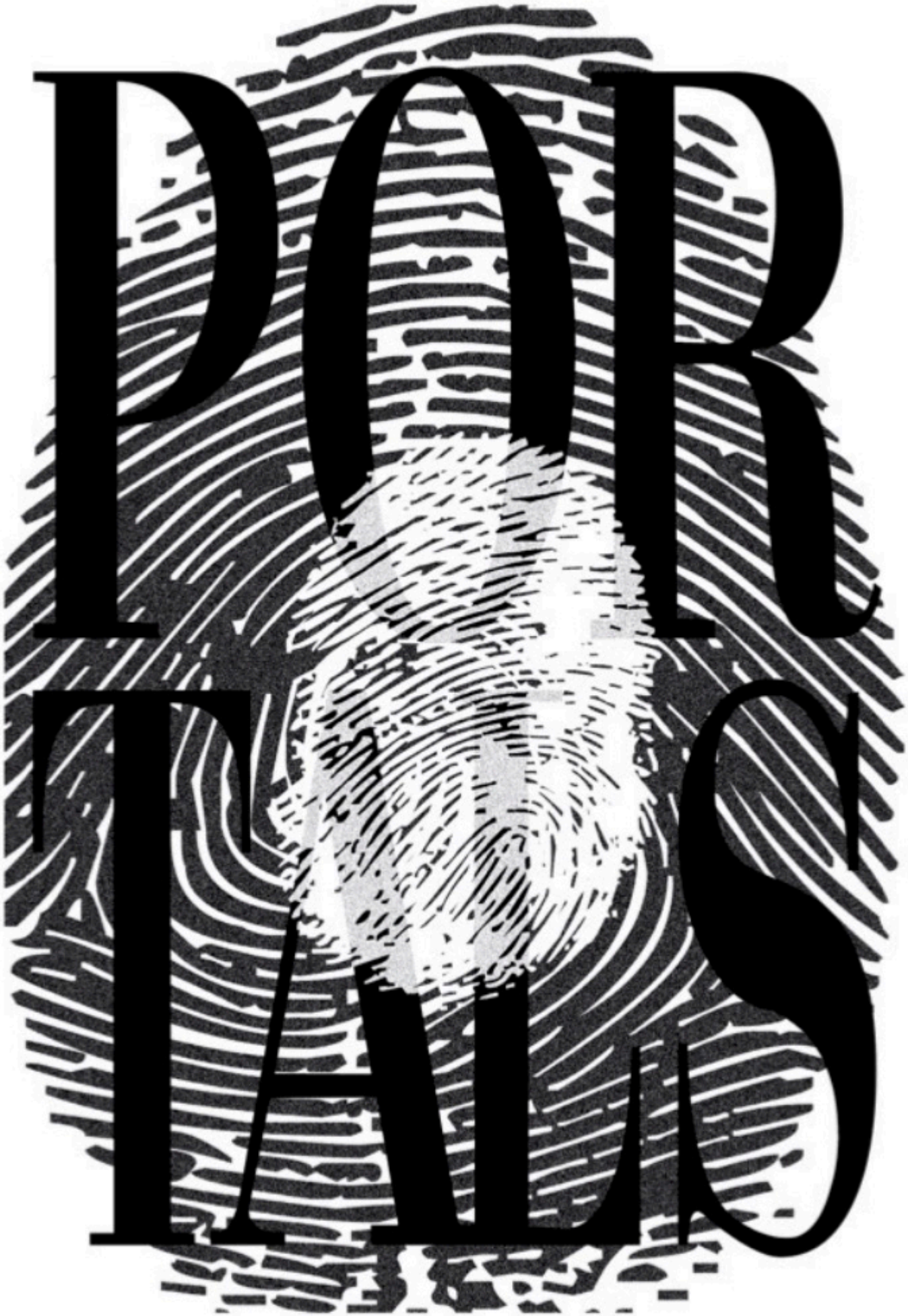


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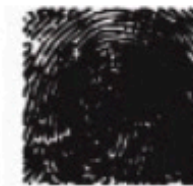
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POR TALS

A REFLECTION ON OUR COLLECTIVE THOUGHT PROCESSES AND REIMAGINING THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE .

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MALINI NARAYAN

THE POLITICS OF SPACE AND BELONGING

MALINI NARAYAN

What does it mean to enter a new space? Are places permeable, fluid, osmotic? Do we carry traces of one space into the next, like snow that stubbornly clings to one's boots long after the storm has passed? Or do we occupy a multiverse? A world of different worlds, in different spaces and different places, that are separate, singular?

In a world ravaged by environmental and socio-political crises, how can we share space? Do the spaces in which we coexist matter more than ever? How do we move through them, and what happens when we enter a new space?

Wherever we may wander, we find certain bodies are under attack. How can we continue to pass through different spaces while resisting the physical manifestations of their historic harms?

These are the questions that have inspired the art, culture, and peoples we engage with in our zine, Portals. As students attending Brown University, the spaces we inhabit in Providence, Rhode Island are marked by blurred boundaries and isolated environments. Our own campus sits atop Providence's College Hill, aloof from the rest of the city. While it encroaches into the West African and Latino neighbourhoods that surround it, and was constructed through the slave trade of John Brown, on land stolen from the Narragansett tribe, rare are the exchanges with members of these communities.

Our notions of space are complicated by the fact that any entry into public spaces are actually re-entries. Others have been there before us. Rationalizing the politics of space requires a reckoning with the politics of belonging. What does it mean to enter a new space that was not built for you?

The artistic collectives we have engaged with reimagine the city in bold, brave, poetic ways. Haus of Glitter, an intersectional collective occupying slave trader Esek Hopkins' house, a monument to white supremacy, reclaims colonial sites through healing community action. Photographer Deana Lawson's photographs of Black bodies in the domestic realm reflect the historical movement from the African continent to the ports of New England. Renegade artist Michael Townsend's squats public spaces with his esoteric installations. Writer and photographer Loki Olin maps the urban landscapes and structures of Providence through the lens of car culture. Community art space AS220 fosters local artists and activists and promotes programs that challenge hegemonic cultures and systems. Through these actions, the city is transformed into a site of resistance, care, healing, justice, and liberation.

How do we maintain our individual identities and freedoms while exchanging freely with others? In an interview with art critic and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, the visionary Martiniquan writer, poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant proposes a praxis of archipelagic thinking, imploring us to engage with the realities of different people and places as we wander through the world as the islands do in the Caribbean.

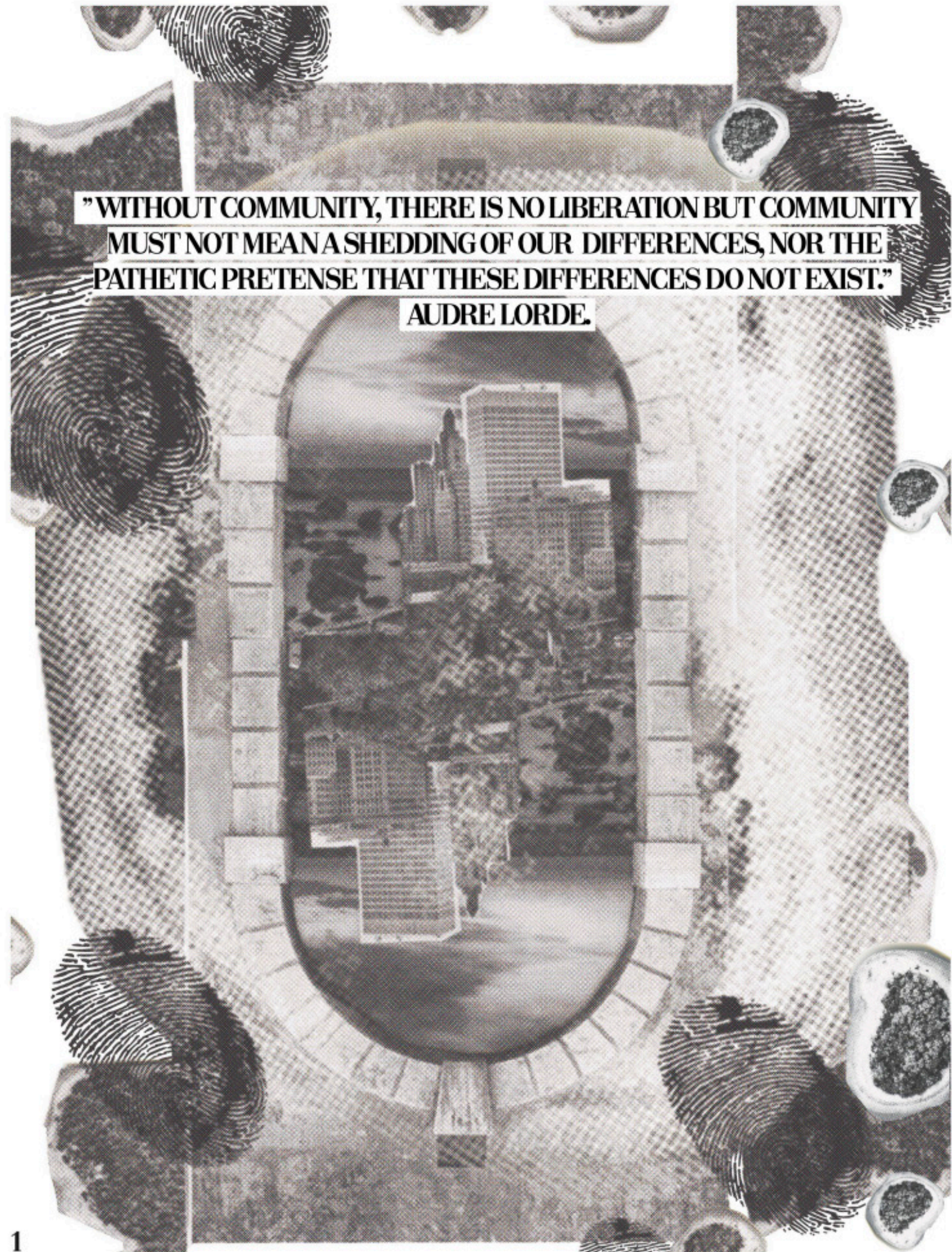
We need archipelagic thinking, which is one that opens, one that conforms diversity, one that is not made to obtain unity, but rather a new kind of Relation. One that trembles — physically, geologically, mentally, spiritually — because it seeks the point, that utopian point, at which all the cultures of the world, all the imaginations of the world can meet and understand each other without being dispersed or lost."

Let us imagine a utopian community of care in which we can grow through our exchange with others, without losing or diluting our subjectivities. We seek to uncover this ultimate portal rooted in existing spaces, but radically imagined into existence, a freedom dream for the future.



**"WITHOUT COMMUNITY, THERE IS NO LIBERATION BUT COMMUNITY
MUST NOT MEAN A SHEDDING OF OUR DIFFERENCES, NOR THE
PATHETIC PRETENSE THAT THESE DIFFERENCES DO NOT EXIST."**

AUDRE LORDE.



DEANA LAWSON DOUBLE VISION

NJARI ANDERSON AND OSAYUWAMEN "UWA" EDE-OSIFO

A REVIEW OF DEANA LAWSON
AT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART BOSTON

Deana Lawson's self-titled Institute of Contemporary Art exhibition requires the body to surrender to slowness. Endless Black bodies hung up against white walls. These bodies stew in their frames like a Sunday dinner's gravy. Walk slowly, allow yourself to focus, as we have, on the figures adorning these walls.

The first room of the exhibition features two photographs of Black women on a burgundy wall to the left of the curators' introduction. The first photograph is a close-up of a woman's face. She wears gold earrings, and her chin rests on top of her orange-hued painted nails. The second, of a woman laying nude, looking over her shoulder to the camera, on top of a mattress with no bedding.

And so it begins. In Deana Lawson's world, Black women are the center of the universe - the sun that other planets revolve around. Her holographic scribbles onto a Black woman's stomach in *Deleon? Unknown* (2020) offer a counter-origin story to the fable of white deities and white founding fathers and a world created by and for white people. Lawson shows us Black women are the creators of life.

Lawson works to displace the sensational and sexualized Black woman trope through sensory overload: nude Black women of all shapes and ages and skin tones, falling against one another or standing alone or dangling off a couch's edge or lounging in bed.

The women all stare into the camera. Their nudity is communal and commonplace.

It may be unsettling to see Black women bask in their nudity when the camera has historically treated their anatomy as grotesque and barbaric.

Could this be the "erotic?" The "erotic" coined by Audre Lorde, who articulates the term as power and a life source derived from the feminine - from women who choose feeling over logic. The patriarchy tells women to be rational, but the "erotic" permits emotional expression and harmony with one's physical body and mind.

Yet while Lawson's photographs do not explicitly sexualize her subjects, who are consensually nude with her, the photographs may never realize the "erotic" in a site such as the ICA, where there is the omnipresent risk of voyeurism and consumption, detached from any real sense of relationality or amongness to the subjects. Detached from feeling.

Nearby in the gallery, a Black couple discusses whether or not her photographs are racist. The man says: "yes," the woman says, "no, maybe, no."

It be ya own peoples. The ones who'll Queen and Slim you, sell you out to the white people. They'll hang your Black ass up in a white museum in the middle of White ass Boston so that the white people can say "look at the ass on this one." Nothing's changed, has it?

You, like the couple, may feel conflicted looking at Lawson's works. Her photographs are deceptively inviting, aesthetically rich in their off-whites (for non-whites) and bare Black skin which asks you to strip search it for bumps and bruises.

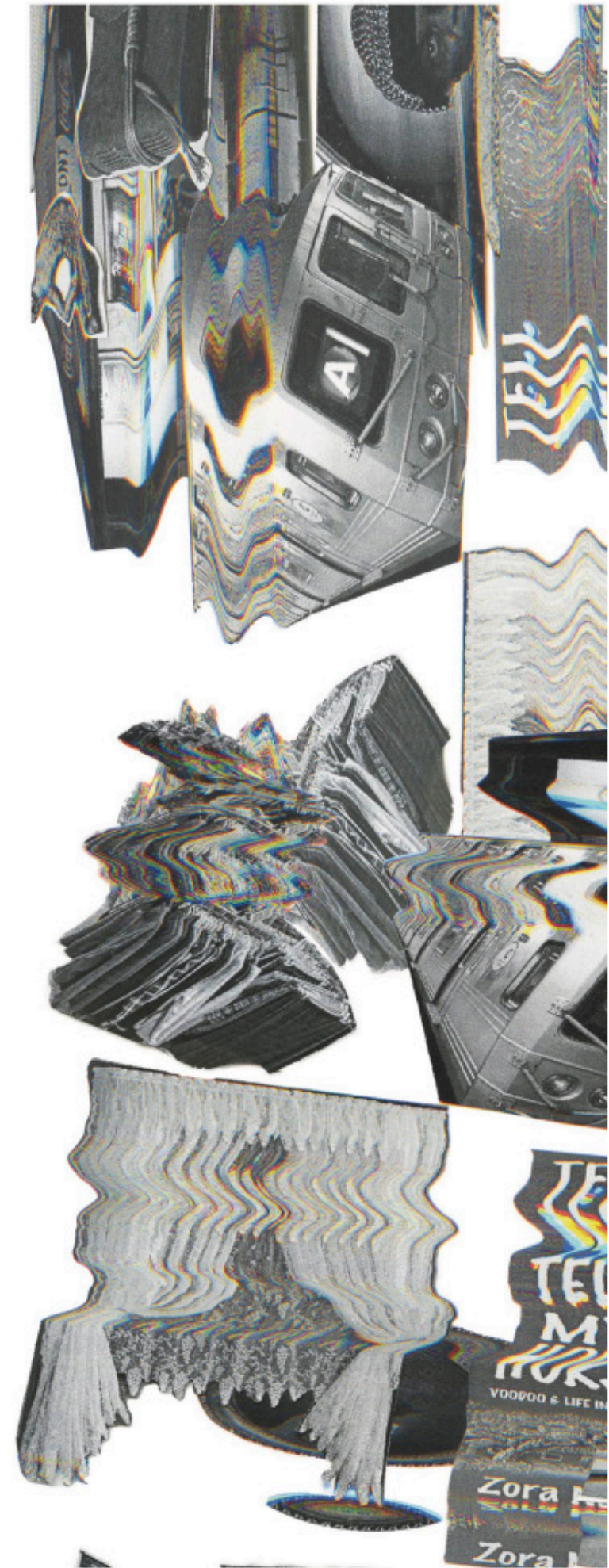
"I am an artist, not a documentarian," Lawson said in an interview with cultural critic Greg Tate when asked about the complications that arise photographing Black individuals globally.

She is a photographer, director, and witch doctor who stitches pockets of the diaspora together like a Gee's Bend quilt to create myth. *The Garden* (2015) pays homage to Black America, the Caribbean, and the Congo with a Black couple entangled in a grassy forest, ambiguous in its location. Imagine a world, her myth goes, where slavery and colonialism had not violently flung descendants of Africans to different corners of the globe. Lawson transcends arbitrarily created borders to envision a world where Black people everywhere are interconnected and in community.

Some may regard such renderings as woefully apolitical and plagued by American revisionism. Either way, Lawson's myth-making prevents her intended audience (Black people) from passively consuming her work.

WHAT IS REAL?

WHAT IS NOT?



Lawson's exploration of the Black interior, too, evades reality. Her photographs of domestic spaces and family, *Young Grandmother* (2019) and *Blinky and Tony Forever* (2015) are a bitter-sweet gesture: Black bodies should be allowed to rest and exist leisurely with their loved ones. To be relieved from the social structures that demand their presence and labor.

How shitty it is, then, to have paid to see these very Black bodies living it up better than we could imagine. Their audacity to gaze back at the camera, to lie nude in a home with full ownership of one's Blackness, Blackity, Black, "Fuck You," Blackness. The audacity to show that more is possible than the "ra-ra" rapper, the curvy go-go dancer, the accidentally shot teenager on the news, or the police officer who called you a criminal when they really meant to call you a "nig-" nevermind.

**SHOW ME WHAT I WANT,
NOT WHAT I LONG FOR.**

On another occasion, Lawson revealed to an interviewer some of her primary inspirations: "vintage nudes, Sun Ra, Nostrand Ave., sexy mothers, juke joints, cousins, leather-bound family albums, gnarled wigs, Dana Lawson, purple, the Grizzly Man, M.J., oval portraits, Arthur Jafa, thrift shops, Breakfast at Tiffany's, acrylic nails, weaves on pavement, Aaron Gilbert, the A train, Tell My Horse, typewriters, Notorious B.I.G., fried fish, and lace curtains."

- DEANALAWSON IN AN INTERVIEW FOR GREG TATE

Alas, this is art, not documentary. The critiques of Lawson's work in coloring vignettes of the Black experience arise not just because of her staging and direction, but perhaps also because of the dearth of Black representation in white colonial legacy institutions. Double vision — we see what Lawson stages, but cannot ignore where myth becomes jarring, and reality overbearing.

Lawson's photographs stick to you like a fly-trap and pull you into inescapable portals. You'll sit there vibrating in place, some sticky residue gluing your six feet to the gallery's maroon carpet. Each photograph is a more enticing sliver of bait that will keep you looking, though you might get hurt.

From wall to wall, photo to installation, installation to hologram, hologram to collage, collage to video, leaving the gallery means searching for a way out.

Sign of exit, the lingering audio trail of her video installation plays you out of the gallery and back to the Boston Harbor - back to the water like a slave ZONGI!



COMMUNITY CARE AS LIBERATION HAUS OF GLITTER

ROCKY DOUGLAS
AND
EASTLYN FRANKEL

THROUGH COMMUNITY-CENTERED PROJECTS, COMMUNAL AND PERSONAL CARE, AND ARTISTIC WORKS THAT REIMAGINE OUR SHARED HISTORY, THE HAUS OF GLITTER IS RECLAIMING AND ADVANCING THE WAYS THAT COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND TRADITIONALLY MARGINALIZED PEOPLES FIND LIBERATION.

The homestead of a colonial enslaver and an iridescent stage of mermaids: a site of trauma and a site of magic. Providence-based collective Haus of Glitter is infusing poetry, dance, magic, and radical imagination onto historic stages of violence. The Haus is a catalyst for grassroots organizing, healing, and activism that seeks to “shift the energetic center of the universe towards Queer, Feminist, BIPOC Liberation.”

Through a two-year Artist Residency with the Providence Parks Department & The Department of Arts, Culture, and Tourism, Haus of Glitter has taken residency in the historic home of American naval officer, Esek Hopkins. In 1764, Hopkins commanded the slave ship Sally through a disastrous trip that led to the death of one hundred and nine enslaved Africans. Despite this bloody voyage, Esek Hopkins continues to be commemorated through Esek Hopkin’s Middle School, Park, and House in a predominately Black and Brown neighborhood in Providence, known as the North End.

During their residency, Haus of Glitter has physically remodeled and spiritually reconstructed Hopkins’ deteriorating house into a home. Similarly, the Haus has launched a campaign in hopes of healing and transforming memorials dedicated to Hopkins. In this way, the collective is an experiment in reimagining colonized settings into spaces of healing and reckoning through communal care. Their historical intervention requires us to think critically about who is allowed to occupy space and to be memorialized for over 250 years. They do not seek to erase Hopkins’ legacy. Rather, the Haus hopes to uplift, and honor the Black women, femmes, and queer folks across space and time who were harmed by colonial violence.

The impact of this work is felt in the many projects that Haus of Glitter has generated. During the past two years, they have created an activist dance opera and community garden, hosted virtual and in-person workshops centered around somatic healing, cultural preservation, and community care, created relationships with local elders and schools, hosted “rest-idencies” for other queer and BIPOC artists of color, and found many other ways to accessibly embody ancestral, communal, and personal healing. Their mutual aid work, spaces of community building, and spiritual care offerings have met vital community needs throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

To further their artistic, spiritual care work in partnership with local and transnational communities, the collective has launched a GoFundMe campaign that is just above its halfway point as of April 8th, 2022. The attached QR code leads to this campaign, which includes more details about their upcoming plans and the work they have been doing in service of community.

We were fortunate enough to sit down with co-directors Matt Garza, Assitan ‘Sita’ Coulibaly, Steven Choummalaithong, and Anthony ‘AM’ Andrade Jr. for a conversation about the Haus of Glitter, its origins, and plans for the future. A brief excerpt of this conversation is included below.

Rocky: Please tell us about the role of your community in building actions of healing care and contemplation?

Assitan: It’s important that we all come from such different cultural backgrounds, and a huge part of each one is the ritual around celebrating our ancestors, honoring our ancestors, as well as honoring our elders, and the wisdom of our elders. We leaned on that as our first offering. We asked for their feedback. Everything we did, we did on our terms. We designed this process to take care of ourselves, to take care of our community, to take care of our neighborhood. And, as A.M. has said, it emerged into this beautiful community of artists and collaborators who also wanted to be a part of the process. We looked around and said, “wow, these are a lot of people who are with us, and who believe in what we also believe in.” We did not start this process with this show being the end goal of it. We just had this idea, and things materialize along the way. It was so beautiful and also felt authentic to ourselves. We never felt like we had to go outside of who we were as individuals. We may have felt the need to expand our knowledge and to grow, but never in a way that felt like we were compromising who we were as individuals or as artists.

Uwa: On the website, I saw the line “we need to feel ourselves on racism.” What does that mean to you all?



Garza: There's so much intellectualism around anti-racist work. So we tried to think about how to create experiences that, instead, invite deep feeling. Our show was really meant to be a space where we thought about the different intersections of our audience. That requires movement. At our show, we invite the audience to dance as a way to preserve our histories. This notion of the written word is a white cultural value and not all civilizations pass down history through the written word. We pass them down through visual art, through music, through song, through drumming.

Uwa: Can you dismantle a system that has historically oppressed Queer and BIPOC people, or do you have to navigate through the resources that are provided for you?

Assitan: Radicalism has to be embodied and we have to show up as our most authentic selves. In order to create change, we have to embody and empathize with the experience of others.

I'm sure each one of us knows individual people who like to talk the talk but can't walk the walk, and this is walking, feeling, empathizing, creating action, and embodiment. And it's something that has to be done every day and it has to start with yourself, it has to start with your heart and soul.

Any final thoughts?

Garza: One of the issues that we see in the world is messy choreography. We need new choreography to move forward in unity. When you see people dancing together, that's an expression of our resilience, an expression of our unity, and an expression of our ability to build systems that move us forward together. That is something we aren't seeing enough in the world. When we talk about freedom, we believe that it is an embodied experience. It's not something that just exists up here (in our heads).



MICHAEL TOWNSEND'S COMMUNAL UTOPIAN SPACES

LINNEA HULT

YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD OF MICHAEL TOWNSEND FROM A HEADLINE LIKE:
ARTIST LIVED IN PROVIDENCE PLACE MALL FOR FOUR YEARS!



Coverage of this secret apartment, constructed in 750 square feet of architectural 'dead space', is often sensationalist, focusing on the wow more than the why. In searching for the why, I discovered that Townsend is a man of many portals. His work in Providence begs the question: what does it mean to occupy a public space for a moment in time? And what does it mean to leave?

Townsend, who comes from a military family, moved around a lot growing up. He did not seriously consider art until his senior year of high school. While he describes climbing a tree to photograph a huge Mickey Mouse that he mowed onto a field from memory, it is hard to think of him as anything but an artist-to-be. Evidently his art teacher felt the same way, as he pulled Townsend aside and revealed he had saved a year's worth of his trashed drawings and photographs, from which the young artist constructed his RISD portfolio.

On his very first night in Providence, Tape Art was born. The idea was simple, drawing with tape on buildings in the depths of night. It was collaborative and, for anyone passing by, participatory. The drawings were living entities, morphing as they grew. And as they grew, so did Tape Art. Founded by Townsend in 1989, the collective now runs workshops everywhere from schools and offices to psychiatric hospitals, all while working on enormous building-based murals. The catch? Every mural comes down before they leave.

Townsend's studio is littered with rolls of tape but is largely empty. On the wall there is a huge map of the US, marked with pieces of tape that represent every mural from their first international tour in 1995, when Townsend was only 25. At a large desk at the end of the room, Townsend and his art partner Leah Smith sit watching a spy movie, which they describe as their lunch project. Townsend is chatty, affable, and talks with his hands, while Smith is more measured, adding only when she thinks he has missed something; the pair reference past projects and laugh at one another's jokes. Townsend describes the pair as "the right type of weird" for the psychiatric patients they work with, something that I remember when they tell me that the affectionate elderly white cat sitting next to me is named "it," because it doesn't respond to a name.

"Don't you think it's selfish to take it down?" Smith brings up an objection to their method that has recently surfaced. Townsend's justification is that for him "capital A art is the moment when the thing being made, the maker and the viewer, are all in the same space." It is as much about the mural itself as it is about "being fully present, becoming part of public space and being available for conversation," with passers-by, even conversation about the horror of the mural's removal. But not everyone feels this way; Townsend points out that 500 people showed up in the rain to remove their mural on the Memphis Brooks Museum. While they peeled off the vibrant blue trees and the women perched in them, they took part in a shutting of the portal that had been opened.

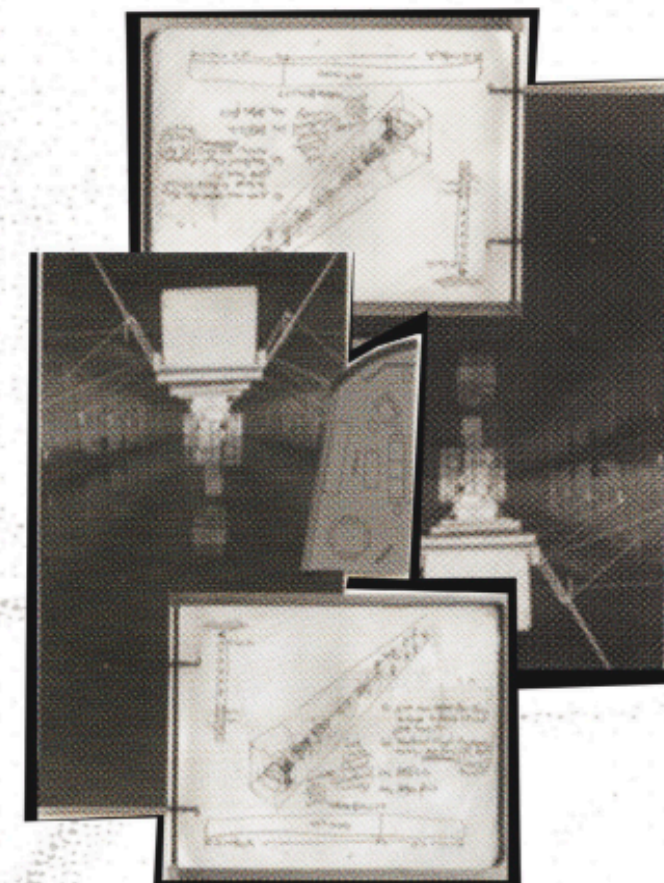
This question of impermanence as a conduit for presentness brings up social media. Despite being "constantly pleaded with to post [their] work," Townsend keeps off of social media, not because he thinks it is antithetical to his art but because it disturbs his peace. He laughs, "I am anti-doing it myself." Smith is the one who brings up Fort Thunder.

"When I talk to people who've been in Providence for a long time," she says, "they always reminisce about art that's been done in the dark, in spaces that aren't allowed, in spaces where there aren't cameras."

She's referring to the infamous Providence art collective Fort Thunder which was active from the 90s up until the early 2000s. When Townsend pulls up photographs, I find myself staring at rooms covered in what he calls "collective stuff." There are hundreds of posters, stuffed animals stuck to ceilings and objects glued to the walls. He points at a space high up on the wall that I barely register is an opening: "that's the door to my room." Situated in a historic mill building downtown with cheap rent and an apathetic landlord, Fort Thunder became the place, hosting famous bands and strange events whilst a group of artists lived "in cocoons" within its absurd walls.

Townsend ties the threads together. "I don't think this space would have existed like this or lasted as long as it did if it had been in the Instagram era," he says. "There's no fucking way. Because, and this isn't to mope, if you showed up to this space, your impulse would have been, I gotta gram this."

The risk of instagramming a space like this is not just that other, 'less cool' people might find it, but also that it becomes visible to the world at large, including the police, the fire department, and anyone else who might have it out for the space. Giving the location of a place that relies on rule-breaking is equivalent to destroying it. And, sure enough, the millennium swung around and a developer began planning Fort Thunder's demolition. Whilst Townsend and others were fighting to save the space, he was also working on another project.



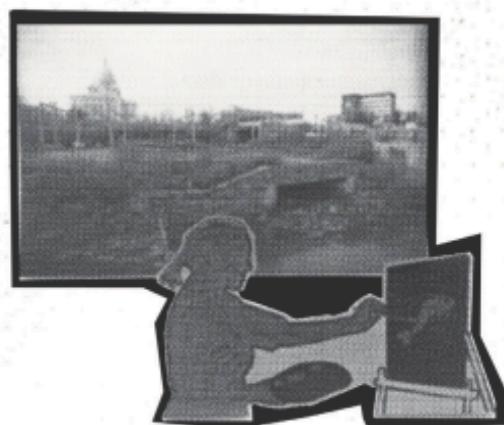
After ten years of cleaning out a water drainage tunnel that he had locked up, he created coffin-like structures and put everything he owned (save for his car, his computer and some sketchbooks) into them, as a "letting go". He constructed strange, humanoid sculptures as his "alter-egos," and hung them all from the ceiling in a matrix. The webbed structure forced anyone traveling through the tunnel to imitate the movements of these 'people.' After months of dodging Amtrak work to keep his secret, he showed it to thirteen people and locked it up again. The only remaining entrance was a manhole that led to a ladder that lowered you down into the tunnel, if anyone dared look for it - and they dared! Townsend quotes an estimate he himself admits is bold: that at least 10,000 people found the tunnel. Interestingly, the project remained unscathed for six years before someone peered through the grate and called the police about 'dead bodies' in the tunnel. When Fox News and the ambulances arrived, they broke it open and broadcast its location. Within six months it was destroyed.

Returning to the tape mural removals, it becomes clearer to me why Townsend might want to position himself as a "gateway" to his art. With so much current discourse on the internet that paints all gate-keeping as a selfish, negative act, I begin to wonder when gate-keeping might be not just useful, but essential to a project. Townsend has "no problem with the explorer class coming in," but when information is broadcast to people who have no skin in the game, it seems a certain degree of destruction is bound to occur. As for the murals, he notes that "only three murals that have ever been fundamentally harassed and it was all white women over fifty."

Where does the infamous mall apartment sit in all this, I hear you say. As Fort Thunder's obliteration loomed, all eyes were on the Providence Place Mall, the largest construction in Providence history with an equally large tax break. Setting out to explore it, Townsend found an empty space in the floorplans, and made plans to move in with a few others. He describes it in a tongue in cheek way that parodies the language of gentrification: "If you have an underdeveloped space, we have a responsibility to develop it. For the community."

Over four years, they covertly moved in furniture and flooring. The eventual goal was to live there for a year, full time, but he was arrested right before he could begin this phase of the project, something he seems mildly grateful for. "The point," he says, "was 'to have the mall to transform us as people,' to fully let loose and succumb to the 'tides of capitalism.'" "If Abercrombie says: this is the greatest shirt for Spring, we're like, damn straight it is," he laughs.

But I'm not sure if he is joking. This project strikes me as opening a similar type of portal to those created in his tape murals, in the depths of the drainage tunnel, or in Fort Thunder itself. It is hiding in plain sight. To build these "communal utopian spaces," arguably one must struggle to give them boundaries that keep their inhabitants safe from outsider and state destruction. The world-building Townsend performs in his portals is ultimately open to everyone, you just have to look for it.



A PLACE TO CALL HOME

INES SAWIRIS



In the midst of a global culture war, where the gatekeepers of major institutions are being held accountable for their perpetuation of unsustainable power dynamics alongside an endless list of corruption scandals, the clash between museums and society is audible. Perhaps not audible enough though, as reputable museums continue to hide behind a facade of 'neutrality,' serving only the beneficiaries of the status quo while upholding social and structural inequalities. Now, a new tide of art spaces are attempting to redefine the role of the institution within society.

The non-profit organization, AS220, has been experimenting with urgent issues in the arts, centering their practice around people, community, accessibility, and equality in downtown Providence, a city that has battled with its own ethical issues around ownership and agency within its cultural institutions. Spread over three newly-renovated historic buildings, it provides an open, non-juried space for exhibitions, performances, workshops, a residency and youth program, a restaurant, and a live/studio work space for the Rhode Island creative community. This work began in 1985 with founder Umberto Cuenca when AS220 was merely an amalgamation of ideas written in their "NEW CHALLENGES" manifesto, and an \$800-a-month rent space on 220 Weybosset Street.

The project was quick to outgrow itself, and by 1992, relying on tax breaks normally used by commercial developers, alongside support from the mayor's office, they were able to buy out a 21,000 square foot building on Empire Street as part of a government gentrification scheme of the downtown area. Interesting that this community and equality driven organization owes its beginnings to a part of Providence's history that stood for their missions' very antithesis; under the same scheme, Black and Latinx communities were displaced from their benefit street homes in order to restore the colonial buildings they inhabited into tourism-worthy sites.

It was only a means to an end after all, as AS220 has certainly made responding to the communities' needs, socially and creatively, an essential pillar of their mission. Their residency program enables artists to live and work in the heart of the city at an affordable rate, while making them the largest providers of affordable housing in the Providence area; 80% of their housing is designated below market value. Their youth program is also heavily community-oriented, offering programs to a public charter high school that serves pregnant and parenting young adults, as well as the state's juvenile detention facility where additionally, they provide a pathway

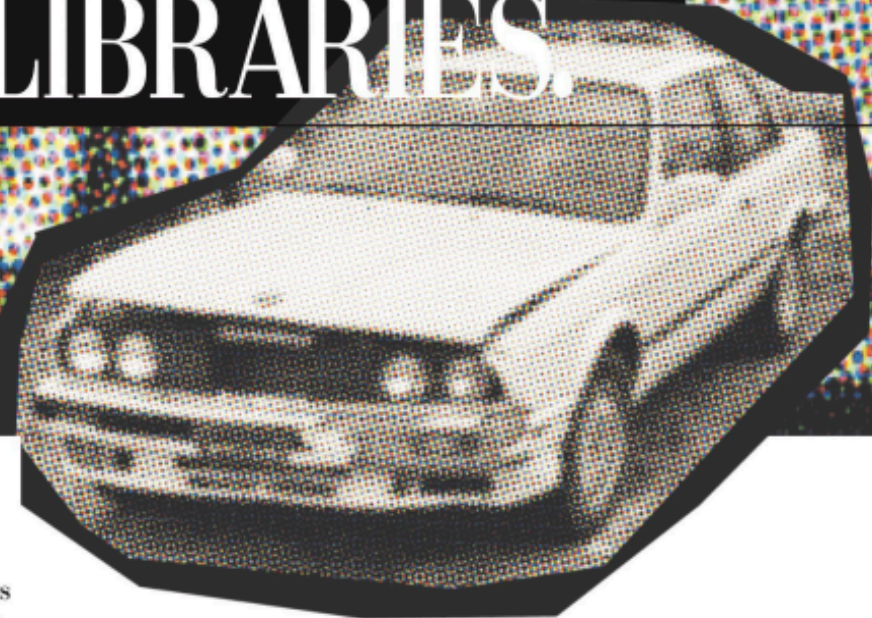
for incarcerated youth to further pursue their creative interest at AS220's studio upon their release.

In alleviating financial constraints and providing creative educational opportunities to all sectors of the providence community, AS220 are tackling the issue of inaccessibility in the arts using uncontested methods. However, they are offering yet another solution, the idea of being a non-juried art space, where anyone can show their work or perform their music, with no criteria other than an availability basis. It is a huge leap away from most institutions who pride themselves on being strict purveyors of culture. There is an inherent danger in allowing a small elitist minority to control the output of culture, however, is abolishing all standards of judging art the best solution?

Friday mic-night at AS220's Main Stage is a local destination for aspiring singers, where anyone can perform as long as it's an original piece. The first song is announced, it's called 'Leave me Alone Honey, I'm tired.' 'It's a song about impotence,' he adds. The rest of the show follows a similar tune, confessions on stage of intimate details over slightly clumsy lyrics and instrumentals, to an audience of less than a handful of people. However, I discover through some small-talk outside that it still manages to attract a cult-like crowd of performers; some having attended for over ten years, and others having traveled from Massachusetts just to perform at the event. Perhaps this perfectly encapsulates the outcome of non-juried art spaces. The appeal is for the artist and maker, more than it is the viewer.

AS220 provides a striking example of the impact arts organizations can make on communities when openness, accessibility, creativity, and community, are prioritized over repression, exclusivity, and greed. In doing so, it sacrifices some artistic vigor, yet perhaps that's not of obsolete importance. Doesn't the notion of subjectivity destroy the idea of 'good' or 'bad' art anyway?

LINCOLNS. NISSANS. LIBRARIES.



LOKI OLIN

IN PROVIDENCE,
BUILDINGS AND AUTOMOBILES BOTH SERVE AS
REFLECTIONS OF THE CITY'S AESTHETIC VALUES. THIS IS
WHY WE SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE LATTER.

The 5,000-pound cruiser sways through turns and glides over potholes as it navigates College Hill's one-way streets and stop-go traffic. The car's soft suspension, white-walled tires, and curtain-drawn windows are all symbols of a bygone automotive era. The car itself is the length of a double-cab pickup truck, but with seats for just four. It is not an efficient vehicle, nor is it a discrete one. Still, it parks innocuously, blending in with the Subarus, Hondas, and Toyotas that provide the antithesis to each of the Lincoln's unique characteristics. Forty years ago, it was the standard. But in Providence, the once-typical styling of a gleaming saloon has turned into an oddity – replaced en masse by slammed hatchbacks, flame-throwing muscle cars, and a new generation of road-bound aesthetic ideals.

Though it now sticks out like a sore thumb in local parking spots, this Lincoln serves as a four-wheeled exemplification of Providence's history. With its glimmering paint undermined by worn

tires that hint at decades of use, this car embodies the aesthetics of a city aspiring to outgrow its industrial roots while preserving colonial notions of wealth and prosperity. Leatherbound seats and half-drawn curtains hint at an idealization of luxury, just as the city's most notable historical figures have striven for inclusion in the ranks of the East Coast elite.

The Lincoln meanders around town, frequenting the white-chalk spots south of George street on Thayer. Although the saloon lacks a University-issued permit, it evades the authorities and never wears that shameful shade of orange bestowed upon the unlucky by Providence's parking prosecutors. It is a smooth operator, effortlessly nomadic in its constant rotation between Thayer, Benevolent, George, and Power. When the Lincoln needs a longer-term spot, it nestles under one of the multi-story colonial houses that dominate the corners of College Hill.

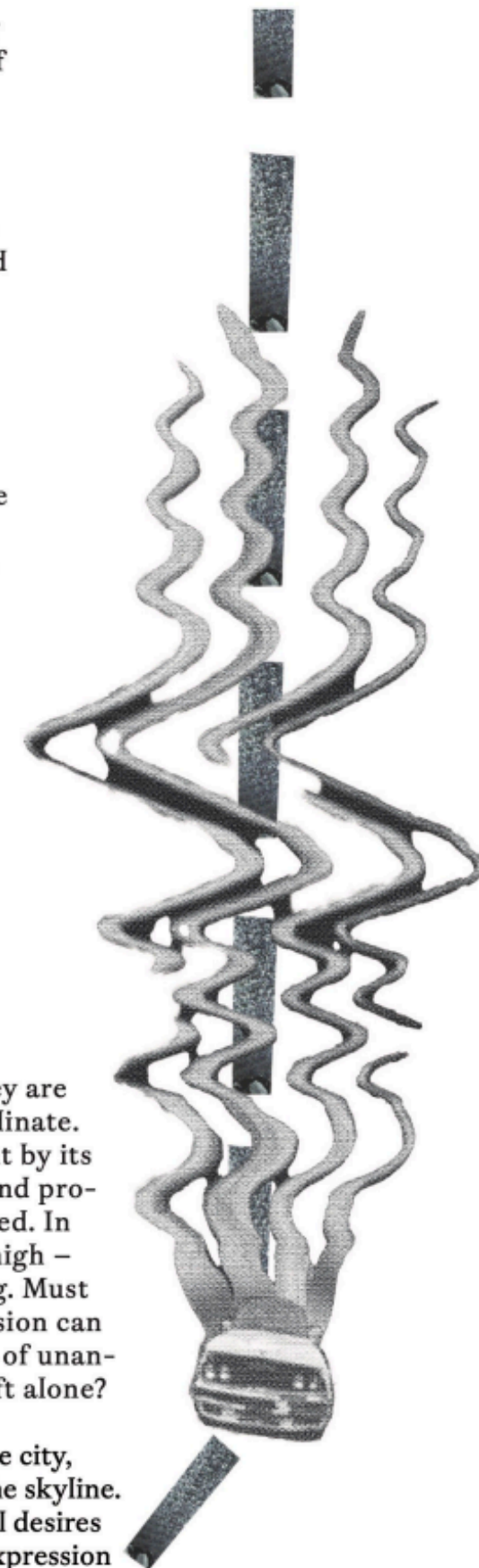


The Lincoln acts as an extension of all of these homes, clocking in the hours as a road-going companion to Providence's army of beige Federal-style clones.

Between 1968 and 1971, around when our Lincoln's town car predecessors rolled off the assembly line floor, Brown University constructed four buildings. They were ambitious projects – hulking structures clad in beige of brutalism that were intended to add strength and character to eastern Providence's modest skyline. The project's centerpiece was the towering Sciences Library, whose renowned ugliness now makes it widely considered the school's most regrettable architectural endeavor. Today, the school is trying its hand at architecture once again. This time, though, it is trying differently. As it undertakes to build a new performing arts center, the school has eschewed the traditional aesthetics of the city and moved on from the brutalist fad that dominated its offerings in the preceding century. The new building is covered in a sheen of pseudo-industrial steel with a base punctuated by floor-to-ceiling glass windows. Online architectural renderings emphasize the building's minimalist interior and gleaming spaceship-style exterior. In a vacuum, the new building may be attractive. But it is not built in a vacuum. It is in Providence. Thus, it is surrounded by houses, dorms, and University wings that were built on the very ideals that this new building seeks to reject. And these centuries-old brick-built staples ensure that the performing arts center will not evade the sore-thumb phenomenon that seems inherent to the construction of any new building on College Hill. Even as the beige of brutalism fades from the neighborhood's architectural palette and is replaced by the silver of steel and the green of glass, dissension pervades the visual language of the city.

As spectators assess the merits and drawbacks of each style, they are forced to choose between two evils: the boring and the insubordinate. And when every addition is judged not only by its own virtue but by its cohesion with its surroundings, hopes of having an immediate and profound positive impact are fantastical. Thus, change is discouraged. In evaluating the best path forward, it is clear that the stakes are high – fourteen floors high, in some cases – and the questions daunting. Must each brick slowly be replaced, gradually upgraded, so that cohesion can follow in the footsteps of progress? Or should the improbability of unanimous approval yield stagnance? Should each brick simply be left alone?

To better understand the evolving aesthetic and cultural ideals of the city, perhaps onlookers should turn their gaze to the street rather than the skyline. On the city's potholed roads, individual stakeholders with individual desires give little thought to cohesion, and a more democratic medium of expression has taken hold. The breadth of aesthetic expression found on the asphalt is abundantly clear. sionally, our Lincoln ventures north and finds itself parked in stark juxtaposition with a local Nissan 370Z that exemplifies car culture in Providence.





Named BRS Z34 by its owner Kai, this 2018 370Z Nismo is loud in every way. It is slammed low to the ground on coilovers and clad in rubber band-thin performance tires. Its stock downpipe has been decatted, demuffled, enlarged. But this Nissan is best known for its paint: every single body panel has been wrapped in eye-popping, neon-colored, anime-inspired artwork. Humming restlessly in the pale shadow of the Sciences Library, the Nissan rejects the notion that cars must serve as an extension of a city's roots.

Although still outnumbered on paper, Kai and his visually outspoken automotive companions are expanding in rank. Indeed, between its leather-vested hog riders and nighttime drag racers, Providence is host to a lively cohort of vehicular fanatics. Some make their presence known through straight-piped exhausts or bass-booster sound systems. Others fit 26-inch chrome wheels on their Mustangs, opting to show off with aesthetics rather than volume. In either case, these cars and bikes are not just to be driven - they are to be seen, and they are to be heard.

This phenomenon should not be dismissed as a fad or subculture or some sort of cultish communal degeneration. If buildings are considered integral aspects of a city's identity, should the same not hold true for cars? While the Sciences Library may embody a certain architectural movement, it is less an expression of identity than it is an expression of agenda. An examination of the project's stakeholders reveals that school administrators, University alumni, and government officials dictated the building's appearance. Although Providence and its inhabitants now live in its shadow, they played no role in the building's construction.

Kai is the sole owner, designer, driver, and photographer of his anime-clad Nissan. In direct contrast to the building which occasionally looms over his project car, Kai required no formal permission when he stripped his Nissan of its white paint and covered it in art. He required no formal permission when he gutted its mechanical innards and made each component an intentional creative decision. Through his modification, the Nissan became an expression of identity unencumbered by zoning boards or alumni committees. By extension, each car that traverses Providence's intersections serves as an expression of its owner's identity - especially those that have been carefully modified and maintained to reflect an intentional artistic or visual goal. In many cases, Providence's cars have evolved to serve as a more democratic representation of the city's changing aesthetic ideals. The Sciences Library will never rid itself of that beige; but tomorrow, the silver rims on Kai's Nissan just might be orange.



SHEY 'RI ACU' RIVERA RIOS
ANTIGONX

REVIEW BY OSAYUWAMEN 'UWA' EDE-OSIFO

Playwright and community arts leader Shey Rivera Ríos' "AntigonX," which premiered at the WaterFire Arts Center in Providence and is now touring nationwide, is staged on the fictional island-nation Abundancia, but there is nothing fictional about the socio-political turmoil the play wades through. AntigonX is rooted in local and historic truths about Borikén, otherwise known as Puerto Rico, Ríos' native island, with a call for liberation.

"My name means 'to be against what is given at birth,'" Antígona (played by Rivera Ríos) proclaims. "I am a child born outside of the gender binary. I am the in between of lenguajes and ideas."

AntigonX is adapted from the Greek tragedy Antigone, which depicts the violent deployment of state and familial violence. Ríos' adaptation decolonizes a Western theatrical tradition, which canonizes Greek plays as the "Classics," by centering queer and Latinx experiences in a futuristic world. The playwright's adaptation rejects catastrophic endings, instead reimagining responses to conflict rooted in love and a future steeped in ancestral wisdoms.

Though violence looms over the play, it begins not in conflict, but in pre-colonial rituals. A multicultural cast—nonbinary and POC actors—emerges clothed in vibrant, loose fabrics that sway as they chant and dance across the theatre floor. A rhythm reminiscent of traditional West African drumming vibrates through the room. A rose hangs on a wall, candles flickering on busy shelves.

On a large screen, cosmic particles are projected next to the image of a purple plant with a prickly yellow top. We enter the Motherboard, a sci-fi tropicalia. The ensemble lifts bowls into the air as an offering to the spirits of the East, West, North, and South, blessing the food. The reverence shown to ancestral spirits of Indigenous Taino practices ceremoniously activates the play.

Now the audience is submerged in the chaos of Antígona's world. Antígona's brothers have killed one another in a battle for power. The island government honors one brother as a national hero and condemns the other, Casiman, as a traitor. The disgraced brother Casiman is sentenced to a no-burial. Antígona embarks on a journey to bury Casiman's body against the wishes of their sister Ismena (Violeta Cruz De Valle).

The siblings debate a question about violent resistance and activism. Should change be achieved incrementally, or should oppressive institutions be confronted immediately at any cost? In Audre Lorde's words, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."

When Antígona succeeds in their mission to help their brother's soul rest through burial, they are caught and punished by death for treason. Their death is a tragic sacrifice that spurs protests across Abundancia. "Somos más y no tenemos miedo," the ensemble chants after Antígona has been murdered. The ensemble invites the audience to join the unified cry of resistance.

The play concludes optimistically with Ismena's election to office and her intent to lead the people in a fair and gentle way, the governor being overthrown by the people, islanders reclaiming their indigeneity, and mutual aid campaigns flourishing.

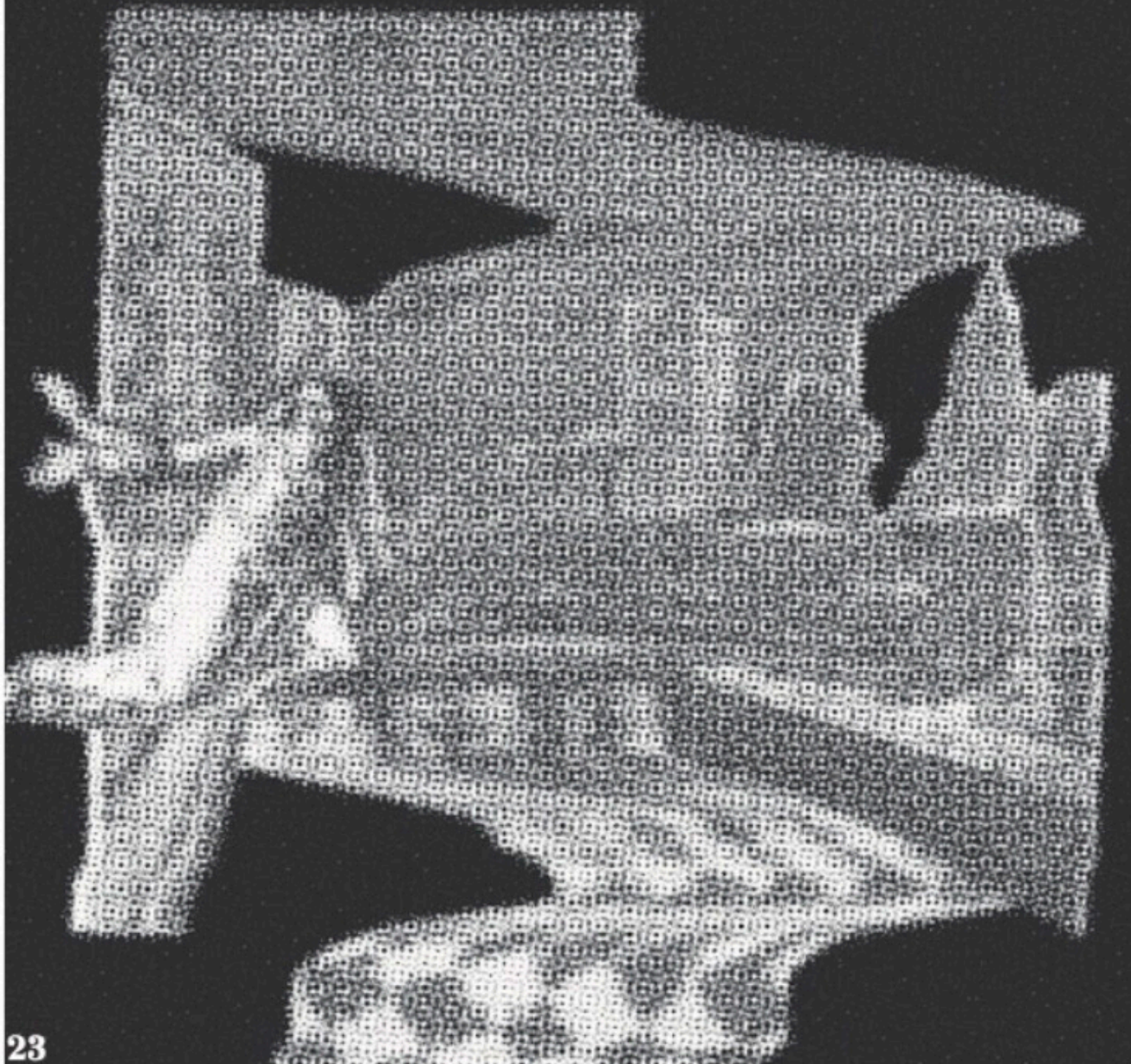
While the heaviness and complexity of this story is masterfully expressed by the cast, it is not matched by a script that, at times, reads parallel to a protest rally leader's slogans. The playwright's exploration of the complications of activism could have benefited from further nuance; the dialogue about radical activism and peaceful resistance comes through as earnest, if not naive.

Inhale. Exhale. Could an equitable and utopian society truly be attained? The audience is asked to suspend their disbelief about the hopeful ending and participate in a cathartic embodiment of radical imagination towards new futures. AntigonX cleverly subverts the tragic legacy of Greek plays: in this alternative world, resistance is not in vain.

As the play concludes, transporting the audience out of the world of Abundancia, Shey Riveras Ríos brings the audience's attention to electronic candles that have been placed on each seat. They encourage the audience to reflect on an ancestor or lost loved one and light the candle to be placed on a constructed altar at the theater's exit. This beautiful enactment of the motions of grief provides a pause for us between the end of the epic and reemergence into a tumultuous world.

SOMETIMES, IT'S DIFFICULT TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU WALK

MALINI NARAYAN



The ghost of my mother grips my shoulders,
steering me through streets and stairwells.

And everytime I come across an entryway she whispers,
“Legs up and over. Do not step on the threshold.”

For it is neither here

Nor there.

And if you linger in the in-between,
The rakshasas will descend upon you.

Myths and rituals follow me through
Benefit Street and Hope Street
(anglicized names of foreign places.)

Through doorways that have forgotten the significance of their thresholds.

An arrogant sage who defied the gods
was slain on a threshold at twilight.
As day turned to night,
Where one place turned into the next.

The ghost of my mother mother waits
and watches with bated breath
As I relentlessly try to avoid this fate
And vault towards my destination.

I collect funny looks and confused faces.
But I cannot forget that each here

is separate,

And there

sacred.

And even while I remain here

—Culturally adrift—

I will never be able to step
Onward to another reality,
Without being reminded that I have left a different one behind.

THANK YOU FOR READING

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