

DEEP

DIVE

PAUSE

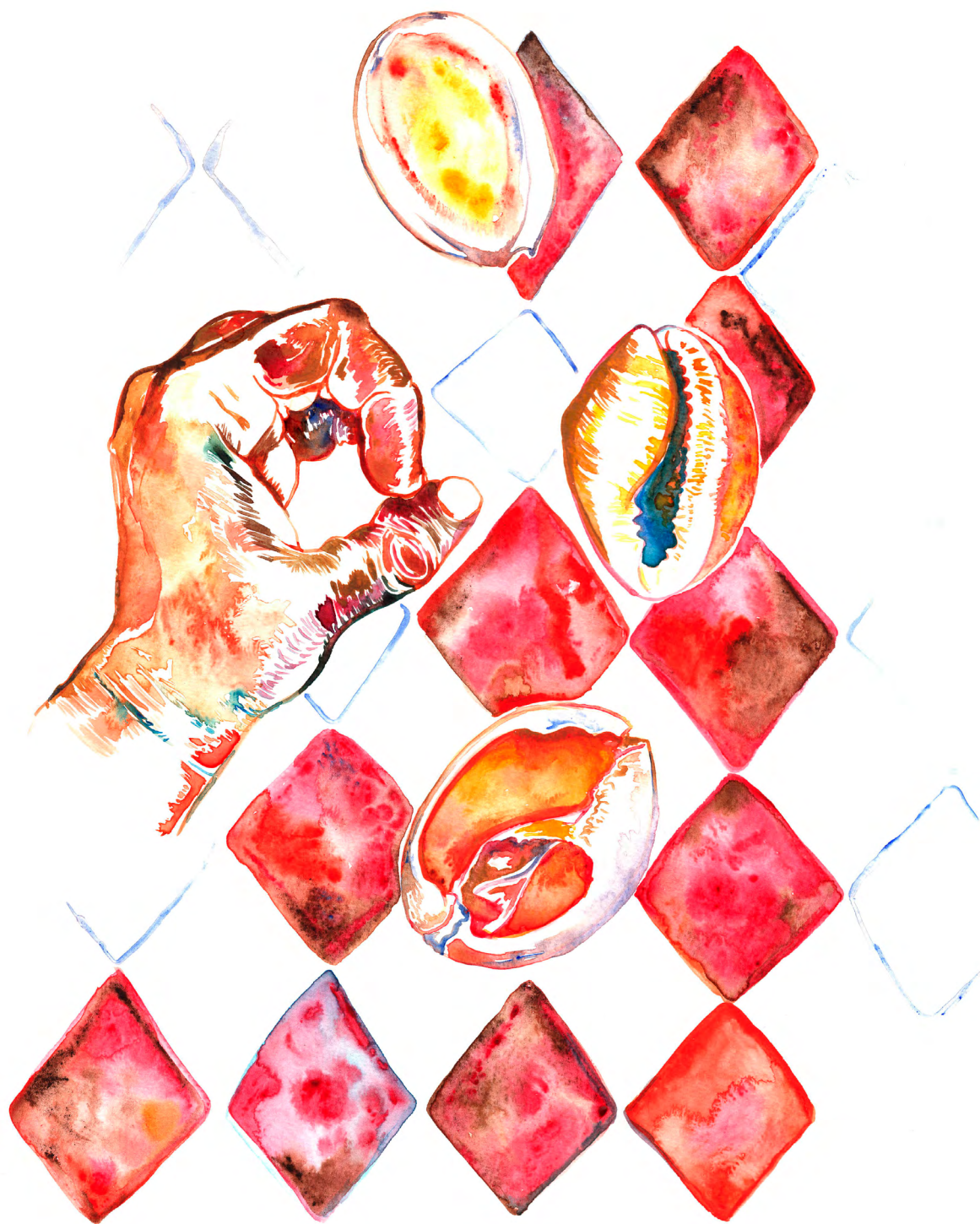
UNCOILING

MEMORY

deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory

Eddie Chambers
Dr Cheryl Finley
Dr Nat Raha
Alberta Whittle





deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory is an exhibition by artist Alberta Whittle commissioned on the occasion of the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, by the Scotland + Venice partnership.

In an installation of new work comprising tapestry, film and sculpture, and spanning two rooms in a former boatyard, Alberta encourages us to slow down, in order that we may collectively consider the historic legacies and contemporary expressions of racism, colonialism and migration, and begin to think outside of these damaging frameworks.

This publication is produced to accompany the exhibition and its related programme and brings together new writing by Eddie Chambers, Dr Cheryl Finley, Dr Nat Raha and Alberta Whittle to further investigate and reveal the ideas and concerns contained within Alberta's practice and the work on display in the presentation.

EDDIE CHAMBERS
Lagareh – The Last Born:
Some Considerations

To watch Alberta Whittle's *Lagareh – The Last Born* is to engage with wondrous, expansive stories about history, identity, geography, ancestry, heritage, and culture, and the centrality of these things not only to the lives of people of African descent, but specifically to the life of the artist herself. The distinctive titling of the work draws from the Mande language of the Mandinka people living mainly in the West African countries of Senegal, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. Incidentally, the fabled Kunta Kinte, from Alex Haley's mid-1970s work of creative non-fiction, *Roots*, was a Mandinkan. Within Whittle's film itself, we experience Mandinkan signification aurally, as the culmination of the textured narrative that is *Lagareh – The Last Born*. Beyond and within the work's poetic references to the last born, we both perceive and appreciate the film's *diasporic* leanings. In so many respects, the multiple nouns history, identity, geography, ancestry, heritage, and culture can be articulated within a single noun – diaspora. Thus, Whittle's nuanced, expansive work is itself a compelling manifestation of diasporic sensibilities, wherein the scattering, the dispersal, of people of African descent throughout the world (particularly by way of the Transatlantic Slave trade) is poetically, beautifully, compellingly, made flesh.

The film begins with a close-up of a sculpted, black-skinned figure, with pronounced, though caricatured, African features beloved of the white colonial imagination. Referencing Venice's history of a Black presence that stretches back many centuries, Whittle's film opens with a view of one of four figures that hold up the seventeenth-century tomb of Doge Giovanni Pesaro in the Frari Church in Venice. The four colossal figures of *Moors*, unapologetically rendered with naked arms, bare feet

and ripped, worn out clothing, are pressed into service and perpetual brutish servitude bearing the monumental weight of the building's horizontal, continuous lintel, or *entablature*, on their shoulders. This formidable, Baroque manifestation of African enslavement speaks to the casual, debased, but insistent ways in which the enslavement of African peoples was celebrated by the owners of enslaved Africans and those who profited from the bloodthirsty trade. Similarly pressed into toil that symbolized the notion that African people were particularly suited to compliant subservience and horrifically brutish labour, the figure with which we are greeted in the opening sequence of *Lagareh – The Last Born* is condemned, century after century, to graphically represent and embody the subjection of the Black body.

But Whittle does more than draw attention to such in-plain-sight historic signifiers of enslavement and colonial domination. We might well read her references to the figure as simultaneously seeking to liberate it from its accursed, centuries-long bondage, and in doing so, give such African ancestors, as well as African descendants, both voice and agency. If these bonded and brutalized *Moors* could speak, what might they each say? From the opening sequences of *Lagareh – The Last Born*, Whittle undertakes invaluable work in drawing attention to Venice's infrequently considered association with and benefits from, the Atlantic Slave trade. While statuary and figurines of *Moors*, or *Blackamoors* are a feature of Venice, they are seldom understood or read as manifestations or victims of a brutal encounter, which is how we are obliged, in Whittle's film, to read the four figures that hold up the tomb of Doge Giovanni Pesaro in the Frari Church.

Broadly told through the units of time that represent the days of the week, *Lagareh – The Last Born* is in some respects built around the motif (as in, a distinctive feature or dominant idea in an artistic or literary composition), the element, the symbolism of water. Indeed, the title of the wider or whole exhibition – *diving deep* (pause) *uncoiling memory* – can itself be

regarded as a reference to willingly, proactively, joyfully *diving deep* into the bountiful, life-giving waters of consciousness of oneself, one's Blackness, one's history, one's ancestry, and leading unmistakably, to considerations of one's place in the world, and recognition of those who continue to be brutalized as a consequence of the weight of history and its legacies of racism. The first of several times in *Lagareh – The Last Born* in which we encounter oceanic manifestations of water, the screen contains the words *Solariss prepares libations for Mami Wata to open up the way*. Thus, Whittle makes poetic, culturally-laden use of and reference to that most diasporic of elements – water. There is no more potent, compelling, and evocative symbolism than that of water. In its oceanic visualizing, water represents the accursed, nightmarish means by which captured Africans were transported in floated dungeons and torture chambers from Africa to the New World and beyond.

The inherent dexterity of this symbolism of the oceans might also lead us to considerations of the seas being the means by which so many of those who are now routinely referred to as the *Windrush Generation* made the Atlantic crossing from the islands and countries of the Caribbean, to Britain, from the late 1940s to the early-mid 1960s. Little more than a century after the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, ocean-going vessels such as the *Windrush* and numerous other ships, whose names we do not routinely remember, carried the descendants of enslaved Africans on journeys that traced the maritime movements of vessels on the third leg of the *triangular* Transatlantic slave trade. The oceans were the receivers of tormented enslaved Africans who sought solace by jumping overboard when the opportunity presented itself. In a different regard, the oceans received the bodies of the sick, the dying, the dead and those living captives considered by slavers to be surplus to requirement. But the poetic symbolism of water has of course, many other dimensions. Water is life itself. Water is baptism, or perhaps in more earthly terms, cleansing.

Everything that breathes, grows, and lives must have water, and this symbolism of water is powerfully articulated at various times in *Lagareh – The Last Born*.

Whittle insistently pays respect, pays homage to her ancestors and those aspects of her cultural heritage that connect her to *Africa*. These early oceanic sequences fittingly evoke and reference Mami Wata, (likely, Mammy or Mother Water) the legendary water spirit or deity venerated in West, Central, and Southern Africa, as well as in the African diaspora, particularly in the Americas. Mami Wata is usually depicted as female, thereby underlining water's ability to both nurture and bring forth life, but also to be the receiver of and the giver of peace to tormented African souls such as those, as mentioned, willfully cast overboard from the slave ship, and those who leapt to their deaths, in chains, to escape the unending horror of the slave ship. The mermaid-like sea goddess Mami Wata is dominantly depicted as holding or being benignly entwined by a formidable snake. We see, throughout *Lagareh – The Last Born* and in the film's early sequences, the earthly manifestation of Mami Wata, engaged in ritualistic, choreographed movement, with an otherwise intimidating serpent. Unlike the infernal serpent with which we associate Adam and Eve's fall from grace, the large snake associated with Mami Wata is a blessed symbol of both divination and divinity. The focus throughout the chapters of *Lagareh – The Last Born* is insistently on the role of Black womxn in retaining and sustaining family and generational ties and the strengths that lie within that even when underpinned with grief, exhaustion, and pain.

This paying of homage to her ancestors by Whittle is reinscribed by way of the performing of libation, early on in the filmic work, whereby ancestral spirits are recognized, acknowledged, and respected by the pouring, or the deliberate spilling of bottled alcoholic substances, most frequently rum. Thus, we see, within *Lagareh – The Last Born*, an insistent wondrous interplay of culture-laden symbolism. Alongside sugar and molasses,

no product historically signifies Caribbean slavery more than rum. This alcoholic liquor distilled from sugar-cane residues or molasses was one of slavery's most lucrative manufactures, so the offering of rum, in the powerful, spiritually charged and affirming act of libation, is doubly, triply, powerful in its symbolism. With so many Caribbean nations having their own particular histories of rum manufacture, the expansive reach and nature of African enslavement in the Caribbean is here powerfully evoked. As referenced earlier, Whittle was keen to draw attention to Venice's complicity and active involvement in Black subjugation by way of the trade in enslaved Africans. In similar regard, she was also determined to draw attention to Scotland's own complicity and active involvement in Black subjugation by way of the trade in enslaved Africans. Sequences of *Lagareh – The Last Born* were filmed at eighteenth-century slaver Richard Oswald's Temple (Tea House) on Auchincruive Estate, South Ayrshire. Oswald was, furthermore, the principal owner of Bunce Island, in what is now Sierra Leone, a poignant site that makes an important appearance in Whittle's film.

As is typical of Whittle's work, we are given access to multiple narratives that at times plunge us deep into historical considerations, and their present-day ramifications and consequences. At other times, the artist's work foregrounds itself very much within the here and the now, such as the intimate, loving sequence in which a married couple – two womxn – discuss their hopes and plans for raising a child, the attendant dialogue reinscribing the degree to which both parties are not only looking forward to parenting, but are also doing so in ways that recognize and foreground their wider as well as their immediate responsibilities of raising a child. We need to consider the fullness of the young couple talking in their domestic setting about making and planning a family. Whittle, as she does throughout *Lagareh – The Last Born* gives necessary and important recognition to family ties and the hope that can be sought in and come from *family*.

Lagareh – The Last Born is replete with references to challenges we face in the here and now, to each be agents of the advancement of societal diversity, equity, and inclusion – not used here as bureaucratic buzzwords reinscribed in this *Black Lives Matter* moment but used instead as the absolute embodiment of what we need to embrace and demonstrate, to facilitate a better society. In these touching passages of *Lagareh – The Last Born* (in which two people, deeply committed to each other, engage with the enormity of the project of child rearing that they anticipate as a part of their loving home) Whittle again evokes the importance of lineage, heritage, and ancestry, though on this occasion, this is addressed through a poignant, joyful anticipation of *life to come*.

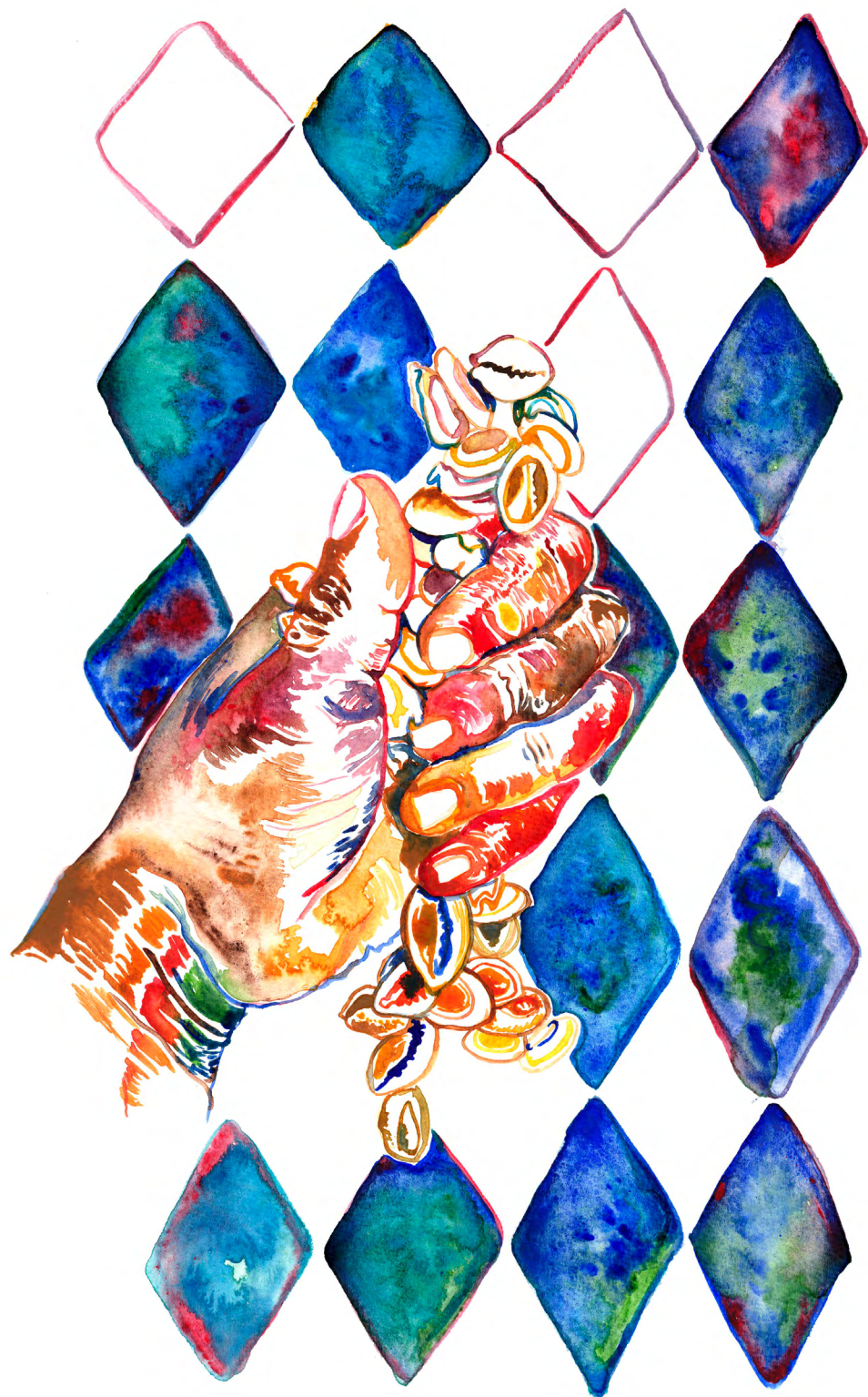
Elsewhere in *Lagareh – The Last Born*, we are jolted into decidedly here and the now challenges by what looks to be camera phone footage of police arresting, nay, assaulting a citizen. We don't of course know any specifics of what we are looking at, but we see enough to know that what we are likely looking at is something that, in other non-police enactments, would unreservedly be viewed as assault, or common assault – in legal terms, that which is committed if one intentionally or recklessly causes another person to apprehend immediate and unlawful personal violence. This notion of assault becomes infinitely more horrific, egregious, and destructive when the assault is committed or perpetrated by uniformed agents of the state's law and order apparatus, making excessive and gratuitous use of batons or tasers, even as they hide behind the protection offered by their police uniforms. In viewing this section of *Lagareh – The Last Born*, those with pronounced associations with Scotland will graphically and unmistakably be reminded of the misfortune that befell Sheku Bayoh, who died after being restrained by police in Kirkcaldy, Scotland. Bayoh, a father of two in his early 30s, lost his life at the hands of police in what are probably best referred to as disputed circumstances. It is only later in *Lagareh – The Last Born*, that we come face to face

with a photograph of Bayoh, lovingly cradling his two young children. *Lagareh – The Last Born* at times caresses us, immersing us in life-affirming narratives. At other times, such as its implied, inferred, or actual references to Bayoh, the film jolts us into urgent considerations of the violence that might at any time threaten or engulf us, particularly when that violence is *racialized*. Indeed, *Lagareh – The Last Born* is itself, ultimately, a homage to Bayoh, poignantly cast as the last born.

As is typical of Whittle's work, *Lagareh – The Last Born* is a multilayered, infinitely nuanced work, from its opening sequences through to its last. This is an aesthetically mature and measured work, which blends, overlays and utilizes a variety of moving image sources, given further sobering and thoughtful context by means of devices such as the previously mentioned days of the week structure, the compelling use of text and the multiple resonances that quite literally girdle the globe. This wonderful *diasporic* narrative, that takes the viewer from the Scotland in which Whittle is domiciled, to particular international locales such as the Barbados in which she was born, and Bunce Island, Sierra Leone, obliges us to consider the geographic points of the triangular slave trade, mentioned earlier. For good measure, *Lagareh – The Last Born*, in its considerations of Bunce Island, reminds us, or more likely informs us that the West African island houses a seventeenth-century castle that was built by the slave trading Royal Africa Company. (Bunce Island, as mentioned earlier, was principally owned by eighteenth-century Scottish slaver Richard Oswald.) A Sierra Leonean historian is on hand, in *Lagareh – The Last Born*, to tell us not only of the tens of thousands of captured Africans who were shipped from there to the New World, but also to tell us about those who died in pronounced misery and were in effect buried in unmarked graves on the island. (This in contrast to those white people of means buried in adjoining ground on Bunce Island, given carved markers and headstones, on which details of their names and dates of birth or death are faithfully recorded.)

Towards the end of *Lagareh – The Last Born*, in the last chapter (Sunday), we encounter a Mandinkan truth teller, a *griot*, singing in her mother tongue, in a wood-paneled court room, or a room in which weighty legal matters are adjudicated. The griot's utterances oblige us to imagine that she is crying out for justice, not only the earthly justice, often hollowly dispensed in environments such as the one in which she is located, but a justice for the ancestors and their dark-skinned descendants who continue to walk the earth. It is here that *Lagareh – The Last Born* takes a sorrowful, plaintive turn back to the destroyed and cut short life of Sheku Bayoh, represented in Whittle's film as the last born in his bloodline. Kumba, the Mandinkan griot, wrote the song she sings to memorialise the life of Bayou (whose family ties link to the same areas of West Africa mentioned at the beginning of this text). Kumba offers both a lament as well as a celebration of Bayoh's life. [Tellingly, this section will not be translated into English, only captioned in Mandinkan, though audiences may make the connection through the mention of Bayoh's name and through the title itself, 'Lagareh'].

Earlier on in the film we see four red-dressed warrior women brandishing machetes in a choreographed sequence filmed in Barbados, as mentioned, the country of Whittle's birth. This fulsome use of machetes – such powerful, culturally loaded symbolism – is replicated elsewhere in *Lagareh – The Last Born*. The performers in red become a family chorus of sorts and can be compellingly understood as a visualization of bloodlines – red fabric being pulled through a site of ancestral history. These filmic explorations underline, time and again, the abiding message that through the survival of those who were never meant to survive, through recognition of the role of Black womxn in retaining and sustaining the family and generational ties alluded to earlier, and through homage paid to Sheku Bayoh and the calling out of the heinous and appalling taking of his life, *Bakra day done! Massa day done!*



ALBERTA WHITTLE
Looking the snare in the eye

I

We are falling now.
Falling through time, whirling,
Dancing,
Jack-knifing,
And twisting until the chain pulls
tight and I cannot breathe.
Stop.
Listen to your heart.

I want you to know you are safe in my deep,
even when you didn't dare hope that I would exist (some day).
You are safe, even when you
looked death in the eye.
But now you are ashes beneath the soil, in the sand,
in mud, with the worms that wriggle
And eat and shit and fuck and WREAK!

Retracing steps worn away by time,
I look for refuge in shorelines but find routes no longer open.
Instead, I see carcasses of wooden ships wrecked and spent on
the horizon.
Not welcome.
No welcome here.
Adorning myself in dazzle,
I step into the water.

II

And I

May never know your face Sarah but I walk with your riddems
in the kink of my hips and the balls of my feet.

I walk as if you are holding my hand and I send this love song
for you,

For me (young and old and now in-between).

My love song is to keep you warm and remind you of long
sweet nights where you tingled with joy.

Joy.

Maybe it was the joy of feeling free in your limbs,
In your heart as it expanded to breathe more deeply,

Was that freedom?

Is this exhalation from your swollen belly enough to move and
shake and tremble through our memories of salt?

Salt water that I taste now,

Burning my eyes

And closing my throat.

You turn back and answer me in gestures,
In words I cannot remember.

I've lost my bearings now.

You were there, handling a cutlass,

The scent of tobacco on your hands.

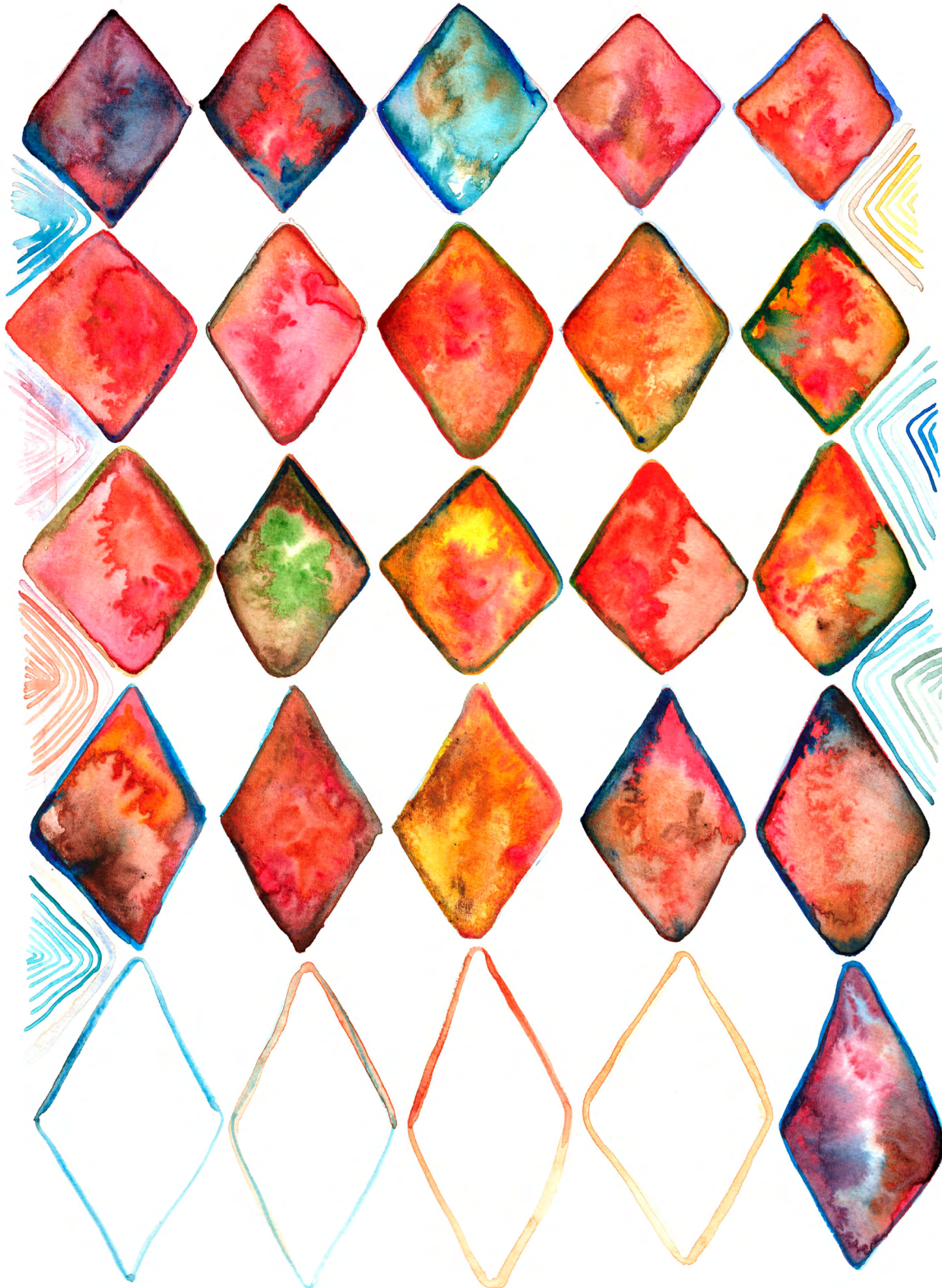
Did you pour libations as you threaded beads?

Whispering prayers and incantations, did I visit you in your
dreams?

I lick my finger and taste salt.

I feel the wind tell me how to navigate my path forward from
the past

(I love you).



DR CHERYL FINLEY

Alberta Whittle: Communities of Care

Throughout her celebrated career, the multidisciplinary Barbadian-Scottish artist, Alberta Whittle, has enlisted a network of collaborators, who, together with her vision and direction, participate in the preparation, execution and care of her powerful works of art. Whether performance, film, installation, collage, sculpture, watercolour, or sound-based work, Whittle's practice is distinguished by the purposeful involvement of others – students, artists, curators, scholars, communities of womxn, migrants and those not often associated with contemporary art – to teach, model and reflect radical self-love as a form of decolonial reparative justice. Her distinctly participatory practice unites and replenishes African diasporic communities in Scotland, Barbados, West and South Africa, and now Venice, wherein the violent legacies of slavery, colonialism and migration continue to reverberate in and around the waters in between.

Thoughtful, inquisitive and determined, Whittle's oeuvre asks questions of history and myth, identity and belonging, time and place, the archive and memory, community and care. Key enquiries guiding her oeuvre consider, what are the different capabilities and possibilities of practicing art? How can art build bridges of understanding and communities of care? How can brutal narratives of the past be recast in projects of healing and recuperation? What is repair, restoration or liberation without fundamental manifestations of joy? Ultimately, Whittle's powerful works of art teach participants and observers alike how to build frameworks for systemic social change that prevent, interrupt, and repair legacies of harm, disenfranchisement and extraction within African diasporic communities. Indeed, for Whittle, the decision to prioritise care and radical

self-love is at the very core of her practice and process as an artist, inviting others along the way to create nurturing spaces of understanding and belonging.

This is not the first time Alberta Whittle has exhibited at the Venice Biennale. Rather, I initially was introduced to her participatory practice at the landmark 56th Venice Biennale (2015), where she exhibited with the Johannesburg Pavilion, developed in honour of the final Johannesburg Biennial curated in 1997 by Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019) who became the first (and only) African Director of the Venice Biennale in 2015.¹ That innovative ‘city’ pavilion was conceived by a collective of artists, writers and curators, working primarily in film and live performance, who set out, in a series of site-specific interventions around the city, to enact the contradictory lived experience of blackness within racially stratified spaces, such as Johannesburg and Venice. Partnering with her frequent cross-continental collaborator, Farieda Nazier, Whittle performed *Right of Admission*, where audience members were invited into their makeshift office to be racially classified.² This referenced the long history of Apartheid South Africa’s racial classification system (1948-1992), which produced hierarchies of race and class that still exist today in lived experience and the built environment, limiting Black South Africans’ spatial mobility and access to economic, educational, physical and social advancement.³ The artists wore matching nude-coloured dresses and used the tools of eugenics – calipers to measure the size of the cranium, measuring tapes to calculate height, and paint swatches to approximate skin colour – to racially classify visitors to their office. This site-specific performance further engaged their racialised female bodies in a critique of Western notions of beauty and appearance, demonstrating how these social constructions intervene in diasporic and postcolonial spaces to limit access based on race and class. *Right of Admission* recalls the work of Black British photographer, Joy Gregory, whose 1995 series *Objects of Beauty* pictured the proscriptive

tools defining female bodies and notions of beauty – brassieres, stockings, measuring tape, eye-lash curlers, combs – similarly calling out Western and male-dominated notions of beauty.

Whittle and Nazier performed the companion work, *Journey of Aspirations*, around the city of Venice, noting the city as a site of spectacle for tourists and art consumers alike, while highlighting its longstanding history of racial, spatial, class and gender stratification. In this intervention, the artists wear matching nude-coloured dresses stuffed to exaggerate pregnancy bumps, over-the-top wigs of unkempt straight hair, gold jewellery and heavy makeup. They jointly tote a plaid carry bag of the cheap recycled type commonly used by African migrants to cart their wares throughout the city of Venice (and other Italian and European metropolises). Pausing to groom themselves, performing acts of self-care with props from their proverbial bag of tricks, the artists perform on display at popular tourist sites, including Piazza San Marco and the Biennale. Becoming spectacles themselves, Whittle and Nazier elicit comical stares and shudders of disbelief, explaining, ‘We deliberately insert ourselves into institutions or informal spaces where we can speak directly to the conversations that are often missing around who is considered acceptable or welcome.’⁴ Performed in public view, *Journey of Aspirations* ultimately delivered a biting critique of the exploitation of migrant African labourers, whose proscribed existence in Venice often renders them invisible except when reduced to illegally selling counterfeit luxury goods in popular tourist sites in order to survive. In 2003, the African American conceptual and performance artist, Fred Wilson, famously deployed migrant African traders to display and sell their wares as part of a performance during the vernissage of the 50th Venice Biennale. They were positioned outside his American Pavilion debut, *Speak of Me as I Am*, as themselves, entrepreneurs, while also referencing modern-day *Blackamoors*, exoticized decorative art objects popularised in Italy in the eighteenth century as African-European contact increased.

Local police attempted to remove and arrest these refugee traders-cum-performers from Wilson's exhibition, highlighting the contingent nature of their very presence in Venice, curtailed by the built environment, modes of commerce and racist anti-immigration laws.

Migration and memory have been constant themes in Whittle's work as demonstrated in her recent exhibitions with Grand Union in Birmingham in 2020 and 2021, as well as her collaboration with the Maryhill Integration Network, commissioned by Glasgow Sculpture Studios, and realised as part of Glasgow International in 2021. These works and others stem from her own experience of migration from Barbados to Scotland, noting how the racial, gender and class-based politics of assimilation affect one's need to fit in and sense of belonging in a constantly shifting 'hostile' landscape. Usually place-based, site-specific, or attending to a particular place or set of coordinates connecting the Black Atlantic, Whittle's works demonstrate how the legacies of slavery, colonialism and imperialism secreted in the landscape and built environment continue to shape the lives of contemporary African descended people. The recently passed Nationality and Borders Bill (2021), together with the 2018 Windrush Scandal, have shaped Whittle's framing of the 'hostile environment' in which many Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom and their descendants find themselves today. She notes how the stringent new laws, restrictions to mobility and covert surveillance risk migrants' (and asylum seekers') safety and stability, declaring, 'Any moment I'm expecting my British passport to be taken away from me given the recent Nationality and Borders Bill.'⁵ Whittle's creative practice urgently compels collective care as a means of deflecting anti-black violence, as a mode of survival.

In *No Mudder Country Here* (2020), Whittle was commissioned by Grand Union to create a hand-painted billboard for the brick façade of Junction Works, a former canal office in Birmingham. Emblazoned with the words 'In a Hostile

Environment, Respectability Won't Save You', painted yellow against a blue/pink backdrop reminiscent of Dancehall aesthetics, the billboard signals the detrimental effects of assimilation politics on Caribbean and African descended migrants in the United Kingdom. Highlighting the word 'HOST' within the word 'hostile' by writing it in white, the artist cautions against the assimilationist ideal of whiteness while implicating the state in failing to protect and care for migrant communities. Around the corner, Whittle also created an interactive light installation in the canal office windows, using deepening shades of pink to suggest how seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses can lead to blindness and amnesia, noting the canal's role in supplying manufactured goods from the Midlands to fuel the Transatlantic slave trade.

Process is an important part of Whittle's participatory social practice, one that involves multiple partners in ensemble work, building compassionate awareness of the body's relationship to touch, breath, stillness, environment, proximity, site, and sound. Forging communities of care, the artist centres the body as key to undoing historical and contemporary forms of systemic racism. In another work, Whittle was commissioned by Glasgow Sculpture Studio's Learning and Engagement Programme to create new work that interrogates the colonial era history of the Forth and Clyde Canal.⁶ The result was *business as usual: hostile environment (A REMIX)*, in which the artist worked collaboratively to produce new film and audio works that expose the role of waterways in the movement of people, both voluntarily and involuntarily, mapping narratives of migration against local and global histories. The Forth and Clyde Canal was the first canal to be built in Scotland, begun in 1768 and opened in 1790, providing an inland route for the movement of people, sea-going vessels and manufactured goods from the Firth of Forth and Edinburgh to Glasgow and the coast at the Firth of Clyde during the burgeoning years of the Transatlantic slave trade.

In the film, *business as usual: hostile environment (A REMIX)*, Whittle worked closely with Maryhill Integration Network (MIN), formed in 2001 as a welcoming bridge uniting asylum seekers, migrant and refugee communities with Glasgow's settled inhabitants through art, social, educational and community projects.⁷ Collaborating with MIN's Joyous Choir, her process involved a series of discussions, collective thought exercises, and integrative ways of using sound and song as a form of both community care and experiencing joy to counter archival footage and her images (taken both before and during the pandemic) that reveal the hostile environment resulting from racist and imperial immigration policies. Exposing Glasgow's (and Scotland's) ties to the Transatlantic slave trade through the Mercantile City's trade goods, movement of people and ships, Whittle's timely and innovative sound works reveal contemporary crises in housing, labour, and healthcare, linking local realities to global histories. Collaborating with artist Francis Dosoo, the sound works are available for streaming and download and are meant to be experienced as one walks along the waterway at one's leisure. Building a listening repertoire that affects the senses, the sound works create a kinesthetic awareness of the moving body in relation to the canal and the built environment. For example, *Excavating Beginnings and Move Like Water* uses original music composition and sound design to explore Glasgow's relationship and role within the Transatlantic slave trade while *Lessons Learned: Weather Warnings* tackles the impact of gentrification and the built environment on poverty, race and class. Therapeutic and meditative, these sound works are a source of community recognition and healing.

Whittle's training as a curator and researcher has uniquely shaped her interdisciplinary practice, demonstrating how her attention to care and the archive has centred projects that insist on reckoning with past histories of colonialism and violence affecting the African diaspora.

1 Okwui Enwezor was artistic director of the critically acclaimed 56th Venice Biennale, *All the Worlds Futures*, the first to centre live performance on a stage designed by Ghanaian British architect, David Adjaye, OBE, and noted for the largest number to date of artists of colour from around the world.

2 Farieda Nazier is a Johannesburg-based educator, artist and researcher, and a graduate of Glasgow School of Art (2010).

3 Alberta Whittle and Farieda Nazier performed *Right of Admission* on 6 May 2015, at the About Artist Studio in Santa Croce from 11 am to 5pm. Developed in Johannesburg, South Africa *Right of Admission* was first performed in 2014, with subsequent iterations around the city that year. A *Right of Admission* retrospective was held at the University of Johannesburg Gallery in 2021 and was adapted virtually to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, noting the need to socially distance as well as the increased state-sanctioned restrictions and quarantines placed on migrants and refugee communities as well as Black South Africans. The policy of Apartheid, segregation on racial basis, was instituted in 1948 when the National Party came to power. The system of Apartheid racially classified people into categories (white, black or coloured), banned interracial marriage and resettled black and coloured people, removing them from their ancestral homelands and forcibly restricting mobility, among other violent limitations to social, physical, educational and political mobility. Facing mounting internal protests and international sanctions, Apartheid was dismantled in the early 1990s, with the repeal of Apartheid laws (1991) and a referendum to end the system of Apartheid (1992). Nelson Mandela of the African National Congress became the first democratically elected president in 1994.

4 creativefeel.co.za/2021/08/we-basically-share-one-brain-a-qa-with-alberta-whittle-and-farieda-nazier/

5 Alberta Whittle quoted in the *New York Times*, citation <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/07/arts/design/british-caribbean-artists.html>

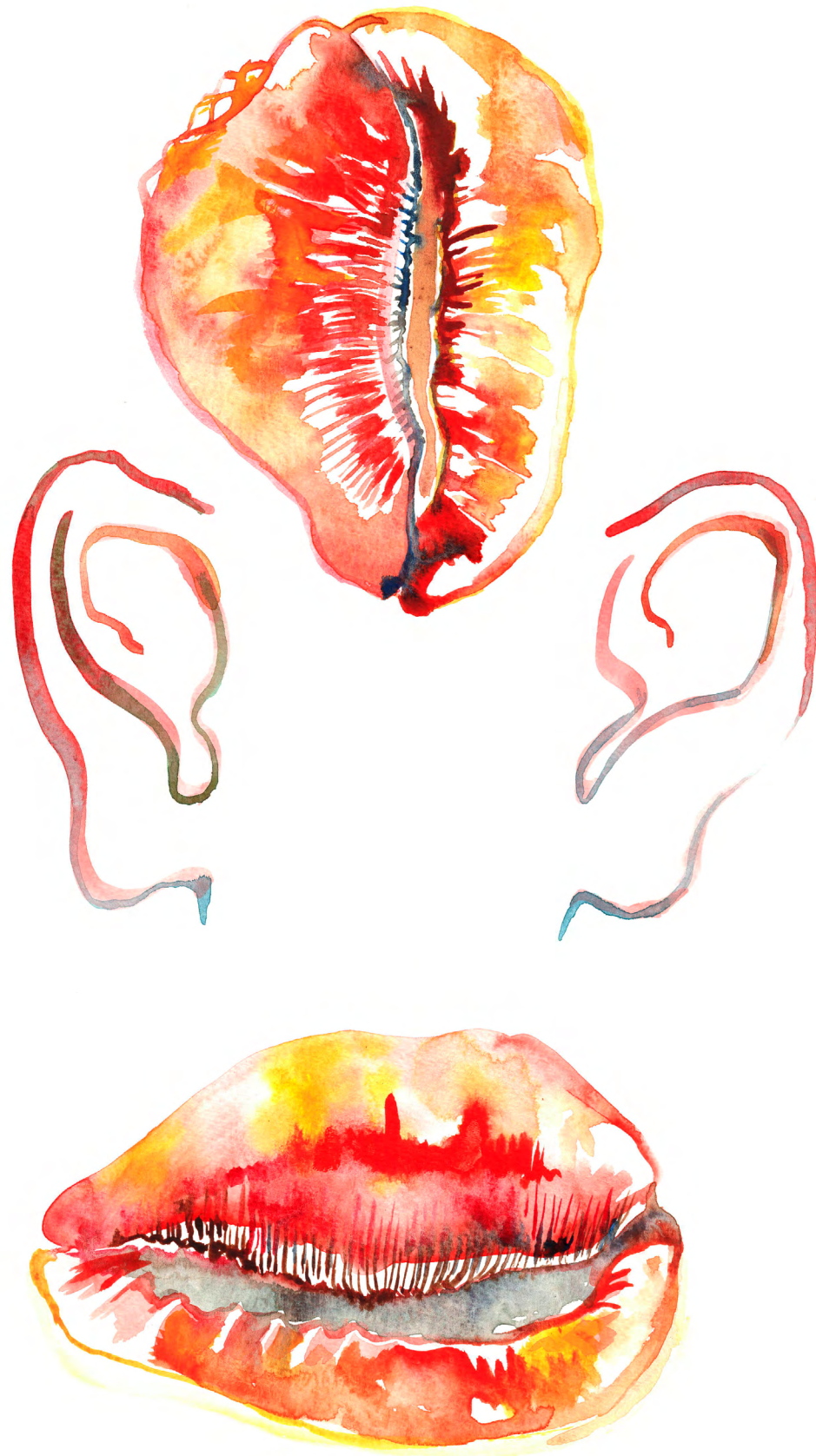
6 In recent years, the Forth and Clyde Canal has been revived for leisure use while artworks like Whittle's have questioned its roots in the transatlantic slave trade and industrial era use as a way of understanding how unequal immigration policies have shaped Glasgow's contemporary civic dynamics.

7 See <http://maryhillintegration.org.uk> The Joyous Choir is an international women's community choir that fosters community care and belonging for migrants and asylum seekers.

PRISONS ARE THE
NEW
PLANTATIONS



DR NAT RAHA
meditations: on visual works &
films of Alberta Whittle (2017-2022),
creopolitanism, dreaming with water



i.

divining tides, springing
from the hands of you

bodydoubled
, crack the vacuum
of talk
animate currents from the core of love –

invoke ecologies

unspooled in the drive of
coloniality
capital, in the
human divorced from the planetary

undoing modes of interpretation
borders imagined onto flesh,
language's weft to service
clocks, orientation, debt, the crossing

for resource

to be held in cycles
on oceans like in years after nations
eyes spin torrents unsea/sonal

if extractivism from earth
in attitude from bodies in life
, the drive that be clearing oceans by species¹
-fell extinctions , un/turning the flow of water²
the planetary un/made

is the denigration of
 the enchantment of living
 reciprocity , trust denatured /³

dive to presence all of our possible souls

in a lull of estuary. you
 take to a quiet of saltwater
 turning summersaults
 renew tendrils, tuning
 into reverberations of the wake
 reparative
 to dearest peace

chiasmic: verdant spectrality
 grounded by the frame bod/ies
 ,, a cosmos dances /ies
 from your dreaming

/ies

refracts to ocean, fire, salt air
 dioxides, bone, bark & leaf

from arbours
 tongues grow petals
 kindle diameters of earth

bridge toes on the fertility of
 ash, breath
 -ing with small insects

slow pulse on the vector of history
 retell centuries in prismatic frames, re
 -inserting multiplicities, dust
 myth's roots translated to sema-
 phores, tartans, arran knits / *I dress*
like you, but not to you.⁴ set
 horror upon water, empires
 arriving by boat.

blackness reauthors the world as they told it,
 asserts the grand decline of their claims

in glossolalia of wet forests
 , delicate limbs extend
 kin aquatic who do not tire

unlearning the given , hear
 spectres scoping bays for scent

ii.

befriending in the count of fires
limber branches towards
in truth
in fullness of somatics
verberate ringing out of accumulate pain
/ str

-ung by

dorsi's

warp

commandeering the halls
? assuming the boat carved, the walls
adorned from trees fiscal grown
in promissory notes ?
, skew gravity
with the pull of hands

speaking geometries
non-verbal
in the flow / release

shoulders, ropes, logics
„ splitting into multiplicities / in-
verting
the clock
floors pound
„ crescendo

to the verticality of oceans.
under eyes' cover, blowing
kisses
in the voluminous dark of world / *swell*
an everyday choreography of the possible / ⁵
run nights in movement
in the rhythm of pleasure

, decibels, re-
fusing conditions of spectacle
brimming – *revoke*
jur enter
-tained
gaze

iii.

spinal gravity by the scope of no other mouths

trajec/stories flowing, find our
-selves working worlding in fissures:

over parched shards, sordid
antimonies,⁶ over the divisions
of continents, land from water
, mind from matter

„ engender
friendship, electrostatic –

desire wayward
from the expectations of us
call, collect, conjure
course soul matter & dive
into presence, the
particulars, st/rains in the being of embodiment

brackish air unwraps fore shoulders

tenderness efflorescent
*: we forge affectivities outside
of where they'd be holed up in
common forms*

in the rooms we reset
, constellations of need
mouths on street /
bloom flowers on our futures

in the dive :

encrypting feelings declarative
in the making of social
life as phones blow up;
as meeting is outlawed

*ultravalent
c[h]oral amorous
aphotic.
revivre*

in the exertion of days, loaded
on y/our backs &
spite the abandonment of lives like
*"the desire to move as she
wished [...] nothing short of treason"⁷
order finds its fascinations
given such callous dermis
so driven to know & possess
-in-violence*

communing afterhours / moon
rise sung on waves
bones soothed blood orange, staying
with the trouble / parachute
silks wrap supple until heat returns

pause to clarity , to savour
delicacies / mourn with the casting
of love —

grain rush buzzes tongues to brain enveloped
– talk of redress
sense the sun on chests
./ transit

sound the conch in the call of night

lunar energetics conjure the lands' lay
 , open organic life otherways

by the practice of dreaming
 in new [ancient] unity
 [bodymindsoul]

durations embellish perpendicular to the everyday with
 fullness, of body / of possible bodies,
 subconscious speaking with fullness
 orchestrated consonance, ex-
 ceeding the scope of matter

in communication with spirits passed
 & future, envisioning
 beyond the eye
 ritual en/chants the remaking of world

in the intertidal mirror-bottomed
jasper worn to shape hearts
inviting in the key of life / you gather,
to refuse the future/past collapses through seabed
to stand here firm /
accrue warmth power love skeletal salted
we raise precious, skyward

marvel in the unreal /
threading
substance

all time

[interlude]

freewheel

/ing
slow pulse

breathing extensive with
all muscles⁸

disappearing from relations of s/kin

your resonance calls
to/gather life from the deep

continental
cruiser , breeching clear for miles

toward hot current, in the know
whistles & bells submerge each name

stretch, find &
forge luminosity
blooming
/ oscillations
scatter with the dive...

immersed ,
 organic mutinies propel
 across the 'mythic'
*(inverted for the dust, in the
 grief of the middle passage,
 disappeared music,
 microparticles)*

skeletal : sense like coral, inter
 -generational /
 cephalopod(a) guide towards abyssal plains
 disguised in light

where,
 might we meet souls
 captured , coerced, then
 jettisoned , buried
 inspiriting absolute blackness

lived envisioning
 in dormancy
 evol/ve, finesse into forms
 anew, unseen in the zones of midnight
 , as the visible gives way in the depth

trajectories inextricable from
 our deep mutualities
 flux current, landed –
 fixed in western eyes singular possessive –
 here is never merely but also everyt/here

grip turns crisis on order-as-usual in the midst
 commodities, buildings, colonial amnesia,
 histories of forgetting that bury the violence
 upon which the present stands

finance shape-shifting to
 rubber, jute, sugar, pineapples
 for status, cashmere, coffee

carved out of core
 force order & laws
 to their latest iterations –
 grinding the logic of law to
 quell / grief of centuries
 speaking always into ears blown
 out citizens tiered
 , forgetting the passages
 the needs w/ which black & brown folxs
 refabricated the shreds of europe
 arms in service benevolent generous
 : if windrush never docked at tilbury
 then britain would not be

unspeaking empyres grammar
 global, we
 sound precessions of living
 in spite of horrors, answer
 in unrest, in refusal of
 disposed black life, rewrite
 the noise streets fill

 envisioning in resistance
 em
 -erging as the social
 meeting as otherwise
 -bodying, holding devastations with love,
 in the compression / of what
 we become on back feet
 tense to the harm of their presence
 – counterpoint force ;
 unwritten decades revived in the rage in bodies,
 orders insurmountable we rumbled, undercut, un
 -settled. make our presence
 irrevocable from their imaginary

vii.

anthroposonics cracking relentless—

ancient streets loose

becoming hydrodynamic
 imbalances in naval gigantism [#]
*(then make a cut large into
 the city so the boat can turn)⁹*

amble, cockles

pebbles on tide
 sounding the fabric of port cities
 in the constant of rain ::

years of hundreds, of
 containment, sickness, auction
 , debt, strikes, race riots,

trouble up grams flesh, sugar
 , fibre, equivalent & taxed to each
 stone still holding the curve of the dock

breathe out urbanities—

our different hunger
 sown with the plates
 of compromise
 anonymous in minor acts
 take heel, lascars tear
 y/our steps up boardrooms

in dust bask blessing the falling
 slavers, lords, queens¹⁰
 unfenced, with joy—

- 1 Mariela Tejerina, 'Seas and oceans, and the relation of Indigenous peoples to climate change', Minga Indígena at COP26, Glasgow Tramway, 9th November 2021.
- 2 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Minneapolis: Uni. Minnesota Press, 2017.
- 3 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*; Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- 4 Charlotte Adigéry & BOLIS PUPIL, 'Blenda', Deewee049, 2021.
- 5 W.E.B. DuBois via Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2019, 234.
- 6 Suzanne Césaire, '1943: Surrealism and Us', in *The Great Camouflage*, Middletown: Wesleyan Uni. Press, 2012, 34-36.
- 7 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 230.
- 8 Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Chico: AK Press, 2020.
- 9 Francesca Savoldi, 'FRICTIONS #2: Venice – port, citizens, and Big Ships', *PortCityFutures*, 21st March 2021, online at <https://www.portcityfutures.nl/news/frictions-episode-2-venice-port-citizens-and-big-ships>.
- 10 On 1st July 2021, Idle No More and other groups representing and in solidarity with Indigenous First Nations called to 'Cancel Canada Day', to honour the lives of Indigenous, Black, Migrant, Queer, Trans and 2Spirit people lost to the Canadian nation state, including the missing and murdered Indigenous youth lost to the residential 'schools' system. Actions on the day included the felling and removal of statues of Queen Victoria, echoing with the recent fellings of statues of Christopher Columbus and Edward Colston in support of Black Lives Matter.





EDDIE CHAMBERS was born in Wolverhampton, England and lives between Austin, Texas and Edinburgh, Scotland. He gained his PhD from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 1998, for his study of press and other responses to the work of a new generation of Black artists in Britain, active during the 1980s. He has curated a considerable number of exhibitions, having worked with artists such as Perminder Kaur, Pat Ward Williams, Mildred Howard and Lesley Sanderson. After periods as a Visiting Professor at Emory University, Atlanta, he joined the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin in January 2010 where he is now holder of the David Bruton, Jr. Centennial Professorship in Art History. His peer review texts have appeared in journals such as *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, and *Visual Culture in Britain*. His books include *Things Done Change: The Cultural Politics of Recent Black Artists in Britain* (Rodopi Editions, Amsterdam and New York, 2012), *Black Artists in British Art: A History Since the 1950s*, (I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2014, reissued 2015), and *Roots & Culture: Cultural Politics in the Making of Black Britain*, published 2017 (I. B. Tauris/Bloomsbury). He is the editor of the recently-published *Routledge Companion to African American Art History*. His most recent book is *World is Africa: Writings on Diaspora Art* (Bloomsbury, 2021). He is Editor-in-Chief of *Art Journal* (CAA).

DR CHERYL FINLEY, Ph.D. is the Inaugural Director of the Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective and Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of Art & Visual Culture at Spelman College and Associate Professor, Department of the History of Art at Cornell University. Cheryl is committed to engaging strategic partners to transform the art and culture industry, she leads an innovative undergraduate program at the world's largest historically

Black college and university consortium in preparing the next generation of African American museum and visual arts professionals. A curator and contemporary art critic, Cheryl is also an award winning author of *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton University Press, 2018), the first in-depth study of the most famous image associated with the memory of slavery—a schematic engraving of a packed slave ship hold—and the art, architecture, poetry, and film it has inspired since its creation in Britain in 1788. Cheryl has contributed essays and reviews to *Aperture*, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *American Quarterly* and *Art Forum* and numerous catalog essays and journal articles on artists such as Lorna Simpson, Hank Willis Thomas, Walker Evans, Joy Gregory, Carrie Mae Weems, Roshini Kempadoo, Deborah Willis and Berenice Abbott. She is currently a Visiting Professor at the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (VIAD/FADA), University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

DR NAT RAHA is a poet and activist-scholar, based in Edinburgh, Scotland. She is the author of three collections of poetry, *of sirens, body & faultlines* (Boiler House Press, 2018), *countersonnets* (Contraband Books, 2013) and *Octet* (Veer Books, 2010). Her creative and critical writing has appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *MAP Magazine*, *The New Feminist Literary Studies* (Cambridge UP, 2020), and *Transgender Marxism* (Pluto Press, 2021). Her poetry has also been anthologised in *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics* (Nightboat Books, 2020), *ON CARE* (MA Biblioteque, 2020), *What the Fire Sees* (Divided Publishing, 2020) and *Makar/Unmakar: Twelve Contemporary Poets in Scotland* (Tapsalteerie, 2019). Nat has performed her work internationally, and her writing has been translated into French, Galician, German, Greek, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Slovenian and Welsh. She co-edited

'Imagining Queer Europe Then and Now', a special issue of *Third Text* journal (January 2021), and co-curated the 'Life Support: Forms of Care in Art and Activism' Exhibition at Glasgow Women's Library (2021). Nat holds a PhD in queer Marxism from the University of Sussex, and co-edits *Radical Transfeminism Zine*.

ALBERTA WHITTLE was born in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1980. She lives and works in Glasgow. Selected solo exhibitions and presentations include: The British Art Show 9 (2021-22), Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh (2021), Liverpool Biennale (2021), Art Night London (2021), The British Art Show 9 – Aberdeen (2021), Glasgow International (2021), Glasgow International (2020), Grand Union, Birmingham (2020), Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee (2019), Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (2019), The Tyburn Gallery, London (2019) and FADA Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (2018). Group exhibitions include: Life Between islands Caribbean: British Art 1950s to Now, Tate Britain (2021-22), and those held at Kunstal Trondheim, Norway (2021), Gothenburg Biennale (2021), The Lisson Gallery, London (2021), MIMA Middlesborough (2021), Viborg Kunstal (2021), Remail Modern, Saskatoon, Canada (2021), Copperfield, London (2020), Eastside Projects, Birmingham (2020), Edinburgh Printmakers, Edinburgh (2019), 13th Havana Biennial, Cuba (2019), Pig Rock Bothy at the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (2019), The City Arts Centre, Edinburgh (2019), The Showroom, London (2018), National Art Gallery of the Bahamas (2018), RAW Material, Dakar (2018), Galerie de L'Uqam, Montreal QC, Quebec 2017, Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg (2017), FRAMER FRAMED, Amsterdam (2015) and Goethe On Main, Johannesburg (2015) amongst others. Forthcoming exhibitions include group shows at Fotografiska, New York; Hessel Museum of Art, New York,

Moderna Museet Malmö, Sweden and a solo exhibition as part of British Art Show 9, Plymouth. The full presentation from Venice will return to Scotland and be exhibited with other works by Alberta at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, opening in spring 2023. Whittle was awarded a Turner Bursary, the Frieze Artist Award and a Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award in 2020. She was the Margaret Tait Award winner for 2018/19.



The exhibition *deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory* is commissioned on the occasion of the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, by the Scotland+Venice partnership with funding support from the National Lottery through Creative Scotland.

The 2022 Scotland+Venice presentation is a multi-partner project commissioned by Scotland+Venice, initiated by Glasgow International and supported by Glasgow Life through Tramway.

23 April — 27 November 2022
Docks Cantieri Cucchini
S. Pietro di Castello, 40
30122, Italy

Commissioned by Scotland + Venice with co-commissioning and production support from Forma Arts, London and Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh.

Supported by funding from: British Council Scotland, The Elephant Trust and the Henry Moore Foundation.

Creative Partners in the project include: Art Night, Glasgow Sculpture Studios and VIAD (Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre at University of Johannesburg).

With additional support from the Supporters Circle with special thanks to the numerous individuals who have so generously contributed to the project.

Scotland + Venice is a partnership of Creative Scotland, British Council Scotland, National Galleries of Scotland, Architecture & Design Scotland, V&A Dundee & Scottish Government.

This publication is produced and edited by the artist and Scotland+Venice.

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Contributing Editor Lucy Askew
Graphic Design by Maeve Redmond
Cover Artwork by Alberta Whittle
Watercolours by Alberta Whittle

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With thanks to Eddie Chambers, Dr Cheryl Finley, Dr Nat Raha, Maeve Redmond, and all the accomplices and collaborators who have graced this project.

