





FIGURE 1. Amina Ross, *If Today Never Gives Up In Me*, 2015. At Chicago Home Theater Festival, IAMKIAM Studios. Courtesy of the artist.

# “If Today Never Gives Up In Me”

Amina Ross’s Spacious Black Present

**KELLY I. CHUNG**

Presented at the Chicago Home Theater Festival, *If Today Never Gives Up In Me* (2015) is an ongoing call for a black present—that is, a black now (fig. 1). Played on loop, this almost two-minute video installation is propped up on a square table and nestled in an arrangement of fully bloomed, silk-coated in latex, fuchsia-striped yellow tulips. Embedded in a single channel are two panels that are visually and sonically disjointed—slowed down, sped up, and at times paused, respectively. The left one displays a close-up of the artist’s mouth eating a popsicle, while the other displays close-ups of individual flowers successively blooming that complement the surrounding tulips. Crisp, wet sounds of breathing and sucking nearly drown out the soft distant accelerated ticking that, layered together, invoke not only a temporality but also a spatiality—and perhaps a spaciousness—within the body that anticipates a black now.

“There is,” the screen reads, “a call to action in me / A need to rectify—rectum / Anus . . . I’ve never known my body this way / and it feels so good.” This sensual call is reminiscent of Audre Lorde’s own call to rectify and calibrate oneself toward the erotic, albeit not always sexually, in her seminal address “Uses of the Erotic.” As a deep knowledge and resource “within each of us”—when tapped into and nurtured—the erotic unleashes “an internal sense of satisfaction,” she asserts, “to *feel* deeply [in] *all* aspects of our lives” in a world that ceaselessly and unevenly robs and extracts from those who are racialized, feminized, and queered.<sup>1</sup> Applying multiple metaphors to

it, Lorde describes the erotic as an electrical charge, a nurturer, and a kernel among others to foreground its core capacity to reconfigure and replenish one's life—flowing, growing, and spreading within the body, throughout all aspects of one's life, and even to others.<sup>2</sup>

Across their extensive body of work, including the installation above, Brooklyn-based multimedia artist Amina Ross (b. 1993) constructs environments that prompt spectators to partially anticipate or apprehend this kernel in the present. This kernel may come as a small leak in a roof that carries the potential to destroy a landlord's property or a slight shift in perception of mundane objects, like work shirts, jars, or pillows.<sup>3</sup> In the opening installation, it may be a moment of self-pleasure that generates the will to live today. As the text on the monitor rolls, "I'm gonna live in these mouths and feel time. I want to push out and into my body, IF TODAY NEVER GIVES UP IN ME." The kernel, here, is never given form nor given to us. Rather, throughout their work, Ross aims to activate a call in us to seek it, or the "smallest otherwise," that might reorient how spectators inhabit the present within and beyond the bounds of the installation.<sup>4</sup> After all, the conditions to live and "feel time" today, in the present, are not necessarily given and may be given up on or foreclosed altogether.

Featuring a conversation with the artist, the following essay offers a reading of Ross's aesthetic practice across a selection of their work and their emphasis on a "black now." Alongside Fred Moten's own critique of the overrepresentation of blackness as

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death-driven, it highlights their ongoing contributions to what they refer to as "black work," or aesthetic experimentations in making multiple forms of blackness appear and emerge in the present moment. For Ross, the present is not merely a death-driven end but, at once, a rigid structure and a "space of unlimited potential" wherein blackness and black life may be experienced in their multiplicity.<sup>5</sup> Growing up and riding the train every day or moving through major cities (elaborated in our conversation below), they would refuse to tune out or settle for the corporate advertisements and buildings in front of them. Instead, they would constantly rearrange and catch what has not yet been perceived in the objects and spaces around them.<sup>6</sup> Placing objects in unexpected positions and built structures, Ross imparts this everyday erotic

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practice into their aesthetic work, working to widen spectators' sense of their own present and immediate environment. As such, the present is a space to be, not escaped from, but worked on and reenvisioned in an effort to make a black present possible, livable, and, to echo Lorde, replenishable.

In *Etheric Bridge: spring's sutures* (2021), a mixed-media video installation and sculpture, for instance, Ross asks spectators to confront the present moment and structure before them by interacting with what is presumably a stationed open carrier with wheels used to transport goods and people (fig. 2). The main platform is cushioned here, inviting spectators to sit or lie on it for a while. Only when spectators reposition themselves might they notice a short, non-narrative film of loose, scattered, abstract, partially

obstructed, slow-moving images planted in the carrier's ceiling. Looped, the video steers not only our attention continuously to the film—to watch and make sense of these images—but also our experience of a slower, extended passage of time. Displaced from its intended use as a medium of labor, forced or otherwise, this carrier supplies spectators with an unexpected space to rest, granting them time to look up, allow their minds to wander, and perhaps actively wonder what more it can yield. Among them, spectators might see sourced grass from the courtyard of Yale Law School—a school, like countless others, that has actively contributed to chattel slavery—growing on the carrier's roof (fig. 3). Beneath this, spectators are set in a now shifted environment, perhaps underground, and thereby another vantage point from which to experience their surroundings. Given the history of the salvaged grass here, we might speculate on slaveowners' underground practices to sustain chattel slavery (in addition to their public ones) alongside underground networks and practices of escape and flight by those enslaved. We might also take note of the distance from the roof down (disclosed on the caption): seventy-two inches, or the former Western standard depth for graves. Six feet under, spectators who rest on the cushioned platform might consider the innumerable ways those enslaved were annihilated and, as Orlando Patterson termed, “socially dead”—barred from names, personhood, kinship, and legal protections (just to name a few) in the material world above.<sup>7</sup> Depending on the spectators' own



FIGURE 2. Amina Ross, *Ethereal Bridge: spring's sutures*, 2021. At Springsteen Gallery in Baltimore. Steel, cup from friends and family, rain water, tap water, reclaimed cedar wood from NYC water tanks, reclaimed MDF, four monitors, media players, soil, salvaged grass from Yale Law School's central courtyard. Courtesy of the artist.



FIGURE 3. Amina Ross, *Etherec Bridge: spring's sutures*, 2021, detail. At Springsteen Gallery in Baltimore. Steel, cup from friends and family, rain water, tap water, reclaimed cedar wood from NYC water tanks, reclaimed MDF, four monitors, media players, soil, salvaged grass from Yale Law School's central courtyard. Courtesy of the artist.

orientations, histories, and perspectives, there are still endless points of perception that have yet to be apprehended from this carrier beyond my abbreviated reading and the artist's own intentions. In this way, with every interaction, the installation incites a range of fresh, familiar, or even erotic ways to encounter and experience blackness in the present.

For Ross, objects hold multiplicity beyond their assumed single forms and representations—that is, what is set forth, presented, and known of their common uses and understandings. If, following my discussion, blackness has been fundamentally reduced and relegated to an object and thereby socially dead by way of the transatlantic slave trade, might blackness still hold multiplicity beyond its original intent and form? Ross continuously wrestles with this question in their work—that is, as referenced earlier, “black work.” As aesthetic work informed by and inseparable from the artist's own lived experiences, black work, they explain, requires the work of “holding that space of tension” between blackness as an irreparable violent creation and as replete with possibilities.<sup>8</sup>

Ross amplifies this very tension in *Etherec Bridge: winter's grief* conjoined with *Hold (1)* (2019), *Sonic Rupture: songs for(e) the swarm* (2020–), and *Untitled* (2020–). Across them, Ross uses objects with transparent surfaces, notably glass and water, to experiment with how light affects and transforms our perception of them and consequently blackness. In *Untitled*, there are forty-five one-gallon glass jars lined up in rows within a gallery space (fig. 4). Four uniform rows of seven jars are placed by the window, while two

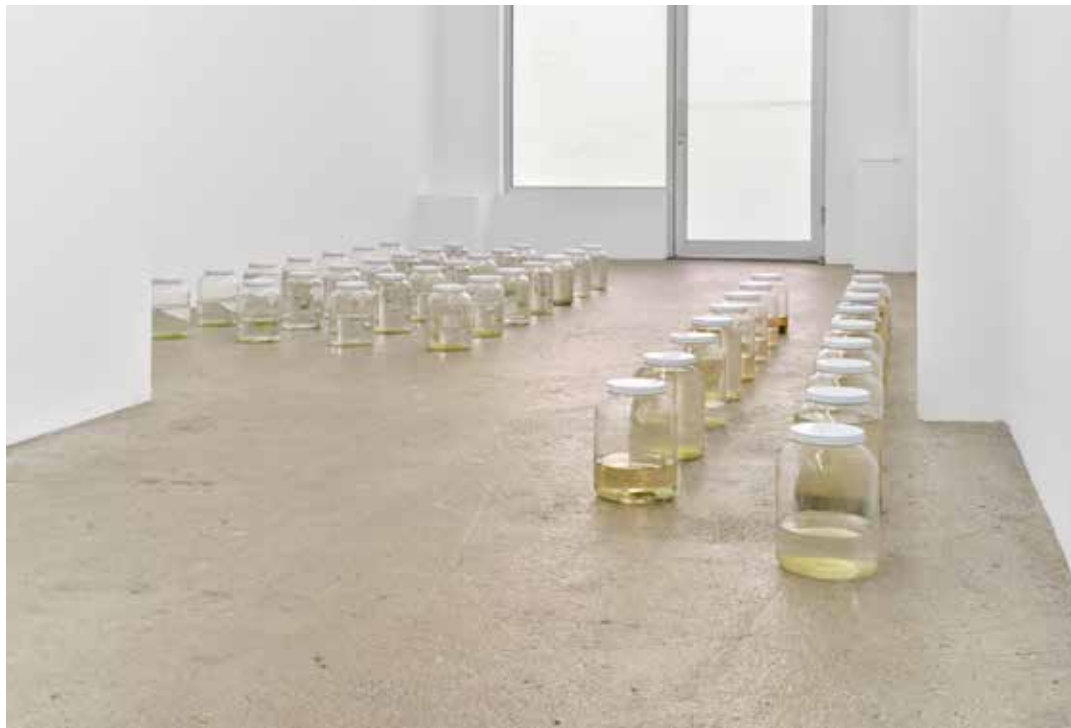


FIGURE 4.  
Amina Ross,  
*Untitled*,  
2020–present.  
45 one-gallon  
glass jars, rain  
gutter water,  
size variable  
to installation  
at M23 New  
York. Courtesy  
of the artist.

other rows of eight and nine jars are placed across the room and away from the window. Each jar is closed and carries varying levels of rain gutter water. Depending on when the installation is viewed, spectators will observe different amounts of growth within the jars. Every gallery visit, shift in angle, amount of direct or indirect light, and presence of other spectators yield unlimited, heterogeneous iterations of what can be seen on, within, and beside the jars. Ross strategically positions these jars to explore how light facilitates how we see other jars, the growths with them, and other people. Playing with the reflection and refraction of light—how it is absorbed and bent

with contact—Ross spotlights how light, that which enables us to see, can alter, magnify, distort, and fragment objects. With light and each moment and orientation, spectators might partially perceive how these jars visually illuminate their capacities to change and hold multiple rather than a single line of sight through time and in the present.

In his essay “The Case of Blackness,” which proposes a reconsideration of the translation of Frantz Fanon’s chapter title “The Fact of Blackness,” Fred Moten similarly turns to vessels, or more specifically jugs, to query whether blackness can exist or be apprehended as more than an object that is a



"death-driven nonbeing."<sup>9</sup> Rather than focusing on "actual" or "whole" bodies, Moten and Ross strategically choose objects that allude to not only the containment, objecthood, and fungibility of blackness enforced by chattel slavery but also the expansive contradictory readings that might cohere in the objects.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Martin Heidegger's own meditations on what constitutes a jug, Moten offers a different approach to apprehend a jug—and by extension, blackness—or more precisely, the possibility or "case" for a black social life. For him, by way of Heidegger, a jug is not merely defined by what is perceived to "stand forth" in the present moment.<sup>11</sup> What stands forth is a representation or one form of a jug made by a potter and now a preconceived template for the making of subsequent jugs. At the risk of oversimplifying Moten, the question at hand is: Is the jug's being defined by its maker that is not its own—as a self-supporting container that stands forth before us—or by its emptiness—that is, its capacity to hold something? Riffing off Heidegger's rumination that the jug might be filled with not emptiness but air and air's mixture, Moten asks if the jug could be understood by what it holds: "its mixed capacity for content that is not made."<sup>12</sup> He continues by arguing for an approach to the jug as "informal (enformed/enforming, as opposed to formless)" entity, or an orientation to the ever-forming content *within* the jug rather than the jug itself.<sup>13</sup>

We might read Moten's and Ross's respective attention to vessels as calls to consider the status of blackness by what is uncontainable by representation,

by what has been denied by its original but perhaps not only form, and by what is perpetually still in the making. Deploying multiple aesthetic strategies—looping a call, reconfiguring an open carrier, or experimenting with the effects of natural and artificial light on transparent objects—Ross creates a space of anticipation for the multiplicity of blackness to appear, come forth, or be apprehended in the present. Instead of representing these forms—what might reduce, contain, and fix blackness—they imbue the present with a sense of spaciousness, providing spectators time to remain open to a new awareness, perspective, or kernel that might allow for a black present, or a present wherein the foreclosure of blackness is not an absolute. For Ross, the present is, again, not merely given but is perhaps akin to what Alessandra Raengo emphasizes as a "practice of blackness [that is] an ongoing process."<sup>14</sup> Not a fixed point of arrival, blackness is, by way of Ross, work that cannot be deferred but must be enacted now.<sup>15</sup> Invoking a seemingly extended present, Ross insists on a space where unlimited iterations of blackness may be awaited, held, may still be forming, and may set forth the will and work to live and "feel time" today.

### **A Conversation with Amina Ross**

After chatting the month before, Ross and I met again via Zoom on the morning of August 22, 2022, to delve deeper into their practice. We begin by catching up about our summers before diving into the following conversation, which has been edited for length and continuity.

**Kelly I. Chung:** In our previous conversation, you mentioned that you consider all your work to be “black work.” Could you elaborate on this?

**Amina Ross:** I’ll often have that internal conversation with myself. As a follow-up, I ask, “Do I consider all work made by black people to be black work?” To that question, I was like, “Definitely not. I don’t consider all work by black people to be black work.” If I did, that would rely on the assumption that blackness travels naturally in the work, and I don’t believe that. I think it’s possible for whiteness to move through black people and through any and all people.

Returning to myself, I humbly claim my work as black work. I hope for it to be and to remain black work by continuing to ask myself if it is in part because I don’t really know what black work is. If I were to define it, I would be unable to. It’s vast. At the same time, my work is black work because all of my work moves through my body. I was thinking about the ways that whiteness denies, erases, invisibilizes, eradicates, and destroys the body, arguably even the bodies of white people. Of course, I’m unable to think about blackness without thinking about whiteness as constructs, as things that are made. If my work is black because it comes from my body, and white work denies the body, even aims to destroy the body, I was thinking through this thing as moving through the body. That is what black work is.

I’m thinking about the ways that whiteness also destroys white bodies on a genetic level. Whiteness becomes this abstraction that’s based on the era-

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sure of specific places of origin, and for white people, some indigenous origin or their own culture and traditions are forfeited to enter into whiteness. It’s very material for me, like images and colors. Whiteness feels like a vacating, an erasure, and a vastness. On the other end, blackness doesn’t feel like an erasure. It feels like a muchness that can be a bit heavy. There’s a similar abstraction through the fragmentation of groups of people through the severing of communities and specific tribes through the Middle Passage and the dispersal and creation of diaspora. There’s this abstraction of specificity of origin, but abstraction, for me, doesn’t erase race. I don’t think that there was an erasure of race but something more complicated that I’m figuring out: What happened in the creation of black people?

But it doesn’t seem like the same vacating or erasure happens to whiteness. There’s so much of it you can’t see clearly where it came from. I do still see a sort of visual inversion; it’s like an open thing. I don’t mean that positively, but rather, whiteness as visual emptiness. I see blackness sort of like a wild layering.

Recently, I created this workshop about the Middle Passage. It was called “Re-mem-bering.” It was a workshop that I led as a precursor to my artist talks as a way to fold in some of my research and think

through the artists and thinkers that I'm interested in. To share some of my internal processing with people, I'm working through some creative writing. I look at a mixed-media piece by Howardena Pindell called *Autobiography: Water/Ancestors Middle Passage/Family Ghosts* (1988), a poem by a Filipino American poet Aimee Suzara called "Amphibious" (2020), and a song by a Detroit-based techno group Drexiciya called "Dr. Blowfins' Black Storm Stabilizing Spheres" (2002).<sup>16</sup> I was really interested in specifically looking at Pindell's and Suzara's pieces—there's a fragmentation and rupturing. Pindell's piece was a part of a series made shortly after a severe car crash that led to head injuries and memory loss; here, I interpret these effects as a sort of fracturing of the self and body. She drew her body again and again. They're slightly larger than person-size pieces, and there's this sort of splaying out and multiplication of the limbs and self that happens in the space of the water. In Suzara's poetry, there's a shift between Tagalog, Spanish, and English happening. There are these points of illegibility, things that are visible/invisible, knowable/unknowable, discernible/indiscernible.

When it comes to a black way of working, there's something about sitting with that space as a space of contradiction and thinking about the Middle Passage as a site of fragmentation and irreconcilable and irreparable rupture. I'm thinking through what a black way of working is by asking what it is to sit with that space and, within that, the grotesque, unknowable violence of the creation of the African diaspora. Yet, it was also a generative act, and I would never sepa-

rate them. I would also never separate this creation of blackness from this grotesque evil. They live together. Having to hold that space of tension is inherently black to me. Even in this workshop I began to extend this way of working through other groups of people who were forcibly made to move from one place to another, like in Suzara's work. I'm thinking of diasporas of the dispossessed. I do think my understanding of blackness in my relationships and collaborations connect to experiences of dispossession.

**KC:** The tension that you describe reminds me of our last conversation when you noted that your work "grapples with rigidity" within our current social structures. I constantly see this tension across your work in the ways images and objects are elevated to offer perhaps different perspectives of them. How do you work through or hold this tension in your installations, and what does the repositioning of objects/images enable for you?

**AR:** Through the literal suspension, like of cables and a carrier steel hook, I work specifically with gravity and the natural forces within a room to allow them to become more visible and what the impact of those forces are, and how the material responds, or how the body responds—really holding space for the material reality of the thing. I like to see what the object does. There's something in lifting it up. I'm specifically thinking about *Rest (Refrain)* (2021) (fig. 5). We'd normally see that hung maybe on a chair or on a bed. There's something about allowing it a little more space than usual to exist in a way where I can consider it more

deeply. I'm often taking images or certain things from the everyday I encounter that I think are special in that moment.

Those work shirts in *Rest (Refrain)* are my grandma's work shirts. Seeing her in those shirts every day just really made an impression on me. Seeing the slight variation in the white shirt was a repetitive image. We'd normally see these objects like a low thing; to me, seeing the white shirt on my grandma or on a chair carries those meanings. Removing it slightly, I could have hung the shirt on the chair in the exhibition space. But it doesn't do exactly what I would hope it would do for someone else. I think in lifting the shirt up, it creates an unfamiliar sight and weight; to bear the very slight weight of the shirt, allows the shirt to hold a bit more prominence in the mind. I think of the gravity of the shirt both literally and figuratively and how the shirt has a bit more life with the support structure that I developed. I often work with these everyday, quotidian images and objects to create these structures that will give them a bit more weight, to look at more deeply, to have a moment of pause. The relationship between suspension and pause is important. To look closely is important.

One of the ways of moving through the world is reorienting myself in the spaces. As a child on these really long train rides to school, I would look at advertisements on the train and repeat them in my head so much that the words would no longer have any meaning. It was a mental exercising of agency in spaces and imagining otherwise with the conditions, materials, signs, and symbols that were given. I would



FIGURE 5. Amina Ross, *Rest (Refrain)*, 2021. Steel, work shirts.  
Image credit: Jesse Meredith. Courtesy of the artist.

say that this is a continued part of my practice: constantly reenvisioning the rooms I'm in, the route, time, and the possibilities of what is already there as a way of keeping my body and self active and feeling in a space of agency wherever I am. I hope that process of truly being with objects in space, being in one's body is something that I can transmit or facilitate through the objects I'm suspending.

There are so many forces—from the mass media to most jobs—that numb and wear us down and can make things feel fixed and make what's possible feel incredibly limited, predetermined, and unchangeable. This is true I think for many people in my line of work, teaching and doing museum tours, even for people with lots of power or ability to change things. I'm curious about how we can keep the material world as a space of possibility to change and do other things than what their predetermined use of function is or was.

**KC:** For me, your piece *If Today Never Gives Up In Me* (2015), in particular, opens up that space of possibility, not necessarily in one's immediate external world but in their interior world (not that they can be divorced from one another). Yet there's also a suggestion that these possibilities, or time, could fail and give up "in me." How do you approach time, or the present, and the confines and possibilities within it throughout your work?

**AR:** I'm really interested in the ability to stretch time, in the moments of stretched time, that sometimes

happen during times of intense emotional connection with people or objects—when time is elongated through that intense connectivity, which I think is an intense presence that is catalyzed by love, awe, inspiration, curiosity, and even sadness and loss.

I also want to think about imagination and creative thinking in relationship to abolition. The biggest contemporary champions of imagination, those who want to shift the world, are abolitionists. When thinking of time, jumping to something as big as the prisons coming down and decarceration—those conversations can sometimes overwhelm and shut people down because it's so outside of their imagination that they feel we aren't able to get there. I think about what is the smallest otherwise that we can propose in the present. I think the possibility of this moment is a space of unlimited potential and when most people might be willing to try something else with me that might be otherwise. When I think about my facilitation work, my teaching work, or even in making artwork, maybe there can be a willingness within a very short time frame to try something new. The fascination with the present is that it's a relatively accessible space of trying something brave or foolish, trying something that might or will fail, where we can begin to experiment and magnify that thing outwards.

I'm thinking about really small time—the present in micro time. I'm in my apartment now. I'm on this couch. No one else is around. In this moment, I can be free; I can really do anything. I have this micro time right now, and that's amazing. It's what I have right

now. I'm interested in tapping into this micro time as an exercise in embodying freedom in this minute and that there's potential that can rippled out to a year or two.

There's a misapplication of mindfulness now. If we meditate for five minutes, we'll be more productive. But I'm thinking of taking micro time to practice freedom—not to be more productive but to become more free to extend it out and out so that more time is free time. I'm curious about what we can do with what we have now. Yes, I am excited about the big leaps and large changes but also what we have right now, so that I don't have to have things so far off. Finding whatever we do have is what makes feeling alive possible.

**KC:** I'm curious to know, then, how the array of materials you use—water, glass, steel, pillows, cables, and jars among others—and the process of producing these pieces enable you to play with, hold onto, question, and/or experience the present differently? What possibilities do you perceive or anticipate in these materials?

**AR:** I've been trying to make all of my work really modular, flexible, and iterative so it can constantly be changing and in conversation with the different spaces that it's in and that different things and times can go together. Even in the works themselves there are endless possibilities for configuration that allow me to see the objects in new ways.

I recently had a residency at Wave Hill, and I

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didn't have my materials, but they had butcher paper and colored pencils. Whenever the sun was out, I just started drawing the shadows to warm up and I was trying to chase the shadows that were moving and I created this image of the windows warping and stretching across the butcher paper. It was a way of marking time and me spending time with my body and space. It was about me being in conversation with the room and environment and being present. Then there's this image that was formed that became a catalyst for the objects that I made now.

Beyond me trying to do stuff with objects, there's a way that the space and objects around me are doing something *with* . . . to me. I didn't know that was

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what I was going to be making until the sun came through the windows, and I saw the shadows, and I started chasing the shadows. The shadows and me together created this warped image that became this sculpture. There's this way that it's not just this one-sided thing but this exchange, where the present is impressing itself on me.

In the *Emotional Weather/Sonic Rupture* (2020) piece, there's a way that the jars and the windows allow for multiple images. The glass holds the weight of several reflections, so you're experiencing multiple places at once, and I think that there's something about that ability to contain, or it's a framing. The glass becomes a surface where many things can come together and many things can be held that is maybe truer to the way I experience the world.

Much of my work has to do with walking around large cities like New York and Chicago. Those are the surface that my day and myself are caught within or that I'll catch myself within, like the reflection of a building. But then I see the person ahead, and then I see the street. There's a conflation of multiple points happening on the periphery that get caught on the

shine of steel or glass of a window that taps me back into my present—the simultaneous moments just in this one surface. The everyday, the banal, is very meaningful as this juncture and crossroads of multiple realities, like walking by a building.

**KC:** There are so many resonances here between the way you describe the present as holding so much potential as well as the weight and “muchness” of blackness and glass holding so many different types of images.

**AR:** Yeah, I like to think about it as a soft holding. I think a lot about the relationship between photography and capture. For me, it's this container without the connotations of containment because nothing is trapped there. It can move freely, like the light is still free to move in and exists on many different surfaces in the rooms around the objects. It is held, but held softly. I think that is one of the larger aims of my work. I'm interested in our feelings, our lives, our every day through these soft surfaces. ■

**AMINA ROSS** is an artist and educator who makes videos, sculptures, sounds, and situations. Their work has been recently exhibited at the Hessel Museum of Art (Hudson, NY), the Tang Teaching Museum (Saratoga Springs, NY), Laurel Gitlen (New York, NY), Sentiment (Zurich, Switzerland), Wave Hill (Bronx, NY), Abrons Art Center (New York, NY), The Luminary (St. Louis, MO), Iceberg Projects (Chicago, IL) and M23 (New York, NY), among other venues. Currently, Ross is the 2023–24 Estelle Lebowitz Artist in Residence at Dou-

glass College, Rutgers University. They recently completed residencies at Fire Island Artist Residency, Lower East Side Printshop, Skowhegan School of Sculpture and Painting, Wave Hill, Abrons Art Center, and Harvestworks, among others. They have also taught at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Rhode Island School of Design. They currently serve as part-time faculty at Parsons School of Design, the New School, and as an adjunct assistant professor of art at Vassar College. Ross lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

**KELLY I. CHUNG** is an assistant professor of American studies at Williams College. She is currently working on a book project that traces black and women of color feminist embodiments of inaction that circumvent spectatorial and political demands for labor resistance and revelation in and around the United States. Her writing appears in *Art Journal*, *ASAP/Journal*, and *women and performance*, as well as other venues.

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### Notes

- 1 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 53, 57; my emphasis.
- 2 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 59.

**3** The examples I listed here are nods to Ross's different installations as well as our initial conversation on July 21, 2022. While the first example, a small leak, implies a positive outcome, I would be remiss to not mention activist, filmmaker, and poet Marlon Riggs's narration of the "lethal leak" in the condom as an end to life in his monumental documentary film *Tongues Untied* (1989). This narration was constructed by the government and mainstream media to induce mass fear of the virus.

**4** Ross, conversation on Zoom, August 22, 2022.

**5** Ross, conversation on Zoom, July 21, 2022.

**6** Ross, conversation on Zoom, August 22, 2022.

**7** Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.

**8** Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.

**9** Moten, "Case of Blackness," 178. For more on Moten's discussion on blackness as a "death-driven nonbeing," see Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*; and Jared Sexton and Huey Copeland's "Raw Life: An Introduction" in *Qui Parle*.

**10** Most prominently, artist Lorna Simpson also turns to and uses jars filled with water in their installation *Five Rooms* (1991) to engage with the history of chattel slavery.

**11** Moten, "Case of Blackness," 183.

**12** Moten, "Case of Blackness," 184.

**13** Moten, "Case of Blackness," 182.

**14** Raengo, "Introduction," 7.

**15** I am thinking here of Julius Fleming Jr.'s *Black Patience*, wherein he theorizes black patience as an anti-black, white supremacist technology that enforces black people to wait and be patient. His work turns to artists and activists during the civil rights movement, namely Duke Ellington, James Baldwin, and Lorraine Hansberry, who have refused the disciplining and pacifying hail to wait and instead demanded a "now." Thinking with Fleming, I want to consider how one can *refuse* to patiently wait for a later but "wait without being patient"—that is, actively wait-



ing and working within and for a different “here and now” (17). This is what I understand to be Amina Ross’s “black work”; their body of work aims to stretch and make spacious one’s experience of the present to generate the will to work within the present, actively “wait without being patient,” and anticipate a present that might not yet again fail them.

16 Suzara, “Amphibious”; Drexciya, “Dr. Blowfins’ Black Storm Stabilizing Spheres.”

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