

THROUGH THE SENSES & STORED IN OUR SOULS

a Critical Essay Written by Amma Amofaah-Ofosu to
accompany

TOUCH

Curated by Chantel Akworkor Thompson
Produced by Bright Boakye-Danquah

featuring

Adelaide Damoah | Asia Clarke
Maggie Sade Coker | Sianeh A. Kpukuyou
Enam Gbewonyo | Black Girls Glow

144 La road, Accra, Ghana

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

AMMA AMOFAAH-OFOSU

Amma Amofaah-Ofosu is an educator and writer. She has maintained a balanced interest in both education and language. Amma studied English Literature with Creative Writing at the University of Hertfordshire, earning a first-class BA (Hons). She holds an MA in English Education with distinction from University College London (UCL).

As an educator, she has taught as a secondary school English teacher and managed a nationally recognised tuition centre. Inspired by bell hooks, Amma approaches teaching socio-culturally and playfully. As a writer, she explores various themes while experimenting with genre conventions. Leaning on the analogy of a story as a journey, her narratives are shaped by observations and rhythms. In 2021, her long-form poem 'Amistad' was exhibited at Brocket Gallery in London, accompanying the work of award-winning printmaker Tanaka Mazivanhanga.

Amma is also the founder of 27Beginnings, a creative Institute focused on education and language. As an Institute, a holistic approach to learning, the use of narrative and an expansive understanding of language drive theory and practice. We deliver creative workshops and develop resources, projects and solutions, centring play as a form of learning. 27Beginnings envisions a world where learning and language are approached playfully to develop thoughtful and reflective communicators.



THROUGH THE SENSES AND STORED IN OUR SOULS

AMMA AMOFAAH-OFOSU

TOUCH is a group exhibition exploring the dissemination of ancestral and intuitive knowledge through sensation and connection. La Foundation for the Arts invites six womxn artists of Ghanaian heritage or living in Ghana to meditate on their sensory understandings. The exhibition is a syncretic showing of works rooted in femininity, identity, African spirituality, ecology, and humanity, explored through various mediums. Echoing writer Clarice Lispector, the artists demonstrate that “the question of understanding isn’t about intelligence, it’s about feeling, about entering into contact” (Dodson, 2017). We are guided through a felt space, receiving signals from each artist, and interpreting their work to make sense of what is happening around us.

Adelaide Damoah’s layers of ink and pigment draw the eyes in. Using body print technique, she transforms the body into an instrument of touch, leaving recognisable marks and figures on handmade, recycled cotton rag paper. In response to Picasso’s *Women*, a series of monologues, the pairing of Marie-Therese and Olga recounts history in a way that critiques the perception of the female body. Damoah’s pieces use placement and texture to create forms that speak to the female body and its reactions to contact, illustrating the body’s memory and ability to hold a narrative. Enam Gbewonyo’s film *Nude Me, Under the Skin*, is a cinematic dialogue. The conversation dances between the narrative, the architecture of the space, and the visibility of the black female body. Behind backgrounds of wooden surroundings and stained-glass windows, the black female body inserts and asserts itself. Gbewonyo also elicits conversations about colonisation and slavery. Touch is active, both an unravelling and a revealing. The slow tear of knitted nude tights in *What Lies Beneath* exposes and coerces a search for truth.

Like Gbewonyo, Sianeh A. Kpukuyou uses colour and narrative. Against an ocean-blue backdrop, *Back Yard Kids* positions a sun-stricken mat over two black women. The mat serves as a symbol of gathering, a material that connects and brings people together. Colour is also used to split sight and direct gaze. *Kuba* is poised. Through a nostalgic haze, we are touched by the various moments our stories have encountered others. All three artists “raise questions about all representations of the black female, whether erotic, benign, or simply there” (Sivanarayanan, 2005), asking what specific motions say about their women subjects.

How can indigenous knowledge facilitate healing? Asia ‘WildMoon’ Clarke and *Black Girls Glow* consider how spirituality prompts reflection, while Maggie Sade Coker employs ecological understandings to encourage healing.

Clarke blends ingenuity and expression through her representation of Caribbean folklore. *The Jumbie* reveals similarities between African and Afro-Caribbean cultures. The recognition of the Jumbie as a malevolent spirit is challenged. Clarke’s bold sculpture silently celebrates African spirituality and mysticism. *The Jumbie* serves as a symbol of forgotten and misunderstood ancestors, a shadowy figure that inspires pause and offers guidance. Texture and depth are carefully added by mixing materials including fabric, wood, wire, and beadwork. Crowned with braids that glare with resistance, touch is evoked through sight and contemplation. A connection of spirits. A celebration of our ancestors.

Black Girls Glow nurtures space for healing through sound. *Touch My Hand* is a direct and antiphonic summons. Presented in a veiled space, using headphones, listeners are offered to sit among community while absorbing a choir of blended voices. The resounding melodies engage listeners through a call-and-response structure (a common practice in African spiritual songs). What is offered is a dynamic dialogue between performers and their listeners. The collective’s use of imperatives and repetition is a reminder of the essential and continuous nature of healing. We are transported into a sacred space that focuses on unity.

Coker's native flora knowledge is exemplified through her use of aromatherapy. Touch: An Ecological Healing Garden (Womb) is a sculptural space that salutes the "'vital force' in all living and non-living things" (Abiodun, 1994). In this explorative and interactive space, audiences are confronted with scents of basil and wild turkey berries, known to reduce stress and promote harmony. We are reminded of the vital role nature plays in nurturing mental, emotional, and social health. The womb is after all where we are made ready and restored. We are urged to undergo a rebirth that returns us to eco-friendly custodians of our land.

TOUCH is an act of connecting with everything around us, a sensory action that requires various forms of contact. There is a collective display of holistic sensory knowledge, culminating in a wide-reaching comprehension of what it may mean to touch and feel connected.

Bibliography

Abiodun, R. (1994) 'Àṣẹ: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power through Art', *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 24 (4), pp. 309-22.

Dodson, K. (2017) 'Literature: Rediscovering Clarice Through Translation', *Berkley Review of Latin American Studies*. Available at: <https://clacs.berkeley.edu/literature-rediscovering-clarice-through-translation> (Accessed: 15/04/2024).

Drewal, H.J. (2005) 'Senses in Understandings of Art', *African Arts*. 38 (2), pp. 1-96.

Sivanarayanan, A. (2005) 'Review of The Black Female Body: A Photographic History', Ed. D. Willis & C. Williams, *Callaloo*. 28 (4), pp. 1108-1113.

FEATURED ARTISTS

ADELAIDE DAMOAH

ASIA 'WILDMOON' CLARKE

BLACK GIRLS GLOW

ENAM GBEWONYO

MAGGIE SADE COKER

SIANEH A. KPUKUYOU

ADELAIDE DAMOAH



Images courtesy Adelaide Damoah. Photography by Nick Delaney

British-Ghanaian multi-disciplinary artist Adelaide Damoah stands at the confluence of painting and performance, her artistry resonating within the tapestry of themes encompassing colonialism, ecology, identity, feminism, and radical joy. After graduating from Kingston University London with a degree in applied biology, her career within the pharmaceutical industry was curtailed when she received a diagnosis of the chronic illness, endometriosis. It was during multiple periods of convalescence that she discovered her devotion to art.

In her current practice, Damoah employs an array of mediums and techniques, including storytelling through performance and filmmaking, utilising artificial intelligence, image transfer methods, body printing, and painting. These elements converge to weave a narrative that delves deep into her own familial history, ultimately extending to a profound exploration of imperialistic and capitalistic expansion and the enduring ecological ramifications it bears.

At the centre of Damoah's practice lies a concept she defines as "generating a spontaneous communi(cati)on between myself and an audience." Through her performances, she serves as a conduit, channelling a recorded history that was once known, then obscured by time, only to resurface with uncanny familiarity in the present moment, only to slip once more into obscurity at the performance's conclusion. Each of her performances represents a mythopoetic creation, born of organic processes. These processes are intricately tied to her sensory perception of the world, encompassing both unambiguous, explicit, and literal experiences as well as the more elusive, implicit, and metaphorical dimensions of existence. This interplay also draws upon the wellspring of memory images, both individual and collective, derived from her multisensory experiences and the profound impact of her diasporic journey.



ADELAIDE DAMOAH, MARIÉ THERÈSE, 2018

ASIA 'WILDMOON' CLARKE



Asia Clarke is an Afro-Caribbean/Canadian Multidisciplinary Artist, Designer and Hairstylist who centers sustainability and futures-thinking in her arts practice. She is passionate about re-envisioning African diaspora futures and helping communities, clients and brands to envision and actualize their creativity. She holds a Master of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation from Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) University. She has been practicing as an artist for 13+ years as a jewelry and costume designer, and hairstylist, her work has been published worldwide, with featured credits in major publications. As a consultant she is also very accomplished, with over 9 years of experience in international development projects in Canada, Dominica, Trinidad, eSwatini and Ghana.



ASIA 'WILDMOON' CLARKE, JUMBIE, 2024

BLACK GIRLS GLOW



Black Girls Glow is a collective that increases the active participation and presence of women and non-binary artists in their communities. They bring visibility to women's issues and explore ways in which they can use art to solve these issues, by providing programs that foster collaboration, innovation and leadership development.

Founded in 2017 as a residency to foster collaboration among artists, it has grown into a cluster of programs dedicated to exploring ways in which art can be used to build community and thriving ecosystems.

They are invested in a world where women and girls have access to resources, community, mentorship and space in their growth as artists, leaders and active members of their community.



ENAM GBEWONYO



Enam Gbewonyo is a British-Ghanaian textile and performance artist, curator, and founder of the BBFA (Black British Female Artist) Collective. Her art practice investigates identity - womanhood in particular, whilst advocating the healing benefits of craft. She uses performance as a vessel, creating live spaces of healing that direct audiences to a positive place of awareness, countering systems of oppression such as racism and sexism. Her work enables audiences to face the truth of the dark past surrounding colonial legacies and the emotions it brings forth.

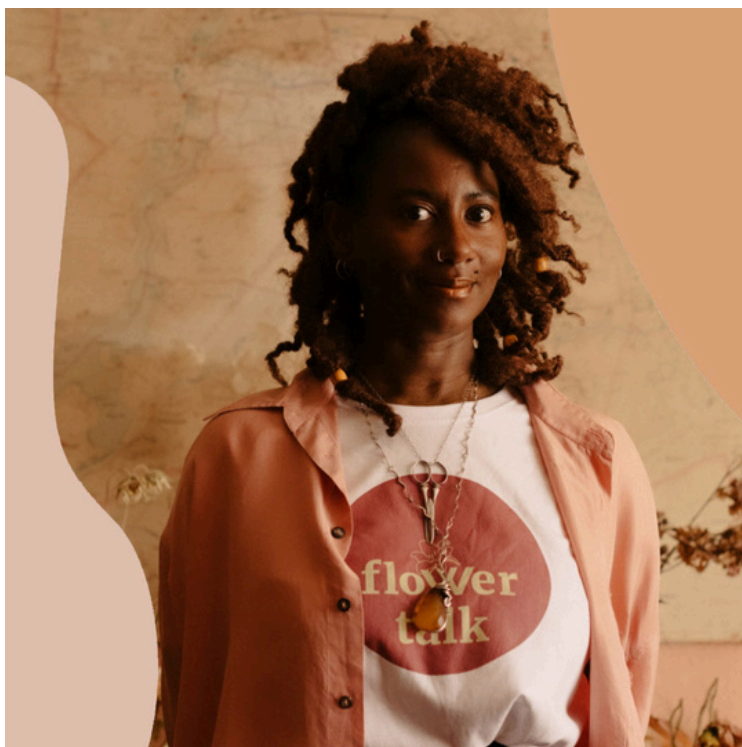
Recent exhibitions include *Neo-Custodians: Woven Narratives of Heritage, Cultural Memory and Belonging* at Bemis Center in Omaha, USA, *Body Poetics* at Southampton's GIANT Gallery, and *Rites of Passage* at Gagosian London. Her work has been exhibited and showcased internationally at the 58th Venice Biennale, Art X Lagos, and UNTITLED Art Fair Miami to name a few.

Gbewonyo is represented by London-based gallery TAFETA, who specialise in 20th-century and contemporary African art. Her works are in several private and public collections including Fondation H, Madagascar and White & Case LLP, UK. She is a 2022 recipient of the Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award and winner of the 2022 Dentons Art Prize and New Art Exchange Future Exhibition Prize respectively. She is also a fellow of Kehinde Wiley's acclaimed Black Rock Senegal artist residency as well as Bemis Center, Omaha, USA.



ENAM GBWONYO, WHAT LIES BENEATH - EMPIRE'S DARK HISTORY REVEALED

MAGGIE SADE COKER



I'm a holistic mental health practitioner, flower therapy workshop facilitator, and floral stylist with over ten years of experience. I'm originally from the UK and am currently in Accra, Ghana. I'm also the founder of FlowerTalk Official.

FlowerTalk is a multidisciplinary studio, with mental wellness, flower therapy, and nature at its core.

Along with my one-to-one coaching I host workplace wellness workshops and facilitate indoor and outdoor nature-inspired activities for brands and corporate events for example I have worked with Snapchat, YouTube, Adidas, Uniqlo, Esty, and more!

After traveling around the world and living in Germany for the past ten years I decided to return to the continent to explore if my services and setting up a Flower Therapy Mental Wellness Studio would be of use by offering a naturopathic alternative approach to dealing with community mental health care.

I am interested in expanding knowledge and perception of how we as Africans approach mental health and community care. What hidden knowledge exists within our indigenous healing community, what indigenous African herbs hold the keys to our mental and physical health? How can we as Africans align ourselves back to nature respectfully and joyfully?

In a fast-paced modern city connecting Nature and flowers to mental health offers a beautiful and healing icebreaker.



MAGGIE SADE COKER, FLOWERTALK



SIANEH A. KPUKUYOU, OUTSIDE THE BOX, 2023

SIANEH A. KPUKUYOU



Sianeh A. Kpukuyou also known as Ask is a versatile photographer and creative director committed to crafting authentic stories through her lens. Her work celebrates people and communities, resonating globally with clients such as Paramount Studios, Tate modern, Water Ai, Vogue, Gucci, and more. Starting her journey in 2018 Sianeh's mission is to capture each frame as a piece of nostalgia, weaving timeless stories that evoke lasting emotions. Passionate about the art of storytelling, she takes pride in curating visuals that breathe life into memories.



MAGGIE SADE COKER, TOUCH: AN ECOLOGICAL HEALING GARDEN (WOMB) 2024















