, a good head for where to go looking first, and a keen sense of

negotiating a price she could afford. In all my years of watching her do her Saturday morning routine of foraging for things, of retrieving something that she had in mind but was willing to be patient for until it was ripe and available, I never expected for it to influence me so profoundly as it does today. When I forage for material I embrace the possibility of not finding exactly what I want, of happening upon it at a time that lies outside of my expectation; of finding what I never would have thought of but still hits me with something like *déjà vu*.

#5 IMPROVISING

Improvisation I first learned in my father's love for jazz music and my years taking youth tap dancing classes. The portion of the tap session where we were instructed to go across the floor one by one, improvising to a simple tune of horns or piano keys was the most challenging for me. I always tried to plan what combinations I'd do before it was my turn which was exactly not the assignment, I know. It was not until I joined the praise dance team of my church- where my mother was a member and my godmother was the leader- that I came to an understanding that improvisation was nearly more about feeling than it was about technique. I watched my godmother (of which I happen to have many) spin and stretch and emote with her eyes the hope, resilience and joyfulness. I realized there was a kind of freedom in improvisation that most people don't ever get to experience, and if they only knew how good it was they'd go clawing for it. Some years after joining the team myself, I finally cracked open a small part of me that was willing to let go and I began to let improvisation take me and the holy ghost take me after that. Still I could only manage this for short periods of time; my mama and aunties were all praise break queens, catching the ghost with dignity yet captivatingly, so certainly I had the spirit too but only a small bit of it I guess. When I think of those days when my spirit was small like my

body, I think of silk hats and elegant pointed shoes and fine perfume and good tights and crisply starched collars in the pews, and all the smells of them being prepared just that morning wafting down the brown of the hallway with the amber light of the bathroom and onto the plush carpet.

#6 EXPERIMENTING (TRUST)

Still thinking so much about sealing. About how this is the most important part. About what things represent seals. Wax, sigils, locks, “Amen!” And what it takes to set and maintain a seal. Trust, grounding, recovery, gentle attention. I am thinking about how the seal can be in my work. I talked to someone today about the importance of closing up a reading- told them that if not you can leave open doors. “LET THAT WINDOW BE A DOOR” must be the name of my show, and I feel I am still calling out for this transformation even as I see it already done in my mind. Thankful for magnetic fields and especially for gravity. I am happy that it all falls down.

There are some days where clarity just doesn’t come. I am learning to write anyways. To do anyways. I am learning from my body that I do not have to wait for [insert: pain, or permission, or an invitation] to care for myself. I was surprised today to find prayer candles being sold on campus. I got one blue and one green. If I can in one way describe how I make art I would say I close my eyes and let my toes gently feel us through an earthen tunnel, towards an exit. My big toe softly sweeping from side to side, knowing every turn and rock by feel, would trace a clear and certain path in the soil. Like the ribbons in sand left behind by snakes. If we can make art, maybe we can arrive at a place far beyond here.

7 CULTIVATING/SUSTAINING THE ARCHIVE

I feel like Black people look better for God in their funeral casket than most other people look walking the Earth on their best day. That is to say I think Black people will always find a

way to survive their memory and shift the codes of time- even when death comes. I read on twitter about a funeral for somebody- they propped up the embalmed body of their grandfather on his favorite couch with his favorite tv on and held the wake with him like that. Immediately this gesture strikes me as horrible and weird and I don't know what I should think. And then I just think, perhaps they don't give a fuck what death says- their Paw Paw gets to watch his race on tv one more time, and better yet he's not really dead until he does! Victor told me the brain is usually alive for 7 minutes after being declared dead. And then I felt- whose job is it to declare things like death?

I've been thinking of the archive as this thing that requires imagination and memory and fantasy to grow it, but I suppose it needs death too. A dry season. And then the people find it again, search for it again, and it lives again; people live with it, and the rain comes back. Pages and photographs and artifacts soaked and water stained with the different years of attention, and thought, and debate, and response. We have conversations with archives. Bone china teacups delicately tinkling.

#8 ABSTRACTING/FRAGMENTING/REFLECTING

My sister found that my chickens are laying again. Winter is coming to its end and Mercury and Venus have turned direct. There was a new moon just last week. She said there were six eggs, all laid in a circle. Six is the numerology of this year. Our chickens make their magic so effortlessly... well it is effort- literally it is labor- but what I mean is that they don't have a dilemma about doing it, they just listen to their body. I cleaned up my belly button today (the one that was part of my umbilical cord). It was in my baby book that my mama kept, but some bugs must have tried and failed to eat it, or chew on the adhesive from the tape on the page.

When I held it in my hand it occurred to me that this is the single piece of flesh that remains on this earth that was both mine and my mother's. It has a beautiful blue color running through it.

I had a dream I was talking to somebody about my art, like we were catching up on what was new. I told them that I was just going to let it all flow out of me; that I decided to stop clogging up my process with overthinking and forcing. As I was telling them in the dream, I wanted Pisces season to teach me how to go with the flow, and also how I don't have to "fix" my bad days; that all I have to do is take care of myself in the meantime...

I wonder if I can find a way to dance with my photo scans. Maybe I dance with a print in front of a video camera? But there's something I love about freezing that distorting movement on the page. I am there in the wrinkles. I realized that I don't think of filmmaking as the start or end of my practice, but as the source of material for my practice; my fountain. Thinking about layers of abstraction also makes me think about how vapor will always cling to a cold glass and gather into a bead of water again. I always rub my sleeve into the puddles they make, but it seems silly to get mad about it.

#9 INTEGRATING

Midwives, doulas, caretakers, conjurers, sages, griots. I want to be all of them at once and also a pop star. These traditional roles are very sacred in West African descended societies as I have learned, and so I too treat them with reverence. I remember wanting to be a doctor to safely deliver babies into the world, but I made the idea of being a scientist louder instead. Now I know artists and doctors can be the same people, just one of us is delivering living things and the other is laying living things to rest. I imagine if my ethics for my art practice come from the people I come from, then they must've been truly known by few, yet trusted by many. The kind of people

who you get treated better for being related to, once somebody finds out your name. I imagine my people are very proud, because I don't want anyone to see me struggle with the work. I don't believe anybody but me can decide if my work really is good. I have a gut feeling to document my practice in a way that it will be inherited, just as I have inherited it.

“Mojo Workin’” talks about the inclusive-integrative principle in a way that makes me feel like I may never know exactly what our ancestral world looks like but I certainly know what it feels like. I have been there many times, or at least through a few twists and turns of it. Have heard its brassy tones and rolling laughter, and stamping feet, and felt its warmth and solidness and magic. A place I can only get to now when I use my body, when I share with other people and their bodies. No keys to get to those places because the doors don't lock.

#10 CONSTELLATING

I realized the other day how important it is to make journaling a part of my daily routine and especially my studio practice. Writing after each day in the studio is helping me to shed off the weight of all my thoughts so that I can really rest easy. I can't rest easy when I feel like my thoughts will get lost. So if I put them in here they are kept safe, and even if I lose this book I have written them and my body will remember the words somehow. I also realized yesterday that my anxiety is triggered when I neglect to give myself attention. I think that is why that time of day around 3pm I am often most anxious. We got out of school at 3:15 (:17? Or :14? It used to change incrementally each year). Mama would pick us up and I would tell her all about my day. So every now and then I guess I recall, quite unconsciously, the dose of attention I'd get when the sun was getting near golden, and miss her.

Sunday morning I woke up from a bad dream where my mama was yelling at me as I was trying to take care of my anxiety. It was exactly how it would've been in real life, down to my feelings of being small and not being seen. So when I woke up I decided to take care of myself first, before any work or any cleaning like I had planned the night before. I sat in bed eating breakfast and watched the first episode of "POSE" while wrapped up in blankets and the warmth of my heater. I cried when they walked the royalty category and cried again when Damon danced to Whitney Houston in his audition. I called someone and they thought I was upset but I was just happy and proud and sad and feeling blessed. I wanted to see their face. The rest of the day was so much better after giving myself that time.

Everything has changed for the better since I decided to give myself more and more. I've been taught that "more" is a bad word, when really less always costs so much more than anyone ever thinks it's going to. At least "more" is honest. When I am working on something new I always throw in more, more, more layers, until I can't hardly handle it all in my mind or in

my studio. Eventually what I end up doing is letting them all spill out in front of me, so I can trace a line that touches all of them; like a spider spinning the circles on a web. And then when someone comes to see this web, if they get close enough it gets on them, and they have to dance to find it all and get it off. Then there are some people who aren't bothered by the spider webs at all.

#11 FIRST DAY OF TAURUS SEASON (REDACTED VERSION)

- I really love my face in the footage Jun made of me and JAX. I feel beautiful, on camera, for the first time in this era of my life.

- I will know that my ancestors brought me much success and abundance as I cultivated the space for it in my lifestyle

- I will not betray my younger self when I get older

- I will have empathy for my children [my mother loved me fiercely but didn't understand how or why I needed empathy from her too (her Capricorn sun plus the Scorpio moon, probably)]

- I want to make my cave out of mirrors

LET THAT WINDOW BE A DOOR features an installation of “29, or 30, or a Thousand Million Mirrors” along with new experimental video work and sound design as the exhibition that flanks my thesis candidacy and defense. I purchased twenty-nine “body length” style glass mirrors and, with the help of Naomi Nadreau, kelechi agwuncha and JAX Bryant, I stripped them of their wooden frames, and laid them out widely in a mostly two-by-two formation. We then laid an enormous drop cloth over the arrangement and used hammers to break every single mirror nearly to dust. We worked in four sections individually, then briefly swapped to try and even out the results our different techniques for swinging the hammers yielded. Still, Naomi’s section looked like Naomi’s and so was true for the rest of them. We laughed as we recognized each other’s personalities in the thousand or million shiny, sharp glass pieces. Once the mirrors were laid, like a foundation, I recruited Jun to film me and JAX as we free-styled solo and duet praise dances to the sounds of classic Black American gospel. The Clark Sisters made me feel ready to catch the spirit for the first time in nearly ten years. I edited our footage while listening to entrancing mixes of Baltimore club music, New Orleans bounce, and classic Chicago house music. In the installation of this footage I use three projectors which land on the broken mirrors of “29, or 30...” before spraying onto the walls in shards of light, as an improvisational sound recording of synths and bell tones plays with great resonance. The overlaps of the projections onto each other in the glass cross the lines between the 3 loops of same footage, which quickly fall out of sync. The reflections of the footage assemble onto the walls in such a way that they are intensely abstracted, though movement and some trace of bodily presence remains

discernible. In one of the projection's reflections onto the wall, the fragments of light are big enough to show the detail of a face, a hand, four eyes, every now and then if you wait to see them. Two candles burn in the corners nearest to the door, anchoring the part of the gallery where no projector is aimed at. The effect of the work on viewers is quite captivating; many have stayed for hours sitting inside, quiet and staring gently, or even sleeping.

The work is hard to keep up with, in its quick cutting editing style and its great use of abstraction, but also in its layers of meaning. The viewer must work with it to see more; move their body and eyes around it and peer into it at different angles and various lengths of time, not too unlike a crystal ball. But this crystal ball has fallen from its place above the dance floor onto the ground, so some may resolve to catch up by stopping the chase entirely- allowing the work to run laps around their stillness. Others still, will leave before understanding that the work is born again every second. The image which refuses to ever be one image, which only asks for a place to land each time it emerges, is what we could call a diverging image. While an image that stops at emerging reveals itself to be something, the diverging image reveals itself to be no one thing. The diverging image does not equate truth with clarity or pondering with resolve. The diverging image moves away from representation and towards abstraction because it is allowed to refuse or embrace in it's light form with the help of materials that have their own agency, as discussed in part one. I present these ideas of the divergent image as the result of an art practice that leads with gut intuition, and prizes divergence in its many forms and fashions.

Additional layers of meaning in the work demonstrate a rich and deep research practice and influences of interdisciplinary approaches. In the work is expressed a history of the old African American hoodoo system with the parameter of the overhead spotlight directing the solo

and duet dances to move around a circular space, just as in the ritual of the ring shout. The action is recorded and displayed in 59.9 f/s high definition slow motion, rejecting normative and linear organizations of time with the additional help of the edit. The glass on the floor retains traces of their rectangular beginnings and together plot out much like the spine of a whale, or a great wooden ship built to take Africans across the Atlantic and turn them into slaves. The

mirrors also begin to feel like a glowing pool in a dark cave; the way light bounces on the wall we may wonder if the cave of the gallery is actually underwater too. The multiple references to water and things deeply related to water continue into the projected video as spinning, turning and fluid motion prevail in the liturgical dance style. If it were not for the Atlantic this dance may not exist, and yet the inflamed tangle between connection and release in the improvised choreography suggests that these aesthetic body languages have endurance that spans far beyond the throws of colonialism. The installation rejects the colonial-capital vision of purity, truth, monuments, surveillance, and the unliving archive, just as readily as it rejects being pieced back together properly once it leaves the projector. The work finds a thin tear in the fabric of space-time where colonialism is obsolete, and opens it all the way up into a door.

EPILOGUE

How to say goodbye to something you never truly got to know? I'll miss you anyway. All my young life I lost classmates, and their siblings, and my cousins and god-cousins to car accidents. Most of them didn't even make it to see seventeen. I miss Johnathan the most, and in a way I knew him the least considering how often we were together with all our church relatives. When I think about my hometown I think about how if the roads are so dangerous I should be sad, because maybe most of the kids will never get out or never even try.

Coming down the hill where the 14 freeway meets the 405, I wonder if one day too much rain will come and make it into a waterfall. There is a water tower on the hill to the east of the freeway that delivers water down the slope but it doesn't even have a sound over the sea of cars beside it. I smell the last bit of unhazy wind before we get into what becomes the city and some forty-five or fifty minutes later we take the narrow freeway exit that always has beautiful sunflowers popping up all over its sides. The gates of Chinatown coming up tell me it's not long now before we finally get to Uncle Harold's house, and I get the tingles down my spine again. I hold my breath often in the thrift store, not wanting to smell the oldness, but here in the vintage craftsman mansion that my great-grandfather bought as one of the first Black homeowners in Harvard Heights, Los Angeles, the old in the air smells like home. My mother and all her siblings and cousins and their parents filled the house with laughter and ruckus and arguments and food and babies and music. My babies will know it yet. The house was sold in March 2020, leaving a gaping hole in my chest that cried out in pain for more and more still to fill it back up. And then I said to it: "you cannot give me what was already mine, are you here to destroy?"

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