

Tour notes

Give Me Body!: Femme Re-Divined

On view: March 8, 2019- April 16, 2019

Curated by: Amy Andrieux and Sophia Rose

Featured artists- Deun Ivory, Marielys Burgos Melendez, Diamond Stingily, Joy Miessi, Kimberly Beacoat, Sophia Rose, Darryl Terrell, Genesis Tramaine, Monica Hernandez, Ayesha T. Jordan, Theda Sandiford, Vanessa German, Harmonia Rosales, Nikesha Breeze, Brittney Leeanne Williams, Denae Howard

Themes

Society's ever-evolving multitude of ways of understanding, defining, recognizing, and celebrating the femme form- mind, body, and soul.

Body

- What makes a body femme?
- How has that definition been challenged?
- What norms do we conform to and which do we transgress?
- How have feminist, trans, queer artists represent their femininity in their work?
- The female bodies as a site of suffering, pain, abuse, comfort, home, memorialization, strength, and transcendence

History/ Society

- Through art how are history and femininity being rewritten to fit our world today?
- Re- appropriating negative archetypes and stereotypes to reclaim and transcend positive meaning for black and brown people
- How is the past reflected in the present?

Sexuality

- How is the femme sexuality being reclaimed?
- Which parts of the female body does society deem "beautiful" and which parts do society hide/discard
- How is nudity being sexualized and how is it being desexualized?
- How is nudity being sexualized and how is it being desexualized?

Religion

- What standards does religion set for ideal femme form? How is that challenged?
- How do artists change religious narratives to celebrate women and women of color?

Race/culture

- African diaspora through the female perspective
- How does the violent history continue to affect Black communities? What traumas are they left with?
- How is femininity performed in Black and Brown cultures and communities?

The Femme form through the ages

- Child/ innocence
- Woman/maturity
- How does our views change? What do those changes do to us?
- Mother, Daughter
- How are the different roles of a woman celebrated?
- How does Familial relations build, and contribute to femme communities and people?
- What do we pass on to generations after us? What was passed on to us?
- Relationships between women
- Relationship with one's own femme form
- How does femininity evolve through life and its different stages?
- What do these different forms and the changes that occur tell us about ourselves and the society we live in?

Further Context

As an exhibit Give Me Body!: Femme Re-Divined explores how the femme form is defined and continues to be redefined. This exhibit challenges our notions about gender, femininity, and beauty. These ideas have always been controlled by society and social norms. from their public-facing meanings to their private impact. Mother. Shorty. Wifey. Bitch. Woman. Trans. Feminist -- and other various descriptors for the female sex gradient, also come diabolically attached to a long antiquated idea of femininity, whose trappings and boundaries suffocate rather than uplift. This is especially true for women of color, whether cis or non-binary, who most often face the corrosive extremes of these imposed values at either end of the spectrum. Trans and queer artists along with artists of color use their work to reclaim their power, sexuality, and their femme form by giving us their definitions of those constructs. While doing so, the artists also address social, political, societal, historical, and personal aspects that contribute and shape their femme form. Through their work artists convey both power and vulnerability, sometimes separately and often intertwined. The art often critiques those aspects and/or corrects them. This exhibit is a celebration of the femme form, empowering all.

Central Gallery

Painting

Brittney Leeanne Williams-
Mommy and Me 2
55 x 67"

Brittney Leeanne Williams is a Chicago-based artist, originally from Los Angeles. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami (Untitled Art Fair), and Venice, Italy (Venice Biennale), as well as in Chicago and throughout the Midwest. Williams attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2017) and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2008-09). She is a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant recipient. Williams was a 2017-2018 artist-in-residence at University of Chicago (CSRPC/Arts + Public Life) and has held residencies at Chicago Artists Coalition (HATCH Projects) and Hyde Park Art Center (The Center Program). Her set design for the short film Self-Deportation has been featured at film festivals nationwide and internationally, including Anthology Film Archives (NYC) and the Pineapple Underground Film Festival (Hong Kong).

Kimberly M. Becoat-
Urban Hottentot: Touchable
24 x 18"

Kimberly M. Becoat is a contemporary mixed media artist whose work is a stylistic abstraction with a conceptual investigation of new materials and visual experiences with social commentary. She uses a variety of art materials including acrylic paint, sumi ink, and watercolor as well as less conventional items like sand, tar paper, foil, candy wrappers and other detritus. Her most recent abstract & conceptual work is an investigation of urban environments meant to create "urban displacement", such as in public housing - aimed to surgically remove "massive amounts of Blacks and Latinos" into designated forgotten pockets of city landscapes.

Monica Hernandez-
Scene 9
48 x 72"

Monica Hernandez's paintings draw from her background as a Dominican woman who moved to the Bronx at the age of six. She received her BFA from Hunter College and now works out her Brooklyn studio. Her paintings engage with the body, desire, sex, sexuality, religion, representation, and interiors. Her paintings are imagined scenes and moments that draw from a well of tucked away experiences that range from Catholic guilt to realizing the first time the voice in her head could be switched from Spanish to English.

Harmonia Rosales-
Emaya Meets Erinle
46 x 36"

"I believe in creating art with meaning--meaning with impact, moving people to see the world differently and to be guided by that new vision. Based in Chicago, my inspiration arises from living life as a woman of color. My art is born out of a combination of my love for history, thirst for endless new knowledge, and

dedication to social action. In refining my work, I have been able to shape a unique perspective built on the foundation of an appreciation of traditional expression and form, with structure and story that creates a bold new contemporary counter narrative--on the elements of the story, as well as the elements of the process of storytelling. Art is my weapon in the ongoing battle against indifference and inaction. It forms the basis of resistance.”

- Harmonia Rosales on her work

Genesis Tramaine-
Sit to the Table and Eat
60 x 48”

Born in Brooklyn, NY, **Genesis Tramaine** is a highly motivated, self identified Black- Queer-Female-Bodied Urban Expressionist and Educator with passion in creative justice through the arts’ in urban communities and academic centers that encourage blended learning systems, liberal arts and social justice models for students of color, alternative learners and students along the LGBT spectrum. As an urban expressionist she creates abstract portraits of men and women who transcend gender, color, and social structures as political or representative. Through a mixture of collage, acrylic and oil based mediums; Ms. Tramaine’s portraits are layer upon layer of real moments and imagined metaphors. She explores ethics and insanity, the mundane and the inhumane, spirituality, and sexuality. She digests the everyday experiences of living and serving in disenfranchised communities and regurgitates it as work that evokes déjà vu, beckoning memories of past lives and glimpses of undiscovered futures.

“Nana ALWAYS made sure we ate well....sometimes it meant she went without... but she always made sure we ate.. nana's kitchen was a dream world for me... and at the table magic happened.. this is my first attempt at Urban Surrealism..... Inspired by: Luke 9:16”

- Genesis Tramaine on “Sit to the Table and Eat”

Sculpture/Installation

Diamond Stingily-
Tumble
30 x 30 x 2”

Diamond Stingily is an American artist whose work explores memory and identity through powerful, restrained installations mediated by an intentional choice of material and careful negotiation of spatial relationships. Using childhood as a universalizing inflection point, Stingily addresses neglected narratives, particularly the ignored experience of black girlhood, drawing on experiences in her mother’s hair salon and childhood diary, which was published in 2014. Stingily has used braids to materialize the historical and contemporary implications of black women’s hair, and more broadly, the physical alienation and exploitation. Structures of power emerge in unexpected presentations of familiar objects, highlighting disproportionate systemic limitation, physical violence, and surveillance.

Vanessa German-

I Will Not Suffer For You

70 x 44 x 6”

Vanessa German is a visual and performance artist based in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood. Homewood is the community that is the driving force behind German’s powerful performance work, and whose cast-off relics form the language of her copiously embellished sculptures. As a citizen artist, German explores the power of art and love as a transformative force in the dynamic cultural ecosystem of communities and neighborhoods. She is the founder of Love Front Porch and the ARHouse, a community arts initiative for the children of Homewood. Her work has been featured on *CBS Sunday Morning*, NPR’s *All Things Considered* and in *The Huffington Post*, *O Magazine* and *Essence Magazine*. She is the recipient of the 2015 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, the 2017 Jacob Lawrence Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the 2018 United States Artist Grant and most recently the 2018 Don Tyson Prize from Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

Nikesha Breeze-

Tribute to my mother

96 x 65”

"I am a black woman, a mother, queer and alive. These truths weave themselves throughout my work. I am inseparable from them, just as the skin I am in. My work seeks to engage the viewer in a relationship of the soul. A personal act of witnessing and being witnessed As a form of active resistance, I speak directly to the heart of issues such as race, sex, power, gender and human suffering at the same time as evoking a sense of the sacred and irrepressible urgency of the human spirit. My Art is an act of conscious resistance. By this I mean, that I believe Art and Art making must be the highest act of civil and personal disobedience. Art must ask questions. The life of an artist must ask questions of itself all of the time. Art must risk. I believe if art is not risking something, then it can only call back unto the known, and the known grows tired with itself in time. Art must not be afraid. Because art must live and breath at the very edge of being, inside the wound of all of human suffering and human beauty. The power of art is not in its ability to be a mirror for society, but in its ability to show what is hidden under the layers, and to speak from that place to all that is. I am a primarily self-taught artist. I have found a way, my entire life, to make art. With my body, with my hands, with my mind, with my words. I have learned and listened to everything as source.”

- Nikesha Breeze on her work

Denae Howard-

Eve's Compassionate Gifts Tabernacle

13.25 x 9.25”

Denae Howard is an interdisciplinary artist from Brooklyn NY. With a focus in printmaking and digital art; She is currently working on an array of projects focusing on instances of re-appropriating negative archetypes and stereotypes to reclaim and transcend positive meaning for black and brown people. Her work is a coded-guide that promotes discussion that reveals the similarities and differences in the way individuals’ experience the systems that are currently in place. Not to be confused with propaganda, Nae’s work is a testament to her existence as a Black Femme in modern day Amerikkka.

Performance

Marielys Burgos Melendez-

The sky beneath my feet

“‘the sky beneath my feet’ is the continuation of a creative exploration linked to the ongoing artistic research project, ISLA en FUGA. In 2018, I started inquiring about the history of mobility and migration of my immediate ancestral lineage, particularly my father. A family story that has been given to me as fragmented memories during my childhood and nowadays as bits of information I have been collecting through anecdotes. This creative iteration departs from collecting “facts” of the past (which in part I will never know) and focuses on the creation of memories of futures and becomings.

Audre Lorde’s approach to the erotic and literary notion of biomythography serve as a general framework to embrace the fullness of feelings and experiences, joy, and common sharing and the political dimensions of spirituality. The ritualistic aspect of the work serves as a strategy to generate a self-fiction poetic narrative and portrait. I intentionally embrace the seek of spiritual bliss as the ultimate seek for freedom; a way to re-imagine and enacting autonomy and I choose to re-create myself anew, not according to what has been written historically upon me and my body, but according to my own imagery. The work invites the audience to generate an internal dialogue about what has been inscribed upon them.”

- Marielys Burgos Melendez on “The sky beneath my feet”

Darryl Terrell-

Becoming Dion

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell (b. 1991) is a BLK queer lens-based artist, digital curator, and teaching artist currently based in Detroit, MI and Chicago, IL. A recent MFA graduate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he studied Photography. Darryl's work is centered around the philosophy of F.U.B.U. (The shit is for US) He thinks about how his work can aid to a larger conversation about blackness, and its many intersectionalities. His work explores the displacement of black and brown people, femme identity, and strength, the black family structure, sexuality, gender, safe spaces, and personal stories, all while keeping in mind the accessibility of art.

Darryl is currently a 2018 Luminarts Fellow in Visual Arts, a 2017/18 Hatch Project Artist in Resident at Chicago Artist Coalition, 2017 Artist in Resident at ACRE, a semifinalist for the 2017 Edes Fellowship. Darryl has also shown at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, IL, Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the Hunter Museum of American Art in Chattanooga, TN, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Scottsdale, AZ and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC.

Ayesha T Jordan-

Shasta for President (video art)

Ayesha Jordan is a New York City based multidisciplinary performer and creator. She and her collaborator, Charlotte Brathwaite, returned with *Shasta Geaux Pop* on The High Line July 19, 2018. *Shasta Geaux Pop* was recently presented at Under the Radar Festival 2018, Right About Now Festival in Amsterdam, NL, and in Orange County, CA for the Off Center Festival at the Segerstrom Arts Center. Last year we were also at the La Jolla Playhouse's 2017 Without Walls (WOW) Festival, the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, Under the Radar Festival (Jan 2017) and at The Bushwick Starr (Sept 2016).

Ayesha was part of the Broadway production of *Eclipsed* at The John Golden Theatre and returned to her role of "The Girl" at The Curran in San Francisco, March 2017. She was also in the dance theater company Cakeface's production of *Stairway to Stardom*. In 2015 she created *Come See My Double D's* at JACK (NY). She has performed abroad in Amsterdam, France, Belgium, Germany, Poland, and Japan. Other projects created and developed by Ayesha include *Enter & Exit: Family Reunion*, *Enter & Exit: Playing House*, *Inter 1-to-1*, video project *Living Room Dance Breaks*, and a plethora of videos featuring Ayesha's "friends and family".

Photography

Deun Ivory-

the body: a home for love

24 x 36”

Deun Ivory is a creative thought-leader, brilliant photographer, visual artist + wellness advocate for black women. she is committed to creating art, spaces + experiences that celebrate and empower women of color. her work positions black women at the forefront of a gorgeous aesthetic; one that has become a restorative visual language for communities of color.

Sophia Rose-

an ode to my soul: four darks in green

16 x 20”

Sophia Rose is a 19-year old visual artist, curator, and creative catalyst.

“‘an ode to my soul’ began as a project with no expectation except to be an alternative to verbal expression. In time, it has become a devotion to capturing the essence of vulnerability within kindred spirits. Recording the subtleties, as well as the ways in which I am led to deeper parts of myself in the process of development. Creating a very non-restrictive and nurtured progression of work, solely protected by my energy and the vibrations of those that choose to share the realest parts of themselves with me and my lens.”

- Sophia Rose on “an ode to my soul: four darks in green”

Digital Print Art

Joy Miessi-

Awareness/Once

23.4 x 33.1”

Genber

19.7 x 27.8”

Joy Miessi is a visual artist, currently working in London. Specialising in illustration, Joy experiments with a range of traditional processes such as drawing, painting and collaging to produce mixed media pieces. Exploring socio-political themes from a personal perspective, Joy’s work takes the form of paperworks,

clothing and paintings on cardboard. Their work explores themes of memory, intimacy, race and culture within the African diaspora, from a personal lens.

“A mixed media self portrait exploring of self identification and gender neutrality.”

- Joy Miessi on “Awareness/Once”

“Combining several mark marking techniques, ‘Genber’ looks at body and form through fluid line drawings. The misspelling of ‘gender’ arose through several mistrials of letterpressing. Miessi intentionally kept the misspelling as a way of communicating the playfulness and fluidity within gender.”

- Joy Miessi on “Genber”

Theda Sandiford-
Kitt and Kaboodle

14 x 18”

Neon Autotune

20 x 16 x 1”

“We all wear masks. Masks to pretend, to hide or just to put our best face forward in a Selfie. Using conflict as a starting point, I allow the materials take over and construct a mask to protect myself. What may start off as an ugly statement, in the end becomes something beautiful. I transform found and meticulously collected materials into mixed media works. I like to photograph my process and digitally manipulating these images to extend the narrative as part of my personal mythology. Fragmented identity juxtaposed with the existence of infinite possibilities is a recurring theme in my work.”

- Theda Sandiford on her work

Glossary

Gender- A socially constructed concept that designates people (based on their appearance, perceived sex, learned behaviors, traits, and actions) as masculine or feminine.

- **Body:** our body, our experience of our own body, how society genders bodies, and how others interact with us based on our body.
- **Identity:** our deeply held, internal sense of self as masculine, feminine, a blend of both, neither, or something else. Identity also includes the name we use to convey our gender. Gender Identity can correspond to or differ from the sex we are assigned at birth.
- **Expression:** how we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Gender expression is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

Sex- Either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions

- Biological, genitalia, chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical, genetic

Queer- Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.

- attracted to people of many genders
- not fitting cultural norms around sexuality and/or gender identity/expression
- Non-heterosexual
- **Reclaimed** derogatory term
- fluidity and anti-normativity
- academic nomenclature to represent prolific postmodern feminist theoretical project centered on sexuality and gender.

Cisgender- Cisgender (sometimes cissexual, often abbreviated to simply **cis**) is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth. The use of "cisgender" rather than "normal," or even "not transgender" draws attention to the system that marks transgender people as "other."

Transgender- denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex. Trans people challenge society's view of gender as fixed, unmoving, dichotomous, and inextricably linked to one's biological sex. The sexual orientation of transgender people varies just as it does among cisgender people.

Binary- Gender binary (also known as gender binarism, binarism, or genderism), is the classification of gender into two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine, whether by social system or cultural belief.

Non binary- is both a gender identity and a catch-all term to describe gender identities other than strictly male or female. Some types of non-binary gender include:

- **Agender:** Someone who identifies as without gender, or to whom gender does not feel like a salient concept. This is also sometimes referred to as being gender-free, non-gender, or neutrois.
- **Genderfluid:** Someone whose gender moves around, either along the female-male binary or outside of it.
- **Non-binary:** Someone whose gender identity is neither male or female, also referred to as NB or enby.
- **Off the binary:** Someone whose gender identity does not fit well within the female-male spectrum. This may also be referred to as third-gender
 - People who are non-binary often use the gender pronoun they/them

- Many non-binary people identify as trans, and/or as genderqueer.

LGBTQIAP- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, pansexual

Androgyny: Displaying physical and social characteristics identified in this culture as both feminine and masculine.

Feminism- the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.

- an organized effort to give women the same economic, social, and political rights as men

Womanism- a form of feminism that emphasizes women's natural contribution to society (used by some in distinction to the term *feminism* and its association with white women).

- based on the history and everyday experiences of black women.
- It seeks to "restore the balance between people and the environment/nature and reconcile human life with the spiritual dimension" (Layli Maparyan).

Femininity- a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles generally associated with girls and women. Femininity is partially socially constructed, being made up of both socially **defined** and biologically created factors.

Femme- a form of contemporary feminism which rejects the gender binary and acknowledges that individuals can fall anywhere within the gender spectrum, resulting in the possibility to be gender-less, gender-fluid, femme or masculine of center.

- **Femme** is also **defined** as An identity term often used to by queer women, who express themselves in feminine ways. Some consider "femme" to be its own gender identity. While an identity term to some, it can be used as a pejorative, specifically in gay/queer men's community.