

Mapping Black Identities: 3 Films

What if the way you experience the world, your perspective, and all that informs it were turned on their head?

The works in “Mapping Black Identities: 3 Films” aim to do just that. The artists confront the legacy of systemic white supremacy—global systems, processes, organizations, and personal actions that maintain white privilege—by presenting conflicting realities. The works by artists Ja'Tovia Gary (American, b. 1984), Nástio Mosquito (Angolan, b. 1981), and Tabita Rezaire (French-born Guyanese-Danish, b. 1989) confront past and present forms of subjugation experienced by Black people, namely slavery and colonization. As a whole, the three films unapologetically champion the voices and experiences of Black artists by providing differing worldviews that envision an end to systemic white supremacy, the pursuit of freedom in an unjust world, and a transformative righting of past wrongs.

“Mapping Black Identities” is co-curated by Mia’s Department of Contemporary Art, including Esther Callahan, Curatorial Affairs Fellow; Gabriel Ritter, Curator and Department Head; Nicole Soukup, Assistant Curator; and Keisha Williams, Curatorial Department Assistant and Artist Liaison, in collaboration with Mia’s Curatorial Advisory Committee. This committee is composed of Mia staff who champion the prerogatives of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility by advising on Mia’s curation, labeling, and programming practices.

See the rest of the “Mapping Black Identities” exhibition in nearby Galleries 373 and 374.

Tabita Rezaire

French-born Guyanese-Danish, b. 1989

Sorry For Real, 2015

HD Film

[DURATION]

What is the function of an apology, and who ultimately benefits? Tabita Rezaire's *Sorry For Real* addresses these questions through a smartphone monologue. In the speech, the Western world apologizes for its violent histories of slavery, colonialism, patriarchy, and the continued exploitation of African and Indigenous bodies, lands, and knowledge. While the apology unfolds in a mechanized voice, a critical commentary from historically marginalized voices appears via text message on screen. Using irony, the work questions the power imbalances within this fictional narrative of apology-forgiveness. This imagined exchange examines Western savior syndrome and the politics of reparations beyond money as an approach to self-reflection and possible healing.

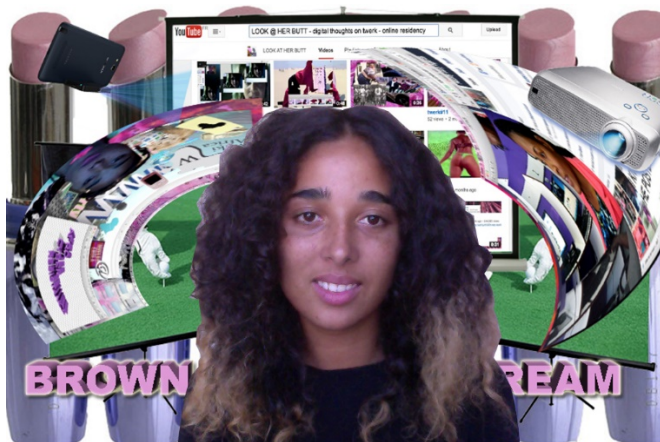


Photo: Tabita Rezaire

“Without romanticising Blackness or pre-colonial Africa, my work seeks to honour the contributions of Black people and cultures over time and space... Those contributions have been either erased, vilified or appropriated; my practice is one of healing our historical memory and recovering from manufactured amnesia.”—Tabita Rezaire, 2018

Additional Info:

The work questions the apology-forgiveness narrative. What is the function of an apology? Who benefits from the apology? What power structures are hidden behind our apologetic age? Why do we need an apology? Should the present apologize for the past? What about forgiveness? Can an apology ever be enough to move on? And what is the face of oppression today?

Tabita Rezaire is a French-Guyanese and Danish new media artist based in Johannesburg. She holds a Master in Artist Moving Image from Central Saint Martins College in London. Both her research and practice focus on the political aesthetics of resistance through screen-based practices. She engages in cinematic urban intervention and digital activism, producing videos and web-platforms, curating screenings, giving talks and leading workshops.

Rezaire describes herself as an agent of healing. She creates digital encounters that offer alternative readings to dominant narratives. In the stories she presents, the process of listening, seeing and witnessing can be potentially transformative. Her work is composed of layers of images and sound, and yet there is a desire to transform the density of data into a collective experience of sharing and knowing.

See articles about Tabita Rezaire here:

<https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/decolonising-the-internet-artist-tabita-rezaire/>

<https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/visual-artist-and-healer-tabita-rezaire-on-the-infinite-flow-of-creative-energy/>

Artist website:

<https://www.tabitarezaire.com/>

Ja'Tovia Gary

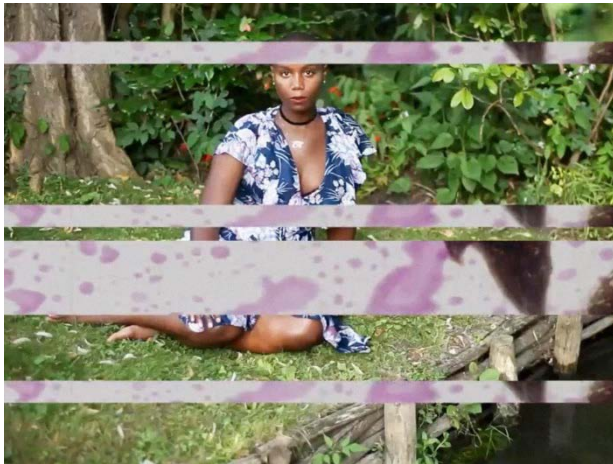
American, b. 1984

An Ecstatic Experience, 2015

Film

6:00

Ja'Tovia Gary sources moments from found footage and music. Through film manipulation and thoughtful juxtaposition, she reimagines the Black figure within the moving image. In the film's central moment, the actor Ruby Dee performs the true story of enslaved woman Fannie Moore as featured on the television series "History of the Negro People," (1965). Dee recounts the epiphany Moore's mother reached for her and her descendants to escape physical and mental enslavement. The monologue contrasts against contemporary footage of an interview with Black revolutionary Assata Shakur (b. 1947) and clashes with police in combat gear. Gary highlights the struggles of Black people in contemporary society and the legacy of resistance as a source of liberation.



Still from *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)*, 2017, featuring the artist

"I wanted people to feel an out-of-body experience... I liken it to the Holy Ghost. In the church you feel it, like when the temperature in the room shifts, they're singing, the drums are hitting, and the choir is working things up, and you feel this kind of quickening in your body, but also in the space."—Ja'Tovia Gary, 20

Additional Info:

Ja'Tovia Gary's work covers a variety of topics including identity, race and gender, and how specific groups are portrayed in popular culture and media. An Ecstatic sources moments from found footage and Gary's own on-screen animations, she reimagines the Black figure within the moving image. Examining the legacy of resistance, strategies for survival, and acts of liberation in the African American experience, artist and film maker Ja'Tovia Gary describes *An Ecstatic Experience* as "a meditative invocation on transcendence as a means of restoration." To say Ja'Tovia's film is complex to me would be an understatement. It is filled with intelligent, beautiful and heartbreaking layers that not only add to a deeper understanding of the film, but give a glimpse into the artist herself.

The film opens with jazz musician Alice Coltrane's song Journey In Satchidananda (sa chi dan an da) and found footage of black parishioners attending church service. Coltrane's song is inspired by Indian religious teacher and spiritual master Swami Satchidanada (sa chi dan an da) whose beliefs center on Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss, and were an important source of inspiration and belief for Coltrane.

In the central moment of the film, Ruby Dee appears and recites a story about the experience of living on a plantation. The performance was based on a true story from [Fannie Moore](#), an enslaved woman whose story was recorded and preserved by the Federal Writers Project and the Library of Congress. Moore's story is about the struggles her mother encountered while raising children during slavery, reliance on her faith and the epiphany she reached allowing her and her descendants to escape enslavement both physically and mentally while receiving a beating from "Master Jim".

The film also features footage from an interview with well-known political activist and member of the Black Liberation Army Assata Shakur. In the clip she is interviewed in Cuba where she recounts her feelings about her reputation in America and her escape from prison. This scene has moments of flashes of actress Ruby Dee crying, perhaps communicating the trauma black women face in our search for freedom.

Gary closes the film with an a cappella version of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" sung by the chorus standing with Dee. During this, recent footage of Black Lives Matter protests in Baltimore and Ferguson is shown with images of police in combat ready gear, and protesters of all racial backgrounds marching for justice, suggesting the fight is not yet over and this history is all connected.

Throughout the film there are major themes of power, conquest and transformation, especially in reference to the relationship between the African American experience and the act of protesting. The African American body is still disrespected and mistreated, however citizens are now able to take part in changing the future through movements; a platform for black voices to be heard, noticed, and able to incite action.

See articles about Ja'Tovia Gary here:

<https://www.culturedmag.com/jatovia-gary/>

<http://asajournal.com/cinema-notes-american-letters-elizabeth-reich-courtney-r-baker-and-michael-b-gillespie/>

Artist website:

<https://www.jatovia.com/#1>

Nástio Mosquito

Angolan, b. 1981

3 Continents, 2010

Video

7:45

Courtesy of the artist

In *3 Continents*, Nástio Mosquito assumes the role of public speaker/politician, addressing Europe, the United States of America, and Africa in three consecutive speeches. In his humorous yet provocative speech, the artist declares that he has “bought Europe” and “bought the US of A,” adopting the flawed Western logic of ownership as a tool of colonization. Behind him are handmade maps, which he marks with a fingerprint as a sign of ownership. Through the medium of language, Mosquito highlights the complex legacy and contemporary continuation of dominant Western thought and the liberating potential of words.



Still from *3 Continents*, 2010, featuring the artist © Nástio Mosquito

“For me there are three basic fundamental characters that I keep returning to, right? It’s the preacher, it’s the joker, and it’s the public speaker. And it can take many different forms, the politician being one of them. So within one of those three characters I think I establish the dynamic of my narrative. And I tend to sometimes combine them—go in and out of them within the same statement sometimes. One way or another, hopefully these characters are always at the service of being ambiguous enough that you have to engage.”—Nástio Mosquito, 2017

Additional Info:

Nástio Mosquito is known for performances, videos, music and poetry that show an intense commitment to the open-ended, liberating potential of language. Exploring a range of themes such as post-internet, performance, protest and masquerade, Mosquito questions identity, political power and the concept of home.

Nástio Mosquito has previously performed at the Walker in 2014

<https://walkerart.org/magazine/9-artists-bartholomew-ryan-on-nastio-mosquito>

See interviews with Nástio Mosquito here:

<https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/n%C3%A1stio-mosquito-what-are-you-willing-die>

<https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/n%C3%A1stio-mosquito-mama-africa-construct>

See a version of the film *3 Continents* here:

<https://vimeopro.com/dzzzz/nastio-mosquito-ban/video/105326166>

Artist website:

<https://nastiosmosquito.com/>