

Artist Statement 2023

After the death of my fiancé, and my arrest for a bounced \$25 check to a local grocery store two weeks later, the color seemed to fade from the world, a symptom of how comprehensively my grief had overtaken all of my senses. Two years later—on a sunny but average morning—I rolled over, opened my eyes, looked out of my window, and saw a bright emerald bush.

A test would later verify that I was pregnant. A new life was coming—of course, color had to return!

The unplanned event led to my child's adoption in 2012. A cycle of grief, one of many, had come to an end for me and others.

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I can look back at this period of my life and recognize that my grief was absolutely compounded by the circumstance of my American Blackness in the early years of social media and digital activism. Cell phone footage of police brutality sucked up all of the air on my timeline, the photos of bloody faces and screaming mothers took up all of the white space on my screen.

The use of my iPhone as my primary camera is not purely about convenience, though an argument about poverty and access to tools and materials can absolutely be had, the choice to lean into the use of my iPhone's camera is a decision that reflects the importance of documenting the ills and beauty of the world with a common and easily accessible instrument.

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Now I search for deep and layered light, contemplating how my intersectional experiences as a queer Afro-Latinx nonbinary pan femme, and previously incarcerated person, inform my approach to art-making in creative fields overwhelmingly dominated by cis-white males. As a writer, which is only another way to say as a reader, I've found myself going back to Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* for guidance, again and again.

To think nonlinearly about the role of my Blackness in my art-making practice is to question the roles my various audiences will play in the interpretation of my work. I grew up "seeing color," only to lose it later as a young adult. When I began to "see color" again, it came back to me as a symptom of internal love and renewed life. I cannot ignore the beauty that exists in my body—or the potential for violence that comes with being both a womxn and Black in a country that has yet to fully embrace my power.

I see color. Everywhere.

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I offer this guiding thought from Morrison's Introduction. I hope it will serve as a guiding hypothesis for both my literary and multi-media audiences to consider.

“When does racial “unconsciousness” or awareness of race, enrich interpretive language, and when does it impoverish it? What does positing one’s writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as unraced and all others as raced entail? What happens to the writerly imagination of a Black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one’s own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be “universal” or race-free? In other words, how is “literary whiteness” and “literary blackness” made, and what is the consequence of that construction? How do embedded assumptions of racial (not racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be “humanistic”? When, in a race-conscious culture, is that lofty goal actually approximated? When not and why? Living in a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer. When this world view is taken seriously as agency, the literature produced within and without it offers an unprecedented opportunity to comprehend the resilience and gravity, the inadequacy and the force of the imaginative act.”