

OUT LOUD: Narrative, Memory, Identity

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Before I was an artist, I was a writer. Storytelling was one of my first great loves. When I was a child make believe games were my favorite. I would create elaborate worlds and adventures for my brother and me. When transitioning into my teens, I began to really write. I decided to keep a diary all through my teenage years. It was a space to process the complicated emotions and experiences I was growing through. I wrote every day, pages and pages, privately, intimately until one of my friends asked to read it. I said yes. Sharing my writing wasn't new for me at this time. My short stories had circulated around the school with some popularity and mild following. Despite that, I was still shocked that someone wanted to read about me, wanted to hear my true voice, wanted to see me. It was nerve wracking. She took the whole school day to read it. Her attention did not budge from my diary. She read it during class hidden in her text book, while eating lunch, and would shoo people away who tried to talk to her. When she finished she handed it back to me with a note inside explaining how my honesty and vulnerability in my writing had moved her. It was my first positive review. Soon more of my friends and classmates were reading my diary and clamoring for a new entry every time they saw me. It felt like I had made the bestsellers list. In sharing my diary, I was amazed that so many people wanted to read my thoughts, cared about what I had to say. People wanted to know me, wanted to know how I experienced the world. It was the first time I thought my voice mattered. The first time my voice had power.

All through my life my mother would tell me stories about her life growing up in Indiana with her parents and siblings. Storytelling was her way of trying to help us connect with her but also her way of staying connected in her love for them. My mother also used stories to educate me on how I would navigate living as a Black woman in

America. She would tell me about the racism she faced in the military. How they did not like her in “white spaces.” She told me how my grandmother never finished middle school because of a teacher who belittled her. How when people look at me they wouldn't expect me to be smart or talented because of their prejudices.

I learned that through storytelling you could learn from those before you and preserve your history for others. For so long stories like mine were not considered valuable, my life experience did not matter. I've decided to fight against that idea by using my history and memories as the foundation of my art practice. Using elements of personal narrative I weave my experiences into my art. Art is considered valuable. You can buy it. It is placed in galleries and museums. Presenting my story as art automatically gives it value. In my work I look to amplify and “legitimize” the Black voice.

Growing up I didn't think I could pursue art as a career. When I took art history and went to museums I did not see myself represented. The art cannon, as I have been taught, has been rooted in the voice of the white male. It wasn't until I saw the show *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic* at The Modern in Fort Worth, Texas, that I could see myself lining the walls of the art institutions I have studied.

What drew me to Wiley's work was how much space he took up. His paintings take up the wall and fill the audience's vision. The viewer can't help but confront Blackness. Not only did Wiley's work show me that there is space for me in the art world, but I saw a whole museum filled with people from the Black community. Here I stood in a museum that at every opportunity made me feel unwelcome for just existing as a Black woman within their walls and now it felt like I belonged. The fact that a Black woman was here in a white dominated museum viewing Wiley's interpretation of the

Judith and the Head of
Holofernes with a Black woman
as the focus of the piece
changed my perception of what
an artist could do for their
audience. Kehinde Wiley and I
are both making art around our
experiences as Black people in
a society where Black is seen
as less than or unimportant. We
are trying to change the canon
of art by forcing the audience to
see us, to hear us.



FORTUNE TELLER

I conceived my paper fortune teller project from a random conversation;

“Remember all those games we used to play to predict the future when we were kids.”

“Yeah, you loved to play m*a*s*h and I loved to make paper fortune tellers.”

“Yeah, none of those predictions came true. If it would have said something like ‘oh you’re a woman good luck with that’ I might have had a better understanding of what I was in for.”

That short conversation with my friend inspired me to make my paper fortune teller give-away. My fortune teller depicts realistic futures for women navigating a patriarchal society. Instead of colors you pick from: Sorry, Smile, Sigh, or Shrug. They are all named after actions I perform while living in a male dominated society that makes it unsafe and oppressive to exist as a woman. “Sorry” comes from the passive language I’ve been taught to speak and having to preface every thought I have with a “Sorry, but I think....” “Smile” from being constantly being told I should smile more to look more friendly and not come off as a bitch. “Sigh” for all the times I’m reminded that America thinks so little of me. “Shrug” for all the times I shrug and roll my eyes when something bad happens to me as a woman because I have been conditioned to believe that I do not matter.

Examples of available fortunes are;

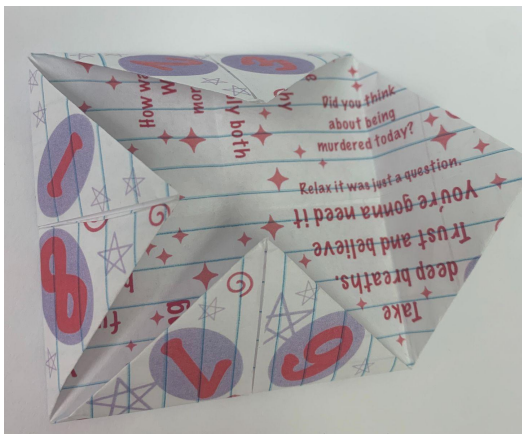
“Today’s probably going to be just okay.”

"You may or may not get catcalled today."

"Did you think about being murdered today? Relax, it was just a question."

Fortunes depict the reality of existing as a woman. It shows what things we have to look forward to day to day. It allows women to begrudgingly laugh at that reality and if men cannot relate that's kind of the point. Using the format of the paper fortune teller was essential. The piece relies on the memories that people have with the object. People expect the fantastical idealized versions of their futures but then have to grapple with the futures I give them. When I approach a piece my materials need to be in service of the concept. My paper fortune teller needed to feel like a memory.

I designed my paper fortune to accomplish two things, to encapsulate a memory and to be easily produced so that they can be giveaways. For the printing method, I decided a regular Xerox photocopier would be exactly what I needed. Galleries are often places where art is not made to be interacted with or touched. I am always thinking of how I want my audience to engage with my work and not worry about damaging it.



The audience will have a memory of making and touching this object. They will interact with it because they already know they are meant to. I decided to print it on lined notebook paper, the kind you would

just pull out from a binder to make a paper fortune teller during class.

When designing the text I thought about handwriting, but ultimately decided against it. Though I was making this object to evoke memory, I was not making a replica of a past object. I was using this form to communicate aspects of womanhood. I wanted to use a font that wasn't severe like a Time New Roman or Arial. I ended up going with a font called Marker Felt that gave me the feeling of writing with a Crayola marker but had the clarity of type. I also added swirls stars around the text as a little homage to the doodling in my notebooks I used to do when bored in class. Every element of this simple paper fortune teller was thought out to evoke a memory that I was actively subverting.

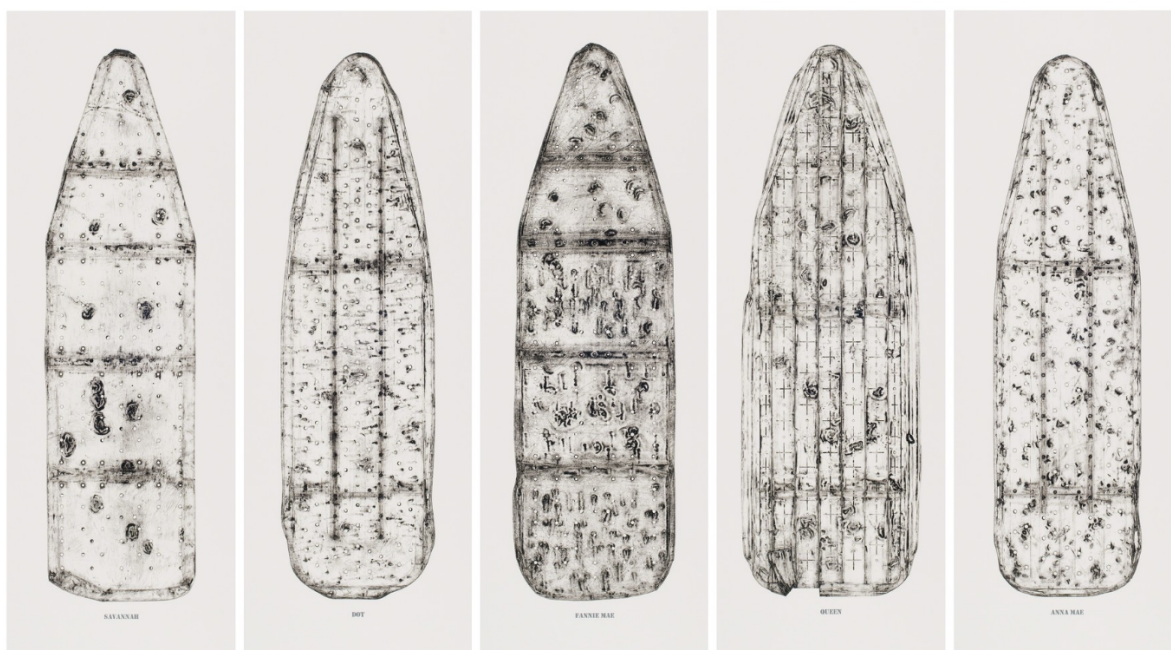
POCKETBOOK CANDY

Reflection is a large part of my identity as an artist. This year will be the 10th anniversary of my grandmother's death from pancreatic cancer. I have been told that milestone anniversaries are often when memories start to resurface. Recently I have been contemplating my experience with my grandmother and how they have been shaped by the society we live in.

The artist book *Pocketbook Candy* came from reflecting on my time with my grandmother. I remember her most vividly in three places, wearing an apron in the kitchen, tending to her garden in a sun hat, and pristinely dressed sitting in a church

pew. Church is what I often think about in relation to my grandmother. There was always tension when attending church. I remember how tight my Gran's smile was and how I never wanted it directed at me. As much as my Grandmother lived for the Lord, she was also there to perform the role of dutiful wife, mother, and grandmother. Her family had to be the perfect accessories to that perfection or else.

Objects can shape a memory and be a perfect symbol of a person. In Willie Cole's series of intaglio and relief prints *5 Beauties Rising*, the vintage ironing boards he uses as matrices represent a woman who raised him up. When asked about the piece Cole stated, "The objects have a memory and history of their own. So if you have a slave, or just a domestic worker, people working for little money, their objects have a memory of that experience" ("Willie Cole | Five Beauties").



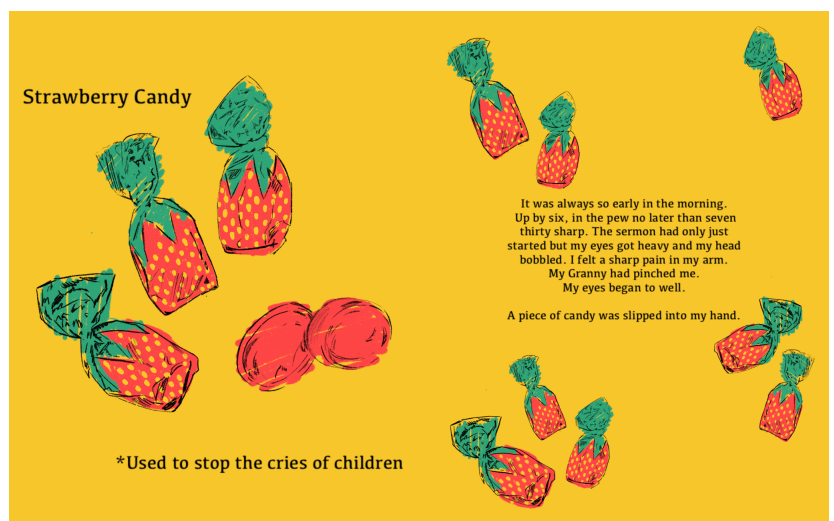
The candy my Gran would give me to act right symbolized the memory, but the pocketbook that housed them was the symbol of my grandmother. She carried a perfectly polished unscuffed black leather bag and that bag needed to house my candy.

The casing of my book folds into a shape that looks like a pocketbook. It is covered in faux leather book cloth and has a handle and working opening and closing clasp to give the illusion of a bag.



Each candy she would give me became a framing device for a narrative. All were “old lady” hard candies – a strawberry candy, a butterscotch, a soft peppermint, a lifesaver, and a candy I thought was going to be a spearmint. I screen printed each candy as a spread which I folded in half to make two pages and attached to an accordion structure. This format allows for the image of the candy with its description to be on the front and the narrative that goes with that candy on the back. The book's color palette pulls from the color of the candies.

In making this book I reflected on my experiences with my grandmother. As time passes, I find memories of her becoming hazier. My relationship with my grandmother was complicated, but she is a connection that is



important to remember. Being Black means that much of my past is unpreserved; I am doing everything in my power to preserve my heritage.

LIGHT BRIGHT AND DAMN NEAR WHITE and BEHIND MY BACK

When I started to explore aspects of colorism in my work I wanted the viewer to step into my shoes and experience what it was like for me to live with colorism. When you grow up in a system like colorism that has always been there, affecting every generation before you, and trickling down to you, it can be hard to put it into words. As a mixed person colorism affects me in a complicated way. I tried to remember the first time I became conscious of the fact that I was “light skinned.” I had always known I was lighter than any member of my family, but my immediate family never treated me any differently. That could not be said for my extended family.

I grew up hearing stories about how my Great Grandma Brown had favored me for my light skin. My mother, the darkest of her siblings and cousins, suddenly found herself being praised for one of the first times. “You did good April,” Great Grandma Brown famously said as she held me tighter and looked at me in a way she had never looked at another great grandchild. I became a show piece, the one that got toted around as a symbol of superiority. And no one loved to show me off more than my maternal grandmother. She would take me to church with her while my other siblings and cousins would get to sleep in or go to children’s church. Everyone needed to see

me with my Gran. I remember being introduced to my Gran's church lady friends. They would smile in my face and then retreat behind their church fans trying to hide their disdain of me. That was when I realized what it was like to be "light skinned." They hated me and yet wanted to be like me.

When conceiving my first piece on colorism I pulled from this memory and decided to use the church fan imagery. The sets of two fans that I have created have stereotypical Christian

imagery of Black prayer hands on one side and a flying dove on the other.

Written over the imagery is a phrase I had heard many times while growing up, "Light bright and damn near



white." A phrase that was used to praise and punish, a constant reminder of my light complexion and a slight against my Hispanic heritage. I was almost white, almost the ideal.

On the backside at the top of both sets of fans I printed the words "Let Us All Rejoice." Under that I printed the text of the spiritual "This Little Light of Mine" and the Bible verse from John 1:5: "The



light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Everything on the fans allude to the reverence of light skin and the fact that being considered closer to white is the ideal.

It wasn't enough for me to just make these art objects. They need to be activated. Yoko Ono often prompts her audience with simple instructions. In *Voice Piece for Soprano* (1961) she displayed on the wall instructions for the audience: “Scream. 1. against the wind 2. against the wall 3. against the sky” (Persse). The instructions are the script which activates the audience and that activation, the screaming, is the piece. In my fan piece I display instructions telling viewers to take a fan and walk around with it. Doing so they view all types of people holding this fan that exults whiteness while they are holding one themselves. It forces them to ask the question, “How have I contributed to the system of colorism?” “How have I been complicit in upholding a system that places such a reverence for something as arbitrary as skin complexion?” Topics about race and identity have often been considered something unspoken so as not to offend anyone or place blame. I am using a silent action that speaks volumes.

When exploring colorism in a different work *Behind my Back* I started with the question, “Why as Black people do we categorize ourselves by skin tone?” – a question I already knew the answer to. All roads lead back to slavery. Slave owners created this system to pit us against ourselves. The darker complexioned of us toiled working hard labor while lighter slaves, who might have been mixed through the rape of white masters, were kept in “privileged” house working positions. Even though I know this, I have to ask myself, “Why do we still do this and how have I contributed to it blindly?”

I thought back to the times my family and I have used coloristic language.

“She’s light but not light like me.”

“My granddaddy was blue black.”

“You know they’re dark. Not like chocolate like charcoal.”

It made me think of all the times I said and heard these descriptions and didn’t think anything of it. I didn’t like that realization.

When developing this idea around complexions in the Black community and the categories we put ourselves in I knew I wanted two things, for it to be a book and for the sheets to be made of handmade paper. I wanted it to be handmade paper so that I could pigment it the right color for the category names I was choosing. I would need eight sheets of paper that spoke to the colors: Light Bright, High Yellow, Red Bone, Brown, Chocolate, Dark, Blue Black, and Charcoal. I also had the idea of watermarking the skin name on each of the sheets. My first thought on the book structure was I wanted it to be an accordion. It would allow the viewer to read each page individually and open the book to view the gradations of color as a whole. As I sat with the idea, it wasn’t getting at the statement I was trying to make. I had to ask myself, “Why is this important?” “What needs to be said?” The book needed text, it needed a voice. I thought back to how the Black community talked about the people with these complexions. I realized that there was always something said to someone’s face and something uttered behind their back. So on the panel labeled Charcoal I put the lines on the front, “Your smile is so white,” while on the back there is a line “niggers, sometimes you just have to call them what they are.” A direct quote from my Granny when talking about a group of dark-skinned men.

I realized that the simple accordion book structure was not going to effectively convey this gossipy tone I was going for, so I went back to the structural drawing board. I went through five different structural mockups before I discovered a pocket accordion would work best for my concept. The skin tone pages would be individual sheets housed in the folded pockets of the accordion structure. The pages would have writing on the front and the back to convey the feeling of someone talking to your face and behind your back. To make sure the viewer was prompted to remove an individual sheet, the housing paper of the pocket accordion would be on the translucent side so that they could tell there was writing on the back and remove a sheet and flip it to read it. This structure allowed me to have the skin tone names on the paper as cut outs instead of watermarks. The watermarks never felt completely right to me. They felt like I was branding the paper. These skin tone names are not who we as Black people are, so they should not be permanent. With this redesign I was able to present my concept. Although we put labels on ourselves and section ourselves away from each other, we are still one people. This piece is my way of calling attention to this problem by making it a physical tangible object you can feel in your hands. Although his piece did not make it into my final show it helped me explore my perspective on colorism and broadening it outside of myself.

TUT

I can still remember the first real rejection I felt from my Hispanic community. My family had just moved from New Orleans, Louisiana to San Diego, California. Everything about the community was different. I had moved from a majority Black population to a Hispanic one. I was at my new school and had begun to make friends with a group of girls in my class when one of them asked me,

“Why do you have Black hair?”

“Because I’m Black.”

“Oh” was the response of the collective group. Their confusion was finally explained. They understood why I looked like them but didn’t. Why I had my hair in Black girl braids, couldn’t speak Spanish, and why my features were not quite right. I was mixed. I was Black. After that those girls no longer wanted to hang out with me and I became the school oddity. I was the only Black kid and a mixed one at that.

This full-out rejection was not something I had experienced. I had grown up around my Black family and lived in majority Black spaces until this point. The Black community might not have fully embraced me, but they at least acknowledged my existence. My Hispanic family would hardly even look at me, let alone talk to me. They always spoke in Spanish around me because they knew I couldn’t speak it. I began to hate the language and distanced myself from my Hispanic heritage. I would never deny I was Hispanic, but I never would claim to be Latina. One was genetic and one was cultural and it had been shown to me that I was not allowed into that culture.

Even though I had decided to distance myself from my Hispanic culture, I was still wanting things it could have offered me. Being descended from enslaved people left

large gaps in my family history and made me envious of people who knew their native religion, country, or language. When I discovered the Tut language, also known as Tutnese, I felt a sense of empowerment. It is a language that was made by slaves to teach themselves to spell in English and to communicate secretly with each other. I thought I had finally found a native language that I could feel connected to.

Unfortunately, doubt crept in. I started to think about my relationship to Spanish and how it made me feel isolated and wondered if that would happen with Tutnese. I wondered if this would be when the Black community decided that I should not be allowed to be a part of this language resurgence. I had many conflicting thoughts, so I decided to process them through art. I decided to make a book about the language.

I originally conceived the book to be an alphabet book similar to the artist book *Roma Abstract* by Russel Maret, which is “based on a geometric alphabet” (Maret). I wanted to present the Tut alphabet and its English counterpart as documentation of the language. The more I thought about this presentation the more dissatisfied I was. I decided to change my book to a narrative. The narrative of the book would reflect my journey with Tutnese and speak to themes of rejection, isolation, and empowerment. At this point in the conception of the book I had decided to have the story in Tutnese and English. I had the narrative I wanted, but the format was still not right. I was struggling over allowing people for whom the language was not intended to have access to something that wasn’t made for them. How could I shine a light on Tutnese but still keep it to the Black community? I would deny them access to the translation.

My TUT artist book morphed into two books. The artist book TUT and the companion zine TUT. The artist book has abstract pochoir imagery utilizing the

pentagonal shape. I chose pentagons because a regular pentagon cannot be tiled next to itself, symbolizing how I don't fit within the communities I am a part of. The pentagonal shape can also be found in okra, a plant that was brought to this country through the African slave trade. The narrative is screen printed and written entirely in Tutnese. The book is all in shades of browns and the pages are decaled. It is bound in a simple three-hole pamphlet stitch, a binding that would have been used in the past.



My TUT companion is a 2"x3" 26-page Xerox printed zine. This book has the English translation of the artist book as well as, in English, the history of the Tut language and its alphabet. A sign near the pile of zines tells the audience: "Only Descendants of **African American Slavery** May Take and **View.**" The zine's first page gives more instructions: "Dear Descendant of African American Slavery, This is for your eyes



only. Individuals in possession of this book will possess the translations to the artist book “TUT” by Elaina Brown-Spence, a book written all in the Tut language. If you wish to share the translations to others you may read them OUT LOUD or you can choose to KEEP IT FOR YOURSELF.”

The instructions, public and private, tell the audience how they should interact with each other, but they are even more important on a conceptual level. The instructions are intended to make some individuals feel rejected from an experience as well as to empower the Black community. So rarely do we, Black people, get to keep anything for ourselves. We were stolen as people and even when freed, our culture gets taken and appropriated. I wanted to give the power of choice to us at this moment. We have the right to choose to share our knowledge, share our culture with whomever we choose.

Audience interaction with this piece is essential because, although the TUT books are physical objects, the heart of the pieces are the audience's actions and choices. I am hyper aware of who my audience is and the environment in which I am presenting my work. One of my artist influences, Kara Walker, plays with creating tension in majority white spaces or locations that have a history of slavery. Her *Katastwóf Karavan* (2018) is a collaborative performance piece in which Jason Moran plays a large-scale calliope covered in Walker's signature



imagery of American slavery. The audience gathering on the grass picnicking evokes the spectacle of lynchings as social events. The location of the piece was the bank of the Mississippi River, an appropriate venue given that Mississippi was one of the cruelest slave states and is known in the Black community for its racism.

I realize that my work is being displayed in majority white spaces. That there might be only one Black person in a sea of white faces or none of us at all. I want there to be tension within my non-Black audience when they realize that they do not have access to all of my information and the only way to gain it is through a Black person. That tension might lead the audience to become aware of how limiting spaces can be for Black people.

My work often falls between performance and conceptual art but socially engaged art is often where I find my work fitting in the best. That art engages the community through interaction, and that interaction is what the piece is all about. That is also the case for most of my work. My work is a tool for me to facilitate audience interactions.

Socially engaged art often has themes of activism and education. Although I wouldn't say my pieces are designed to inspire a call to action, I have designed them to lead to self-reflection. I work with the themes of race, identity, and systems of oppression ingrained in American society. My goal in exploring these themes is to have my audience become aware of how I have felt experiencing these things and how we each may have contributed to upholding systems such as racism, colorism, or gentrification. This is similar to Suzanne Lacy's *Silver Action* which consists of 100 older

women sitting around tables and discussing their experiences with sexism, as typists type their stories, which are projected on large screens.

STITCH FIX: the game of choice

My mother grew up on Gladstone Avenue in Indianapolis, Indiana. She told me stories of what it used to be like, a thriving black neighborhood focused on community, but that wasn't the Gladstone I knew from all the summers and winter holidays I spent there. The Gladstone I knew was filled with liquor stores, gun shots, and abandoned buildings. It baffled me how a neighborhood she described could be the same one that I knew.

When I was eleven, my dad made plans towards retiring from the military. He wanted to do so in his home state of Texas. He found a house in a neighborhood with a good school district and was considered a great area to raise a family, until Hurricane Katrina hit and New Orleans refugees needed shelter. The government flooded my neighborhood with refugees because wealthier areas of the city refused to take them in. They put them in the apartment complexes that were meant to bring in late-twenty somethings to boost business but became government subsidized housing instead. With no resources provided for the refugees, I watched as my neighborhood became abandoned. Businesses pulled out, schools went down, and white flight emptied the houses around me. Over the years I saw the produce in the one grocery store in the area decline, liquor stores open, and cash loan businesses prey on the population.

Sometime later a new development opened barely ten miles from my house. It had brand new subdivisions, strip shopping malls, walking trails, a neighborhood Walmart, and a roundabout. I thought, “Wow they are actually putting some money on this side of town.” I waited for the prosperity to trickle to my neighborhood. As I waited to see what they would build for us, low and behold another cash loan place opened up right across the street from the other one. The city and developers had drawn a line. They carved out their little idyllic piece and they would not cross over to any undesirable area to share the wealth.

Gentrification has always been a topic at the back of my mind, but I decided to explore it when I happened to hear someone on a plane considering moving to a neighborhood because the neighborhood was being gentrified. It baffled me that someone realized there was gentrification going on and thought of it as a good thing. It was like they were completely blind to the effects caused by gentrification. Gentrification always displaces a population and sucks the resources from other neighborhoods, all for profit. I wanted my piece to allow my audience the experience of being part of the process of gentrification. I wanted them to feel the frustration of trying to accomplish something “good” and then have it not turn out. I wanted them to see how little choice they have, when gentrification moves through a city.

Never has my audience played such a vital role in one of my pieces. I decided to use a game format to engage the audience. Gentrification plays with people's lives, so my representation of it would involve roles and players. I had not written or even played many role-playing games before and knew if I was going to get the interaction right it would need to be tested many times. I decided to use my critiques and thesis

committee meetings as test groups for my game development. With each version, I used the feedback from the players to rework the game. I would ask them questions like “How did you feel about the role you were given?” and would pay particular attention to how they felt about what the actions their roles allowed them and how performing their role made them feel. I would take in every idea, question, and critique to modify my game. I also listened to see if the game was creating the feeling I wanted in the audience. I wanted them to have the illusion of choice and then feel frustrated when they realized that they did not have choice. My game is not one you can win. Its aim is to bring to light how little choice we as citizens have in the communities we are a part of. There’s a fine line between frustrating your players purposely and providing them with a gaming experience that is not frustrating to play.

In addition to using focus groups, I pulled inspiration from two board games which I had growing up, Monopoly and Clue. I drew inspiration from Monopoly in its pieces representing real world objects and its focus on capitalistic ideas. I also wanted to pull the feeling of frustration I associated with Monopoly. My family has never finished a game of Monopoly, because someone always gets frustrated with how limited is the real estate they have, money they lost, or the fact that they thought they were being plotted against, so that they flip the board and the game just ends. My game play is similarly frustrating by creating the illusion of choice.

Stitch Fix: the game of choice is a game that is simple but layered with complexity. The game play is as follows: Players randomly “Choose Their Lot in Life” and are assigned a role: Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Housing, Industry, Shopping, Concerned Citizen, or Politician. Players' individual instructions tell them how

and which fabric patches they are allowed to manipulate. There are general rules that all players have to follow but the main ones are,

Concerned Citizens' requests can be ignored.

Developers' requests may not be ignored.

The Developer is the agent of chaos in this game and it is secretly played by me. In my role as The Developer I can move anything I want and force people to do what I want. In my role I leave players notes telling them where to put their patches and compliance is mandatory with the illusion of being able to go against me. A section in the instructions reads,

I'll let you in on a secret, there are ways to go against The Developer:

TO GO AGAINST THE DEVELOPER:

you give up all but one of your patches

you give up half of your patches and fulfill one request

from Concerned Citizen.

Sometimes you go along to get along.

TO GO ALONG WITH THE DEVELOPER

by fulfilling 2 of their requests:

you gain one additional patch of your color

The game is rigged in my favor and by playing the game the audience realizes that their choices are nothing but empty promises.

I decided on role playing and "rewards" to get my audience invested in the game play. One reason my family loved Clue was the way it let you step into a character and act as they would based on descriptions of them. In my game players are asked to

participate in a role to develop the city before them. Each player's instruction begins with a sentence that puts the player in the mindset of their role:

They say housing is a right, but that's for you to decide.

You'll be running **Housing**.

Capitalism is in, haven't you heard? You'll be positioning **Shopping** venues.

You live here, is the city growing the way you hoped?
You're a **Concerned Citizen**.

Are you for the people? You're a **Politician**.

When given a role to play, most people fall into character but I also encourage them by rewarding them. They collect a sticker at the end of the game as a prize. The sticker is similar to a voting sticker with the phrases:

I fixed it!

It's fixed!

I did my best to fix it!

Each sticker is meant to sound like a pat on the back when really it's telling the player that there are no winners because it's fixed for them to "lose."

The game matrix is made to look like a life sized board game. Players are provided with fabric patches to adhere to an eight-foot tall square covered in a gridded Pellon fabric. The players are not only playing a game with these fabric squares, they are building a quilt.



The choice of a quilt as a base for the piece stems from memories I have around quilt imagery. I grew up using a quilt made for me by my great grandmother and watching it being patched by my grandmother. I loved my quilt but patching was required because of its constant use. It originally had beautiful squares made from scraps of printed cloth in many



colors, but it was patched with giant pieces of solid yellow cotton fabric that my grandmother had on hand. Eventually I put my quilt away, opting to try to preserve the beautiful fabric that was left and forgo patching so there would still be remnants of the quilt I had loved so much. I also loved the children's book *The Quilt* by Anna Jonas. It is a story of a little Black girl who loses her stuffed animal somewhere in her bed and as she searches for it her quilt becomes this beautiful landscape of forest and fields. That book changed the way I looked at quilts. Now I can only see them as landscapes and maps. Those two memories lead me to quilt as the backdrop for my gentrification project. Here was this beautiful quilt that had gone to ruin and was patched up to try to solve the problem, which it never did, so it was abandoned. The perfect metaphor for a decaying city. The quilt as a city metaphor might not be obvious to people, but for me to work through my feelings about gentrification, I needed to pull from a place that felt relevant to me.

At the end of my thesis exhibition I will take the city the players have made and turn it into a quilt as evidence. I will also document the change in the city by taking a daily photograph to compile into a book that will go along with the sewn quilt. I hope to set up more *STITCH FIX: the game of choice* opportunities in various locations, which would result in multiple quilts.

In my work I explore memories and experiences connected to my intersecting identities as Black, Hispanic, and a woman. I use my stories to get to the core of issues such as racism, colorism, and gentrification, and my materials and processes are always in service of those concepts. My goal is to physically engage the audience and get them to think deeply about those issues. That audience is at the forefront of my mind at every stage of developing my work because ultimately I'm engaging them in conversation. I'm posing questions.

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