

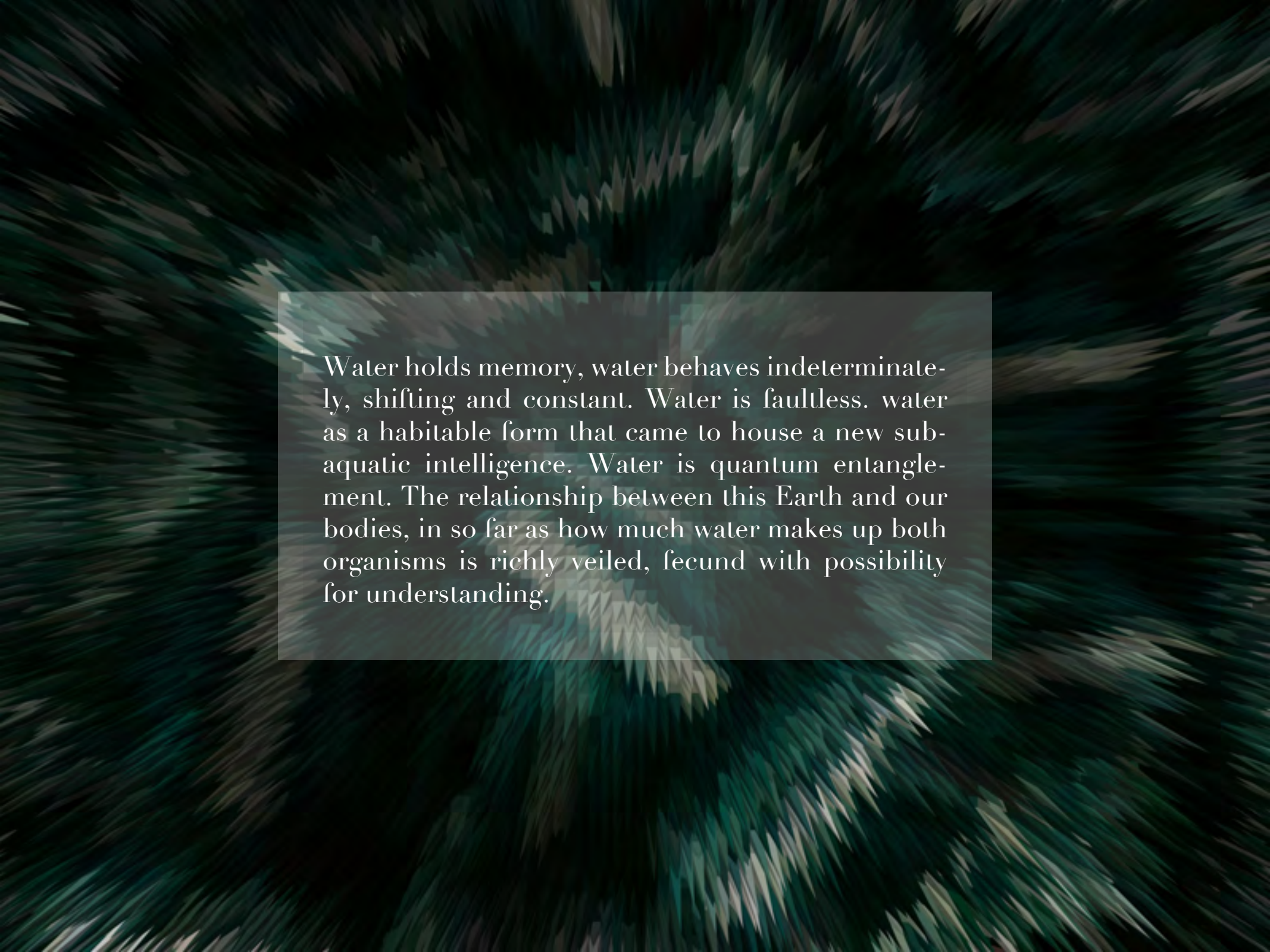


The artist and filmmaker Barbara McCullough discusses ritual as a symbolic action to free one from an internal state, an act or action that helps to move from one space and time into another. Senga Nengudi attaches ritual to a spiritual plain, recounting it as a ceremonious way of doing things, a form that usually has been done by many before you.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the 1958 novel by late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, the first chapter sees two characters Unoke and Okoye back and forth as to who should break the customary kola nut, a ceremonial process and sign of etiquette, rooted in the appropriate welcoming of guests into the home of the Igbo people. 'He who brings kola brings life' a familiar refrain.

What relationship does the idea of ritual have to a community and connection thereof? Repetition, practice and routine that are oft performed religiously. Speaking about energy as a kind of raw material, and ritual as a process of manifestation, perceived gaps in communication as it relates to language are bridged via ritual, a cathartic experience that acts to shift frames of understanding and connectivity. Art objects and ritual objects are one and the same, the control laying firmly with who is wielding what in the presence of whom. Objects and actions will take on a power that re-establishes a space for the dweller.





Water holds memory, water behaves indeterminately, shifting and constant. Water is faultless. water as a habitable form that came to house a new sub-aquatic intelligence. Water is quantum entanglement. The relationship between this Earth and our bodies, in so far as how much water makes up both organisms is richly veiled, fecund with possibility for understanding.





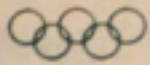




Wendell Hassan Marsh writes that:

History is the science of the state,  
while memory is the art of the  
stateless

a tender truth that speaks to  
what this music is intent on do-  
ing, accounting for, document-  
ing and time stamping a reality.



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A conversation between Joy Gregory and Elijah Maja



E: I feel like your work is discussed in the frames of identity, a lot of things that I saw online, identity is the main point of beginning. But I want you to speak more about what you want your work to do, what you feel like you want it do or provoke. Beyond people writing about it solely being about identity as the thing that it is.

J: I don't know its difficult to say, because I think with my work, what people do is bring themselves to it. So, I'm not saying it's a blank canvas because it never is, obviously you set the scene. So I think I was talking about the girl thing before, or handbags, where all you can see is an object on paper. The top right one \*Joy points to one of her works mounted to the wall at her studio\* But it's obviously referencing the body, but its something that is universal about it because its not about the individual, you don't see the body or a person. You see a figure, you don't know if they're black or they're white, or if they're fat or they're thin, it's a body, it's a being that is referenced. So it's just the traces of that, so when people look at it, they don't think, 'that's about someone else or that's about me'. They sort of are like 'it could be about me' so if you're a woman, or if you have any association to that sort of form, you might think well that's about an object I'm familiar with. Whereas some of the other work.. \*Joy paces to draw the blinds from sunlight\*

E: So you kinda like to leave it open?

J: Well, I don't like to dictate what people should be looking at but I also want to steer them of the direction of, this is the subject. So like, the work I'm working on for Exeter now; Exeter, it's a town like a lot of towns in England, that seem to have no.. it's not like Liverpool or Bristol which you think 'that's a really strong connection to the slave trade' but it's like the rest of the country where, people are comfortable, but they don't think about where that comfort and that wealth actually comes from. And it's about excavating through the histories and through objects within the museum to put the origins of that wealth on the table. In a way that is completely incontrovertible, but it's not about pointing, but it's about, this is the history of this space, and not allowing people to actually move away from that and not being doubt that because the evidence is there in the object. As well as in the intangible wealth and comfort.

E: I feel like that is a space your work occupies, in so far as I've always thought about as quite delicate but also a historiography in the sense that it's a subtle dripping of reference in between spaces. It's not forceful - not that that is a wrong approach to have, - its more so a delicate placement of reference and historiography and what you're saying about Exeter speaks to that.

J: Yeah, and I think the other thing about these things, Sunil Gupta, used to talk about my work in, not in quite a derogatory way but used to tease me saying it was about truth and beauty. But in a way that is really at the core of the work, about it being aesthetically very pleasing, so its attractive to look at, but actually underneath it, it is talking to a truth to something that cannot be avoided, or moved away from or hidden. It is about this uncovering, constantly, and making connections in ways that sometimes seem quite whimsical but actually are quite serious.

E: There is definitely that. When I was going through stuff online and trying to find things to piece together, it is that idea of truth and beauty but traces of memory, traces of things that are underlying, on the surface, but they're still there, still a presence within it. Is that something you actively want your work to do?

J: In a way I don't think I design my work, I think it just happens. I do a lot of reading around it and I think I struggle with it. Like I think about the Kalahari work is a real struggle for me because I'm working, I keep having to pull myself back to the fact it's actually about language. And the major thing to do with language is to actually to look at language and object, because language is about a series of codes which decipher the meaning of individual lives. So maybe I should focus on the objects because the people who I'm working with have been so exploited. And here I am, an outsider looking at their world, to take it out, and that feels very exploitative. And its like how do I actually deal with that without using the people. I've done portraiture, landscape, looked at archival images and thought about using those but I just find to repeat the archival image of a naked black body or a bushman body it doesn't help to show it again. So how do you deal with that? One thing I started to do a long time ago, about ten years ago was describing the images in texts, rather than actually showing the image itself.

E: Why was that an approach you sought to go for? placement of reference and historiography and what you're saying about Exeter speaks to that.



J: I don't know, I haven't actually done it, I've started doing it but haven't shown this work, it doesn't feel like its complete. But then I think the way to do it is in a collaborative way and maybe it's a conversation between myself and some of the individuals I've been working with. So obviously some of them are dead, so the two women I worked with in the beginning have both died – between 10 and 15 years ago—so working with their granddaughters, now and we go back and forth. They have no idea about my world and I have no idea about their world, in lots of different senses.

At least I go there and their world is visible to me, but my world is completely invisible to them because they've never been here, it's sort of like, beyond the imagination. So that's why it feels like its an exploitative thing, but its one of those things I feel I can't actually let go of, because they've given so much of their time, so therefore it should come out in some way. And maybe the thing to do is sit down and talk to them about how I feel about what to do with that work.

E: Also seeing where they stand, within how they feel they're being represented because they do have the agency to know what exploitation may or may not feel like. And what this work is doing to that story, or how its impacting their being seen in their world and also from the outside looking in.



J: yeah, because the story has been told over and over again, about land rights claims and the coming to Johannesburg and being in the empire exhibition. Going back losing their land, sort of like a biblical story, people being kicked off land and eventually getting the land back and then they have their paradise again, but it's sort of like it's too simplistic because so much was lost within that. And that isn't the story, the story is about how a language is lost, and how it mirrors the loss of thousands of languages across the world within indigenous communities., the language was lost through being forbidden to use it, but also the shame of owning who you are, so that goes back to the idea of identity in some respect.

E: You spoke then about the breadth of your technique, when we met last, we spoke briefly about the transparency work, the interiors work, the still life. I'm interested in hearing about how the breadth of technique is placed within your work?

J: I think for me photography is a language in itself, I suppose my interest in language and codes is about how people read things according to what the mode of the imagery is. Colour photography is very everyday, particularly now. But there was a time when colour photography was only used in commercial work, so if you did something in colour it was commercial. Whereas now I think things have changed, you do things that look like they have been photographed in film it's a very romantic harking back to the past in the same way black and white photography is obviously about truth. So when I did the work 'Sites of Africa', I deliberately chose to do it in black and white because it was about truth, but also it was referencing the idea of document and document is always black and white, black and white is also about truth. If you say something is black and white, its either the truth or it's a lie, its basically telling it as it is. So I told it to that person in black and white, so its the document itself. The subject and the way in which its framed talks about what it is you're trying to talk about. We go through images from Sites of Africa online. So they're black and white documents referencing in particular the history of the African in London, the commission was to actually show the African presence in London, beautifully framed, but what they really meant was go and take pictures of Black people at Brixton Market or something. And I thought actually, no, if you're talking about documenting the African body in London then its actually about going into those historical documents.

E: the moments where people don't really think about the presence of those people prior to 1950s.

J: 1950s! Mid 20th Century.

E: Yeah, and that plays into an idea of when people got here, why they came here. Rather than thinking that people have been coming.

J: People have been coming for millennia.

E: Its very easy to fall into the idea that it was a war venture and after the war nobody wanted to leave, or after people came to study.

J: the fact is some of the people who were deported should never have been deported because when they came here they were British citizens. They didn't lose the documents they set fire to them, one thing you should never do is set burn documents.

E: I do think a lot about the broader techniques you use and what it is that makes you employ those techniques, from cyanotypes to still life.

J: I think the cyanotype started with the whole flower thing, because I was doing this thing called the Victorian language of flowers, and cyanotype is a Victorian printing process, but it was also used by Anna Atkins to document flowers without drawing them, different plant forms mainly, seaweeds and things. So she's got this book which was the first photographic book ever – by a woman – and it's all these cyanotypes, so I started using that, but then I quite liked the fact it was very painterly but also it was something that was quite accessible. And when I really didn't have any money when I first left college, I used to use it to do my contact sheets, because you coat up the paper, put it in between some glass, leave it out in the sun – contact sheet. Whereas if I was to go to the lab it would have cost me a whole load of money, for no good reason. It was a functional thing.

That's the other thing about also subverting the idea of photography as being this thing you can repeat and repeat and repeat if you do it so you can only ever have one, its sort of subverting the idea of photography and print. I mean, that's what makes painting so precious, because there is only one, you can do that, sit there and paint five canvasses that are one, but they could all be five different variants of exactly the same thing.

The thing about that (cyanotype) work there is it's about time, it takes 30 minutes to an hour for exposure, the sun is never ever in the same place, the light is never the same, the way in which you lay the object on the paper is never going to be the same. The object itself is never going to be exactly the same and the time the day, it's a different day, it's a different time, it's a different everything.





E: Almost like a ritual process to it.

J: I think it is quite ritualistic, well not ritualistic, yeah I suppose it is. Its sort of like, not ritualistic, meditative, because you're sat with something.

E: I guess that is on some levels what ritual is, activating.

J: Is it?

E: Yeah, a process that is repeated in some instances, as something that you do to access a different point in time as well, a way of activating a thing, you put these things down in order to bring something else about.

J: I suppose it is.

E: I've been watching a lot of Barbara McCullough film and video pieces about ritual. About process, it speaks to those notions of what ritual is, she speaks to Senga Nengudi, David Hammons and several other artists. That time in visual art and performance art.

J: Oh yeah, particularly women in performance art, because nobody realised it was art – it was like a bunch of women.

E: people were not accessing what they were trying to access or really putting themselves within the continuum that they were trying to get into.

J: I suppose this sort of work in a way is performative as well, it's sort of like laying these things out, often in a car park, because I didn't have any space, not like now, now I have access to my own car park outside. Before I'd have to drive to Vauxhall, coat all the paper up, dry it and put it into black plastic bags and drive to an abandoned car park in Vauxhall, on a Sunday and sit out with all these objects. After the markets were finished, is Nine Elms Market still on?

E: It still goes.

J: There used to be an amazing market with food, you could have clothes sewn..

E: What are points of influence in your work.

J: What, apart from Anna Atkins? No, I think everything is, music, other people that I might, nobody is ordinary. I've never met anyone that is ordinary in my life. Are there ordinary people?

E: Everyone's got a thing and there are people that like, not basic, but do just move through the motions.

J: I never see those people that just move through the motions, they don't come anywhere near me.

E: You're occupying a different time space as well; you move around quite a lot.

J: I think I'm influenced by things I read, I'm influenced by the things I feel, by the people I meet. I'm quite happy to talk to just anyone. I only ever meet people that sit on the fringes, I'm inspired by people's individual stories, that's what I find inspiring and that's what I think feeds my work. I'm influenced by stories and I think that's from when I was little, when I was growing up, and I grew up in a place where there was a printworks called Hazel, Watson and Viney in Buckinghamshire. And they used to publish books for people like Penguin and stuff, out in the middle of nowhere. The books used to be dumped on the allotment, they had a dump and we used to climb up into the dump – if a book had a fault in it, then they'd just put it on the Biffa truck thing, and I used to crawl in and get all the books and just read them. So I spent all my childhood just rereading books that had gone wrong. So, I used to love the idea of stories, and short stories is something that I find really fascinating, that you can encapsulate something and because of my dyslexia, I've got quite a short attention span. You saw it - I'm always moving from one thought to the other. And that influences the way in which I practice, the stories I collect from other people and hear from other people actually, feed into my work.

E: It does speak to what you mentioned about how your work is about codes, so a code is specific to a person, a time to an identity in a way, it's you getting into that and unpicking the code and formulating a narrative from what might seem like a random jumble of numbers or words – ergo a code and you making that into a thing that doesn't always have to exist as a linear process but it's something you have access to and are able to unpick via picking up books from a site fill. And figuring a story, in some senses what that speaks to – the publishers dashing the books away – is that it's not perfect...

J: It's not good enough, well its not perfect, it's not what someone is going to pay for, five letters missing off this page.

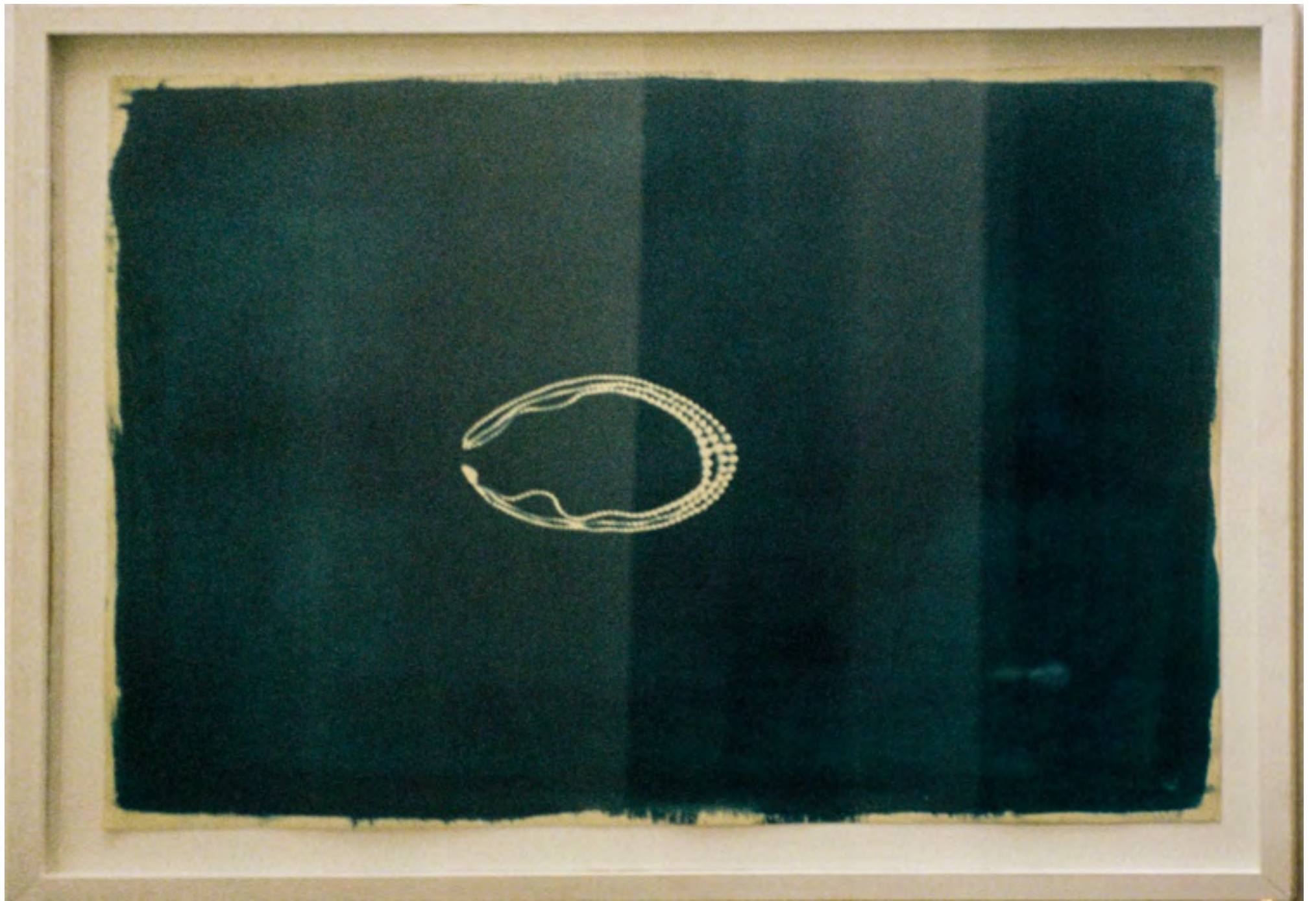
E: Your thing was then working it out.

J: My thing was just enjoying it, and actually not worrying about the fact that half the page was missing.

E: Because that's unique to that specific thing, its unique to that. And that what makes everyone an individual, it links back to what you said about nobody being ordinary.

J: I'm interested in individuals and their individuality and their individual stories. I think people that will speak to me – I'm often travelling on my own are maybe people that are so individual that they don't quite fit, but they're perfect, because they don't fit.

E: Do you feel like that it why you are happy to dip your hands in different points of technique?




J: Yeah I do dip in and out of things, I don't work on one single project at once, which people find sometimes quite strange but then I quite like that, I think about people who have been in the studio next door, they've always worked on about two or three projects at once, and that made me feel like I was quite normal. At the moment I'm working on the project in Exeter and I think they're probably a bit nervous, because I don't seem to be settling on anything. But the way in which I work is I start by actually not focussing on anything in particular, just absorbing lots of different things. The last trip I went on I walked around the town and took lots of pictures in the town, I looked at maps, and tried to read up on the history of Exeter, and tried to understand the place without thinking I'm making a piece of work about this and also looking at the stuff in the museum and I looked at all the cases and spent time observing people of the town and trying to understand that. I spent 15 years doing the Kalahari and I can't get my head around that, how am I going to do this in less time. The work has to be in existence and on two legs by August and I usually like to work with people because if you're doing a commission that is about people – we should talk about matron bell – it has to belong to the people. It can't be about me only and my experience but if it's a commission for a community, then the community has to be within the DNA of that work. And if you're not there in that space, then you have to think about a way of finding something that will have a relevance to that space as well as to my practice and to my work. So I suppose all of it is about translation, and trying to understand.

E: I feel like that is something you respect, just how things translate differently in different context, and it requires a different understanding and taking into account of time and how that then impacts the fragments that you're trying to put together. It is fragments that you are trying to piece together fragments to formulate a history that is not quite being documented nor is present at that moment in time. That is where I feel it occupies a space of historiography, accounting for a time space beyond what has been said and done before. I think it necessary that it takes the time it takes before you reach that certain point, a spreading out of points of reference and experience before you kind of centre it. How do you deal with the time sensitive nature of work?

J: When something is time sensitive, that's been the problem with the Kalahari project, it hasn't been time sensitive. I have to make a decision that this must end on this point, and I think for the Kalahari it has to end this year. I don't know how I'm going to end it, but I know that it's ending this year. I think the way to end it for me is to find a gallery that will actually show the work and for them to put the time on, I obviously need to have more studio visits and have more people come to the studio.

E: I really like this Julia work.

J: She is one of those people that made me do the language project, she's from a place called Bocas del Toro, in the north of Panama, and they're the people that came over when slavery was outlawed on the English-speaking islands, and they couldn't get work because you have to be an apprentice or something, and you'd basically be a slave but in any other name. so a lot of the people moved to panama or moved to the other islands, they had loads of sugar plantations so they worked on those as free people, but they kept their language as their identities. So when I met Julia and other people within that community, they all spoke English but like a frozen English, so they didn't have words for computer or words for anything that was invented in the 20th century because they didn't exist, so they would revert back to Spanish to do that, that whole thing about code-switching within a language. It was also about living in a world, a language is also a world, you're living in this world where the boundaries around the time in which the language was closed, so no further words were developed so when it was passed on to them by their great grandparents to their grandparents to their parents to themselves, they didn't develop any other words in English, because they weren't within an English-speaking community. So like mobile phone does not exist in the language that they speak, because the Victorians didn't have mobile phones, they didn't even have telephones. They'd use the Spanish word for it.



E: You mentioned it being frozen.

J: So things that are frozen, after I'd spoken to them in 1997, in 2000 I got nominated and invited to apply for an ESTA, I decided that when I got it I wanted to do something around language and identity, because it was such an important part of their identity. But it's taken me until now to even think about it, because I think that the idea of endangered languages but also lost languages because that language is lost, so Juanita does not speak the language of her grandparents so the language is dead, there's only two speakers left, and if you don't have another speaker the language is dead anyway, because who do you converse with? The whole point of language is being able to share. So I suppose I was trying to understand what it is not to have that part of your language, that part of yourself anymore. That's also about my own experience, so I've grown up in a Caribbean family, with parents who, a mother at least, who denied that any of her ancestors were slaves and that she was Jamaican and that's how she ended up on the island and that has nothing to do with anything other than the fact that she was Jamaican, rather than Jamaica was a constructed space, it's not a space where indigenous people came up or whatever. So the loss within that is having developed a new culture, so the old culture is gone, and the language that they spoke - because I think language is very much about who you are - has also gone or moved on to something else, and so there's a curiosity about what is it not to have that history because history is actually encoded within the language as well.



E: And in so far as how you think about things and the language that you process in.

J: Yeah, and how you dream.

E: What ideas or what is considered logical or illogical, via the words you are able to use and access.

J: It describes where you are, it describes a geography, in both a physical and metaphorical sense.

E: Even how words are said, whereabouts in your body it's coming from, in so far as vibratory. What is being conveyed, some languages I guess are more navel, in the sense that you have to bellow in a certain way and you're accessing more parts of your spirit. Whereas on some levels, English is quite limited.

J: And also English is quite quiet, I didn't realise how quiet English was until I went to Jamaica, you know, people are talking to you and they're here, and you're there and they're talking as if you're over there and when I went to Nigeria it was exactly the same thing, people are talking and you're thinking who are they talking to? and they're talking to the person that is next to them. It's even worse on the phone, on the bus.

E: Almost to account for the distance via the phone.

J: It is to do with the geography, so if you were talking to your neighbour they would be on the other side of the field, and so you would need to be able to talk loud to them. So it talks about the geography.

E: Its speaking to a familiarity, it speaks to how people feel about each other, they're not coy about hearing each other's voices.

J: And also laughing, the whole of your body laughs.

E: Over here, there is a level of repression.

J: I think the culture here is around, not a reticence, but they're reserved. They have to reserve, reserved in the way you hold everything back. Because it's not wise to show your hand, but that's embedded within the whole of the culture, so nobody ever talks about money, never talk about ownership, never talk about class. Its always implied and you have to understand the codes so you understand where you are. That's why when people come over from other countries and they're like 'they said that they liked it' I'm like 'they didn't like it' and they go 'how

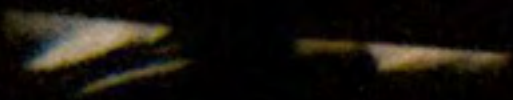
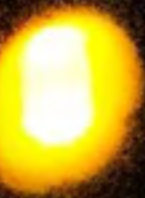
do you know they didn't like it?' well because the way in which they said 'oh, it's really good'. That sincerity, you have to understand they're saying it's really bad, because they're not going to say its really bad, because that's not within the culture to say somethings really bad. But Jamaicans will tell you 'that's rubbish'.

E: and they mean it.

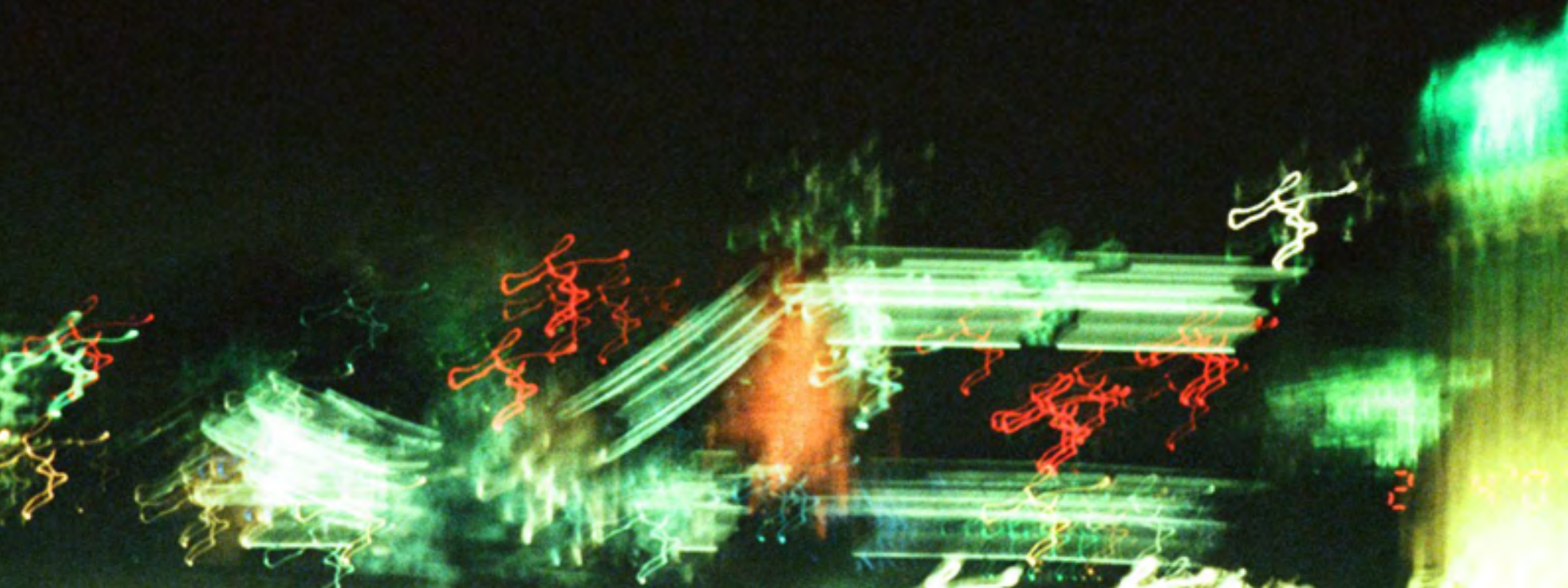
J: and they mean it, they'll tell you go and burn it down.

E: You need that.

J: But that's a different culture, it's about it being outside, so a lot of the culture is lived on the street and that talks about the way in which the life is, it's about being outward. Whereas here everything takes place behind walls, because its cold as well.



"I am a stranger, learning to love the strangers around me." June Jordan



DUB MUSIC HAS MYTHIC QUALITIES, ACTS AS A SCIENCE, THE ABILITY TO CREATE MYSTIC AND OTHERWORLDLY SONICS, TRANSPORTATION DEVICE, HOW IT CREATES A NEW PERSPECTIVE BY MANIPULATING WORLDS ALREADY FORMULATED, THE PORTAL AND ITS PULSES, JULIAN HENRIQUES DISCUSSES IN SONIC BODIES, [LINK A, B AND C](#) • LUNAR DEITIES IN HISTORY, [LINK](#) • SHAPER OF GOD RESEARCH MACHINE BY AMERICAN ARTIST, A FOCUS ON SCI-FI, OCTAVIA BUTLER AND THE FREQUENCY OF BLACK PEOPLE, [LINK](#) • AMERICAN ARTIST FOCUSES ON BLACK LABOUR, VISIBILITY AND HISTORY OF DREXCIA AND THE NAUTICAL AFROFUTURIST MYTH, [LINK](#) • PARALLEL NARRATIVES BETWEEN DETROIT AND BERLIN, [LINK](#) • DOMINIQUE WHITE'S SCULPTURAL OFFERINGS SPEAK TO THE CONVERGENCE OF NAUTICAL MYTH, AFROFUTURISM AND THE SHIPWRECKED, SHARES LINKS TO DREXCIA, AND THE PAST, PRESENT FUTURE, [LINK](#) • CELEBRATION OF FALL OF BERLIN WALL, [LINK](#) • AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN CLASH OF SYNCOPATION AND TIME, THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW LANDSCAPES, PERHAPS SYNTHETIC AND NEW CONCEPTION OF TEMPORALITY, BEN GOOK SPEAKS ON THIS HERE, [LINK](#) • DETROIT FIRE, WORKS SHOW CELEBRATION, [LINK](#) • MID AUTUMN FESTIVAL, CHINA PRAYING, THANKSGIVING, GATHERING, CELEBRATION HAS TAKEN PLACE SINCE THE SHANG DYNASTY, ON THIS DAY, THE CHINESE BELIEVE THAT THE MOON IS AT ITS BRIGHTEST AND FULLEST SIZE, COINCIDING WITH HARVEST TIME IN THE MIDDLE OF AUTUMN. PARALLELS IN INDIA, SRI LANKA. LAOS. VIETNAM, [LINK](#) • MONUMENT TO THE MINDS OF THE LITTLE NEGRO STEELWORKERS, [LINK](#) • COLORS AND TONES (4:39-4:53) GOES ON TO TALK ABOUT FUTURISTIC AND ALIEN SOUNDS AND TECHNOLOGY IMPACT ON HUMANS AND THE MUSIC MADE [LINK](#) • M. NOURBESE PHILIP SYNCRETISM RELIGION AND WATER SPEAKS ON ZONG AND THE BLACK OUTDOORS, [LINK](#) • THINKING ABOUT NOTIONS OF IMMATERIAL ATTACHED TO LOSS THE UNDOCUMENTED AND FRAGMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH KNOWLEDGE WITHIN BLACK LIFE HOW IT REMAINS PROFOUNDLY GENERATIVE, DOGON COSMOLOGY, HAITI, HAITIAN VODOUN, NIGERIA, BRAZIL, [LINK A, B AND C](#) • STORY OF SPIRITS AND DUPPY IN JAMAICA, [LINK](#) • UNDERWATER

SPIRIT DEITY MAMI WATA LAUDED IN YORUBA TRADITION, [LINK](#) • GRACE NICHOLS POEM ON SHANGO OYA HURACAN KEEPS THE ORAL TRADITION PRESENT, [LINK](#) • CHARLES BURNETT ALLUDES TO PRESENCE OF SUPERSTITION AS PART OF AMERICAN SOUTH TRADITION IN TO SLEEP WITH ANGER, [LINK](#) • THE LORE ASSOCIATED WITH FLYING AFRICANS AND IGBO LANDING, TONI MORRISON SPEAKS BRIEFLY ON THIS. MIRRORED IN HER BOOK SONG OF SOL-OMON; [LINK A](#), [B](#) AND [C](#) • THINKING ABOUT THE GHANAIAAN AKAN CONCEPT OF TIME ASSOCIATED WITH SANKOFA. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IMMATERIAL AND THE IMAGINED LIVES SAIDIYA HARTMAN, [LINK](#) • PARIS IS BURNING. COMMUNITY AND COMMUNION, [LINK](#) • CARTOGRAPHIES OF THE ABSOLUTE - TOSCANO DOCUMENTS THE MANNER WIN WHICH ARTISTS CREATE, COMMUNICATE AND DEVELOP PROCESS, [LINK A](#) AND [B](#) • JULIANA HUXTABLE, THERE ARE CERTAIN FACTS THAT CANNOT BE DISPUTED, [LINK](#) • UK RAVE IN ESSEX, PEOPLE DANCE TO FRANKIE KNUCKLES, [LINK](#) • JEAN ROUCH AVENTURE AFRICAINE LOOKS INTO THE DOGON TRADITIONS, THEIR CUSTOMS, LIVING STRUCTURES AND CELEBRATIONS, [LINK A](#) AND [B](#) • DOCUMENTARY ON DOGON STAR, [LINK](#) • DAVID HAMMONS CONCERTO IN BLACK BLUE, [LINK](#) • ARIA DEAN WRITING ON BLACCELERATION, [LINK](#) • AFRICAN COSMOLOGIES, PHOTOGRAPHY, TIME, AND THE OTHER, [LINK](#) • THE STATE OF MIND OF AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY THE ETHEREAL THE SHARPNESS OF A DISORIENTATION AND HOW THIS CAN BRING ABOUT INWARD LOOKING FORMLESS AND SHAPELESS IN EXPRESSION, [LINK](#) • COMMON NEWCASTLE CELEBRATIONS, [LINK](#) • THE DOGON ARE BASED IN MALI, THEY HOLD SIGNIFICANCE AS THEY WERE ABLE TO TRACE THE COMPANION STAR OF SIRIUS A, PRIOR TO INTRODUCTION OF TELESCOPES AND SUCH TECHNOLOGY. THEY ESTABLISHED CONTACT WITH EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS. THE ARCHITECTURE AND STRUCTURES ARE ALSO OF INTEREST, [LINK A](#) AND [B](#) • RON EGLASH AFRICAN FRACTAL SHAPES, RELATIONSHIP TO BINARY CODE, [LINK](#) • FRACTALS AS IMPORTANT GEOMETRIC FORMS, THE RELATIONSHIP TO BINARY MATHS, TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE, EULARIAN PATHS, BAMANA SAND DIVINATION [LINK](#) • BENJAMIN BANNEKER THE BLACK INTELLEC-

TUAL SUCCESSFULLY PREDICTED A SOLAR ECLIPSE IN 1789 BANNEKER'S JOURNALS AND WRITINGS DOCUMENT THE MOTIONS OF THE SUN AND MOON, THE TRUE PLACES AND ASPECTS OF THE PLANETS, THE RISING AND SETTING OF THE SUN, PLACE AND AGE OF THE MOON, &C. THE LUNATIONS, CONJUNCTIONS, ECLIPSES, JUDGMENT OF THE WEATHER, FESTIVALS, AND OTHER REMARKABLE DAYS, [LINK A AND B](#) • INDIGENOUS PRACTICES SPEAKS TO THE IN BETWEEN SPACE FOR THE SACRED, EVERYDAY QUOTIDIAN TO DEVELOP - THE MACUMBA AS AN EXAMPLE, [LINK](#) • - DEFORREST BROWN JR. SPEAKS ON TECHNO, INFLUENCES AND LEFEBVRE VIA RESIDENT ADVISOR, [LINK A AND B](#) • SOPHIE OLUWOLE ON IFA MATHEMATICS AND PHILOSOPHY, [LINK](#) • HOW DOES ONE REFLECT ON THE EVERYDAY POSSIBILITIES OF THE IMAGINATION OF ANOTHER REALM? • AMERICAN ARTIST AND LEGACY RUSSELL SPEAK ON THE BODY ABOLITION AND FUGITIVE PRACTICES ON NTS, [LINK](#) • ONIBABA HORROR TRAILER JAPANESE FILM, [LINK](#) • MYTHS ASSOCIATED TO THE NKISI WHO ARE SPIRITS THAT INHABIT OBJECTS USED IN DIVINATION PRACTICES ASSO- CIATED WITH CONGO AND HAS BEEN AROUND AS EARLY AS THE 16TH CENTURY, THESE ENERGIES ARE MIRRORED BY THE ARTIST KNOWN AS NKISI. 'LIFE IS FUNDAMENTALLY A PROCESS OF PERPETUAL AND MUTUAL COMMUNICATION AND TO COMMUNICATE IS TO EMIT AND TO RECEIVE WAVES AND RADIATION FROM THE BOOK AFRICAN COSMOLOGY OF THE BANTU-KONGO BY KIMBWARDÉNDÉ KIA BUNSEKÌ FUÉKIAU, [LINK A AND B](#) •



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