

The Chorus is Speaking

Experiencing Identities of
Blackness in Canada



"**The Chorus is Speaking**" is a group exhibition of eight artists of incredible inventiveness and insight that speak to facets of the Black experience on Turtle Island: Ojo Agi, Christina Battle, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Dana Inkster, Karin Jones, Jan Wade, and Syrus Marcus Ware. The exhibition has been made possible through a curatorial partnership with Michelle Jacques, Chief Curator of the Remai Modern. We are grateful to be able to work with this incredible group of creatives, thinkers, and changemakers to create a space within the gallery where the Black community of Campbell River and North Vancouver Island can come to feel supported and inspired. Echoing Charles Campbell's sentiments, we hope the diverse artwork communicates in ways that Black folks viscerally connect to, and that it will create opportunities for those community members to feel joy in being recognized and celebrated.¹

Author Saidiya Hartman's book **Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments**, has been a guiding inspiration behind the exhibition name. Her reflections on the origins of the word "chorus" exemplify how the exhibition expresses collective and individual power, voice, and perspective: "The Greek etymology of the word chorus refers to dance within an enclosure. What better articulates the long history of struggle, the ceaseless practice of black radicalism and refusal, the tumult and upheaval of open rebellion than the acts of collaboration and improvisation that unfold within the space of enclosure? The chorus is the vehicle for another kind of story, not of the great man or the tragic hero, but one in which all modalities play a part, where the headless group incites change, where mutual aid provides the resource for collective action, not leader and mass, where the untranslatable songs and seeming nonsense make good the promise of revolution. The chorus propels transformation. It is an incubator of possibility, an assembly sustaining dreams of the otherwise."² The brilliant insights of Hartman communicate the synergy and power of the group, while creating space for "all modalities." The chorus was a source of wisdom in Greek theatre. I see this group functioning in a similar way. They bring a wealth of experience as educators, artists, advocates, activists, and scholars thinking through their own lives and creative processes and offering us the opportunity to learn from and witness that wealth of knowledge.³ This is not a headless group, however; each member is recognizable, distinctly heard, and valued.

There has been imbalance and prejudice in the colonial structures that dominate the dissemination of culture, funding, and recognition in the arts in Canada, which has disproportionately affected IBPOC creatives. "**The Chorus is Speaking**" is the CRAG's way of contributing to the way Canadian institutional structures work to include Black subjects, Black culture, Black production and Black audiences. Histories of exclusion and difficulty can weigh upon artists and diminish their achievements; being "the first" as a Black artist, academic, activist, individual is a fraught accomplishment. For example, Jan Wade's 2021 solo exhibition "**Soul Power**" at the Vancouver Art Gallery was an important career milestone to be celebrated. However, it also became an "accomplishment" for the VAG to be showing a solo exhibition by a Black female artist. It is imperative that we challenge the structures that made this a first in the Gallery's ninety-year history.⁴

Similarly, "**The Chorus is Speaking**" is an important milestone for the Campbell River Art Gallery. We are proud that it is the first exhibition held at the CRAG to feature all Black artists.⁵ That said, conversations that center black and brown voices should have been present since our founding in 1994. This erasure is a direct result of the systemic racism present in colonial institutions such as public art galleries. It is a history that we acknowledge, take responsibility for, and recognize as upholding

white supremacy. We hope that this project precipitates many opportunities for new relationships and audiences, as we re-commit to engaging with communities of colour in a meaningful way through programming and exhibition content.



Ojo Agi, Chantal Gibson, Jan Wade, Charles Campbell. **The Chorus is Speaking**. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.

In the conversation "Breathe" with Deanna Bowen included in the catalogue for "**Soul Power**", Jan Wade states that she thinks "all art is a self-portrait." I put that as a question to the group of artists and Dana Inkster emphatically agreed: "My work provides breadcrumbs to reveal who I am as a person. It's available to study for those who are interested. And for those who are not, the work is still there. My work honours, acknowledges and speaks to those who step into the world with more questions than answers and a curiosity about the human condition." In Yaniya Lee's article "How Canada Forgot Its Black Artists," the author asserts that "Canadian blackness is constantly seen as recent and uniform, and this fails to incorporate the rich and subtle diversity of black communities across the country."⁶ Dana Inkster beautifully sums up her experience that responds to Lee's assertion: "My experience of Blackness in Canada is full of layers and contradictions and grace. I have always been Black. A "visible minority." But in many contexts very few people have been interested in seeing me the person. It's like being invisible in plain sight."

This amazing group of artists was brought together to create a self-reflexive exhibition in service to the Black communities of Campbell River and Vancouver Island. The artists in "**The Chorus is Speaking**" exemplify the variety of histories and perspectives present in Black communities across Canada.

1. Ojo Agi, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Karin Jones. 2022. Interview by Michelle Jacques and Jenelle Pasiechnik. Online via Zoom. May 12, 2022.

2. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2019), 347-348.

3. Since conceiving of this exhibition a few years ago most of the artists in the group have hit major milestones, received recognition through awards and appointments, published books, and been in major exhibitions (Jan Wade: *Soul Power*, Vancouver Art Gallery and Viva Award; Charles Campbell *Vancouver Special*, Vancouver Art Gallery, *Fragments of Epic Memory*, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Viva Award; Karin Jones, *Sobey Longlist 2022*, *History Is Rarely Black or White*, Agnes Etherington Art Gallery, Queen's University; Chantal Gibson, *Pat Lowther Memorial Award*, 3M National Teaching Fellowship, *With|Holding* Caitlin Press; Syrus Marcus Ware *Until We Are Free* University of Winnipeg Press. Due gratitude and appreciation are in order for the work that this group of artists does. These people are some of the rockstars of Canadian contemporary art, literature, and activism.

4. Deanna Bowen and Jan Wade, "Breathe: A Conversation Between Deanna Bowen and Jan Wade," Stephanie Rebeck, ed. 2022. *Jan Wade: Soul Power*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Jan Wade: Soul Power" shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery. 29.

5. The Campbell River Art Gallery opened its doors in 1994.

Their artwork embodies a thinking through of societal and artistic challenges, which they address through materiality, identity, storytelling, and the exploration of relationships. They make compelling symbolic connections as they ruminate on the relationships among humans, communities, and the natural world.

After migrating from the United States to Hamilton, Ontario, Jane Wade's family set roots for several generations to come. Her great grandfather was an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) minister who travelled back and forth between Evanston, Illinois and Hamilton: "it was at the Black church where she heard the singing of spirituals passed down from survivors of the Underground Railroad, saw quilting, and witnessed the telling of stories as well as political strategizing. These experiences at the church, which was really more akin to a community centre, all had a profound impact on Wade's understanding of the lives of her ancestors as well as her own Black identity."⁷ Wade's paternal great-grandmother survived one of the first Great Migrations north of Black people seeking freedom.⁸ Wade Compton writes in the catalogue for "Soul Power" that, "Wade's work is specifically Black North American--that is, diasporic across the border between the United States and Canada--in the way Black culture on this continent has always operated, with its own counter-national exigencies...The national border is not an overdetermining cultural border for her family, tradition and ancestry, as with so many other Black Canadians with roots in US slavery and migration."⁹ These histories come through Wade's use of memory jugs, a reference to funerary traditions, likely originating in Africa, that are used in Black North American communities, as well as meditations on Christianity and the way spiritual practice in slave cultures were melded with it. The work comes through the artist's own questions around religion and offers others opportunities for inquiry: "I was born and raised Christian...and had a joyful and mostly happy music-filled... family-filled experience in my childhood. But at a certain point I started to read about the history of my own religion...it's a questioning."

Carrying, holding and questioning history is an important element to the practice of Jan Wade. Similarly, Karin Jones' work is a rumination upon her own approaches to and working through the weight of difficult histories and her relationship to identities - chosen and inherited.

Jones utilises hair and worn accoutrements to examine narratives of the slave trade and beauty standards. The series of work entitled "The Golden Section", on display in "The Chorus is Speaking", comes from a place of questioning impossible white beauty standards and the way that very narrow aesthetic vision has created pressure, restraint, and unreachable standards for people of colour.¹⁰ However, she also notes that there is a playfulness associated with the work. Jones' work faces down very difficult histories and questions, but she looks up to writers and makers who continually look for and find moments of beauty from the most dire circumstances and experiences.¹¹ Her respect for that ability comes through her own work; "The Golden Section" is imbued with a tone of humour, as she pokes fun at these impossible beauty standards with white blonde sections of hair perfectly brushed, braided, and woven into mesh. The compositions of these disembodied ponytails are reminiscent of the highly geometric and serious paintings of the minimalist style.¹² "The Golden Section" evokes the ever-present absence of whiteness in the exhibition. Whiteness so often others yet manages to evade the gaze and unwanted visibility IBPOC folks are faced with. The bloneness stands out as hyper visible within a space where the wisdom and beauty of Blackness are celebrated. It asks white folks to think about their own race and their relationship with it.

Karin Jones' carefully chosen materials carry the weight of her messages with tongue in cheek humour. Similarly, Ojo Agi's works also hold material as a central element to carrying her message. Through the use of brown papers she creates a space where the Black experience is centred.



Jan Wade and Charles Campbell. *The Chorus is Speaking*. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.

The figures in Agi's portrait series "There is space for you here", avoid the gaze of the viewer by turning away in empowered acts of refusal. The series was developed after George Floyd's death when the artist observed that Black life was under a lens, leading her to feel overexposed.¹³ With the aid of Bell Hooks and Toni Morrison, she was thinking through the development of boundaries and pushing back against the socialisation of Black women to overextend and over-explain themselves.¹⁴ The figures in the portraits set boundaries by disallowing the viewer's surveillance, without creating a site of struggle.¹⁵ They turn away, signifying that they are taking space; it is accentuated through its material presentation as blank space on the paper. Knowing when to say no is an important and often underused act of self-preservation. Agi's selection of materials is key to the work. The artist has chosen to use brown paper to represent women of colour. This goes against the seemingly innocuous tradition of starting from white paper, canvas, and drawing surfaces. Agi's choice of materials centres brown and black skin, making that the norm and a natural state of being. The brown papers centre the Black experience through materiality. Crucially, creating space for Blackness to be natural.

6. Yaniya Lee. "How Canada Forgot Its Black Artists," thefader.com, August, 2016. <https://www.thefader.com/2016/08/31/black-artists-in-canada>. Accessed April 2022.

7. Daina Augaitis, "Life Lessons," Stephanie Rebick, ed. 2022. Jan Wade: Soul Power. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Jan Wade: Soul Power" shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

8. Daina Augaitis, "Life Lessons."

9. Wayde Compton, "Signifying, Text and Movement in the Art of Jan Wade," Stephanie Rebick, ed. 2022. Jan Wade: Soul Power. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Jan Wade: Soul Power" shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery. 33-34.

10. Karin Jones, "Artist Statement - The Golden Section," 2022. Accessed on May 20, 2022. <https://karinjones.ca/projects/7190218>.

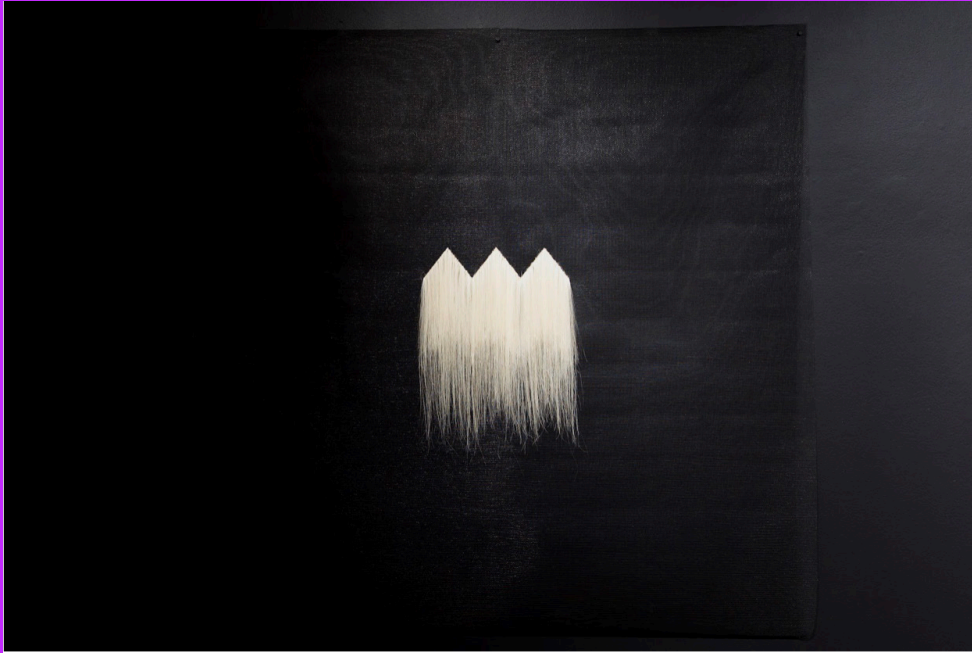
11. Karin Jones. April 4, 2018. "body of work." (Oral MFA Thesis Statement). Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ika6Gd-sumQ&list=PLVQKZ5NOrn2cnbx-5IjQD8CLVcq_FdGP&index=5&ab_channel=KarinJonesStudio (accessed June 1, 2022). 4:57.

12. Karin Jones, "Ojo Agi, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Karin Jones." 2022. Interview by Michelle Jacques and Jenelle Pasiechnik. Online via Zoom. May 12, 2022.

13. Ojo Agi, "Ojo Agi, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Karin Jones." 2022. Interview by Michelle Jacques and Jenelle Pasiechnik. Online via Zoom. May 12, 2022. 46:26.

14. Ibid. 47:08. Bell Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* Boston, MA :South End Press, 1993. Toni Morrison, "Black Studies Centre Public Dialogue, Part 2." 1975.

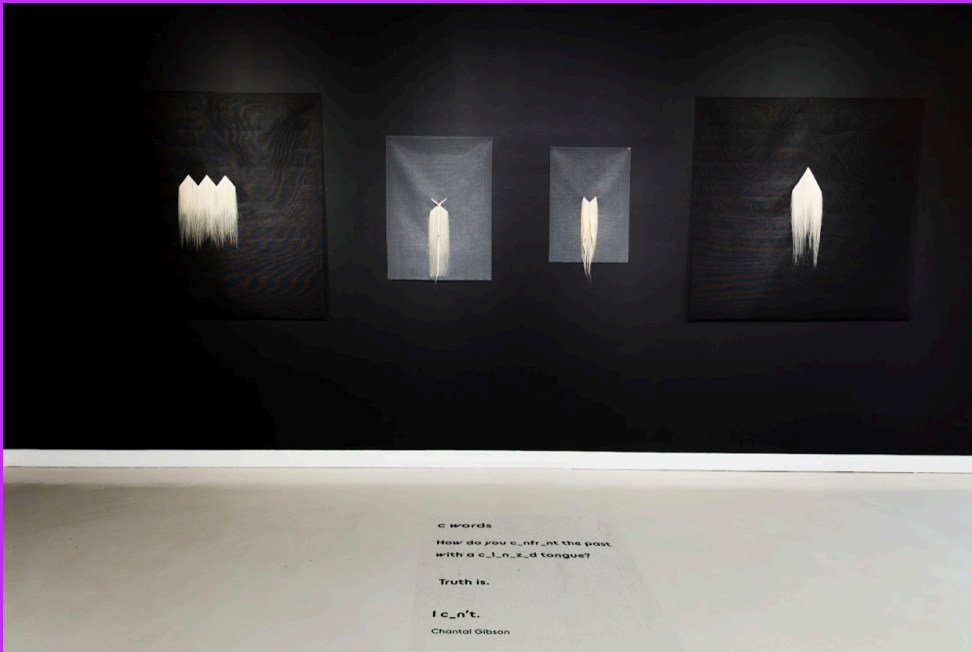
15. Ojo Agi, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Karin Jones. 2022. Interview by Michelle Jacques and Jenelle Pasiechnik. Online via Zoom. May 12, 2022.



Karin Jones. The Chorus is Speaking. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.



Ojo Agi. The Chorus is Speaking. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.



Karin Jones. The Chorus is Speaking. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.



Ojo Agi. The Chorus is Speaking. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.

Agi's figures are evidence of her own journey to advocacy for herself and other Black women. This advocacy is also central to the work of Syrus Marcus Ware. There is a great synergy between turning away and toward, as boundaries and self-preservation are an important and less discussed necessity for activists and advocates.

Ware is well acquainted with the work it takes to advocate for Black rights, transgender rights, and disability rights. He brings an important dimension to the exhibition through the relationship he creates between art and activism. Ware is a Vanier Scholar, visual artist, activist, curator and educator.¹⁶ He is a core-team member of Black Lives Matter-Toronto, a member of Black Lives Matter Canada, and he is part of the PDA (Performance Disability Art) Collective.¹⁷ Ware uses drawing, installation and performance to explore social justice frameworks and black activist culture.¹⁸ For "The Chorus is Speaking", Ware is presenting "Activist Wallpaper", a wall installation featuring Tina "QueenTite" Opaleke. The wallpaper is adapted from a large-scale graphite portrait of Opaleke.¹⁹ Ware's large-scale portraits bring visibility and material record to members of the Black, Indigenous, Queer and Trans, and disability communities that is normally reserved for dignitaries and wealthy patrons.²⁰ Opaleke is now a part of the tradition of art history through the veneration of new heroes, interrupting a hierarchical process that reinforces systems of oppression and division.

Opaleke is a Nigerian/Jamaican hybrid of the African diaspora and the co-founding director of PFFD (Prosthetics For Foreign Donation).²¹ A former international model and spoken word poet, she led chants for the Winnipeg Women's March on Washington 2017, and was awarded The ACA Humanitarian Award 2019.²² "I will continue to advocate for disabled Black bodies, including my own. Our stories, experiences and voices are valid and imperative in bringing forth change to a system that devalues disabled bodies, dehumanizes Black bodies and the plethora of vulnerable racialized victims at the intersections of that crossroad."²³ Opaleke describes herself as a warrior and a disability advocate who uses her voice to speak up for those who sometimes don't have a voice.²⁴

Opaleke faced a lot of racism in the predominantly white neighbourhood she grew up in. From an early age she felt protective over folks of colour and those with disabilities. Guided by a strong moral compass, she was compelled to speak up, knew the responsibilities of elders as protectors, and refused to accept racism from teachers and administrators.²⁵ Opaleke recalls always feeling as if she were a different being. As she says, "I didn't really see anybody with physical disabilities. And, it's so strange. You don't see people wearing their disabilities." When her son was born with PFFD, a congenital birth deficiency that affects the hips, pelvis, and femur, Opaleke wished that she would have been introduced into the disability world by a peer with lived experience, as it is a "fantabulous world to belong to." Being different isn't a bad thing, it's a different lens. Her son Iahnijah's amazing spirit and generosity has led them to start Prosthetics for Foreign Donation, a movement that helps connect people around the world in need of prosthetics with folks that have prosthetics to donate.

Syrus Marcus Ware's Activist artwork highlights the work of tireless advocates and changemakers. Chantal Gibson is another changemaker, working to redact damaging books filled with racist rhetoric, and writing poetry to bring representation to school reading lists and IBPOC voices into more classrooms.



Syrus Marcus Ware. The Chorus is Speaking. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.



Syrus Marcus Ware. The Chorus is Speaking. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Jenelle Pasiechnik.

16. Syrus Marcus Ware. "About." <https://www.syrusmarcusware.com/about>. Accessed June 3, 2022.

17. Syrus Marcus Ware. <https://www.artland.com/exhibitions/syrus-marcus-ware-irresistible-revolutions>. June 3, 2022.

18. Ibid.

19. The portrait drawing that Syrus adapted into wallpaper originates from the exhibition Syrus Marcus Ware: Irresistible Revolutions at Wil Aballe Art Projects | WAAP · Vancouver, Canada from 26 Jan – 27 Feb 2021. Syrus Marcus Ware: Irresistible Revolutions at Wil Aballe Art Projects | WAAP · Vancouver, Canada from 26 Jan – 27 Feb 2021.

20. Syrus Marcus Ware, "Queer (Self) Portraits," CBC Arts. Accessed June 2, 2022.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMsr6ukWKBA&ab_channel=CBCArts. 2:05-2:30.

21. The organisation PFFD (Prosthetics For Foreign Donation) started because of the open innocence and generosity of Opaleke's four year old son Iahnijah. The organisation brings together folks in need of prosthetics with those who have one to share or donate. The mission is to bring freedom and empowerment through mobility.

22. Syrus Marcus Ware, "Portrait of Queen Tite Opaleke." Artland.

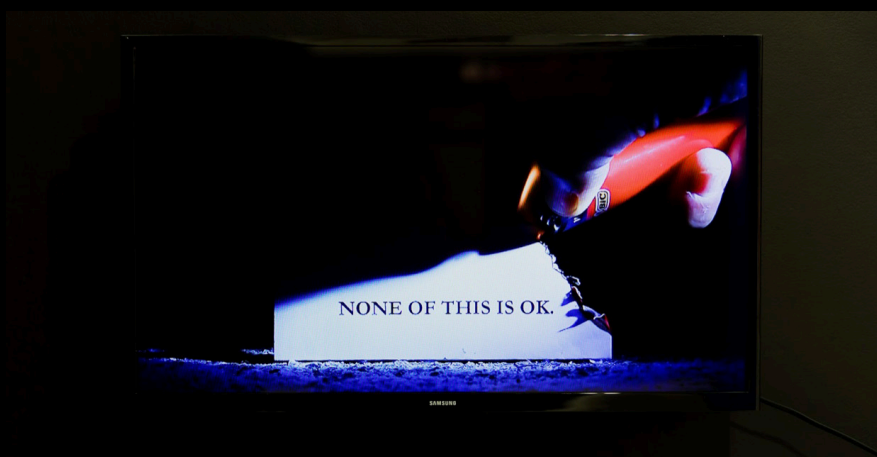
<https://www.artland.com/artworks/syrus-marcus-ware-portrait-of-queentite-opaleke-a37cf8>. June 3, 2022.

23. Tina "Queen Tite" Opaleke. "Navigating through disability while Black' can be a disheartening challenge, says mom and advocate."

24. The Accessibility Collective, hosts, "Talking with 'QueenTite' Opaleke," All Access Pass (podcast), February 2021, accessed May 25, 2022. <https://www.spreaker.com/user/citr/talking-with-tina-queentite-opaleke>. 10:00.



Chantal Gibson. *The Chorus is Speaking*. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Jenelle Pasiechnik.



Christina Battle. *The Chorus is Speaking*. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.

One of Chantal Gibson's greatest concerns is how text is transformed. The artist employs industrial, liquid rubber in the making of redacted books. Redaction is an act of erasure. It renders text unreadable. The thick black substance is a metaphor for text.²⁶ It signifies unheard and erased voices oozing from and coating the pages of books, permanently sealing them.²⁷ Books with titles like, "When Africa Was A Country," books that need not be read ever again. The artist takes great pleasure and joy in sealing the pages of racist children's readers with the voices that were never heard, so that violent rhetoric can no longer do damage. Gibson works at the intersection of writing and visual art.²⁸ She is a teacher, poet, and visual artist. This combination of talent and expertise results in work that is pedagogical and works to transform text, and create change within the school system. Her books of poetry are being added to reading lists in schools, while her visual work is helping to seal off books that have facilitated violence against, and misinformation about Black culture and communities.

Chantal Gibson coats texts with liquid industrial rubber to seal their misinformation permanently. Christina Battle explores the fleeting existence of social media updates through the permanent quality of burning paper updates. Artists Chantal Gibson and Christina Battle are interested in the powerful and fleeting qualities of text in its physical and digital forms.

Christina Battle's "Notes to Self" are an engagement with the fleeting yet permanent quality of social media updates. The video work is a collection of notes the artist has written to herself that range from humorous, to profound, to reflections on greater societal events.²⁹ Each note remains on screen only a few seconds before it is burned down to nothing. The viewer must witness the statement and reflect on its meaning before it disappears. The fate of the notes is finite and determined. There is no possibility of the note returning and resurfacing months or even years later. The viewer's engagement with the statements are a slow burning, manual experience of the act of scrolling through status updates on social media. Conversely, I imagine the notes as a commentary on the performative updates and virtue signalling that occur ceaselessly online. Where people perform solidarity with causes and issues without contributing any action or substance to ongoing conversations. Such updates are worth as much as a burned down piece of paper. Battle's meditations upon our relationship with social media and status updates leave space for critical engagements and considered thoughts on the viewer's part. The notes are simple in form and execution and are neither leading nor instructive.³⁰ Her artistic practice focuses on thinking deeply about the complexities and intricacies of disaster. "Notes to Self" have been ongoing since 2014. Like Chantal Gibson's newest book of poetry "With/Holding" her work becomes a site in which to examine Black lives within the spaces of digital media, and the impacts and consequences continued engagement and enrapture with the online world has on those lives.

The complex underpinnings of Charles Campbell's nature-inspired sculptural work contrast the simple form and execution of Battle's examination of ubiquitous forms of digital engagement. Both welcome questioning, curiosity, and reflection.

Charles Campbell's "Breathe Cycle 1" is related to the cycle of human breath, but begins from thinking around our human relationship to ecology. It is a circular mobius structure made of aluminium, measuring eight feet in diameter, suspended from the gallery ceiling. The pattern is derived from lichen, inspired by Campbell's many forest explorations and fascination with the species. Lichen are

25. Ibid. 13:00-14:30.

26. Chantal Gibson, Ojo Agi, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Karin Jones. 2022. Interview by Michelle Jacques and Jenelle Pasiechnik. Online via Zoom. May 12, 2022. 59:11.

27. Ibid. 59:49.

28. Ibid. 57:30.

29. Christina Battle, "Artist Statement - Notes to Self." February 25, 2022. Accessed May 27, 2022. <http://cbattle.com/notes-to-self-2/>.

30. Christina Battle.

one of the many contributors to oxygen production and photosynthesis in our atmosphere. They are symbiotic organisms that live in mutual benefit with other species like fungi, algae, or cyanobacteria.³¹ Lichen provides a structure within which other organisms can exist. Campbell sees this coexistence as a metaphor for Creolized societies coming together, resulting in hybrid cultures and language traditions.³² However, these relationships in the natural and human worlds do not exist without exploitation. Societal structures like Capitalism often call for the labour of one group to be exploited for the benefit of other groups, as in the relationship between lichen, fungi, and bacteria.³³ In addition, Campbell's complex work and its underpinnings highlight and celebrate knowledge like Fractal geometry and binary counting that originated in Africa, as the mobius shape originates in fractal geometry.³⁴ This pushes back against the narrative of primitivism that is pervasive in thinking around Black culture.³⁵ It alludes to that reclaiming of knowledge and the breaking down of the primitive civilised binary. There is a symbiosis between this unique life form's ability to play a role in the reclamation of damaged environmental sites, and Campbell's own pursuit of the reclamation of knowledge forms that break down harmful binaries.

Campbell's work pushes back against misinformed narratives of primitivism in relation to Black culture. Dana Inkster's film "*Ladies of the Saturday Night*" pushes back against the erasure of Black histories in the mining community of Drumheller, Alberta.

Dana Inkster's film "*Ladies of the Saturday Night*" features stories about brothels that popped up in Drumheller, Alberta in the early 20th century. Mary and Fanny were renowned in the community and that notoriety continues today.³⁶ They were very successful entrepreneurs running their own brothels, who were fiercely protective of the women who worked for them. Mary Roper was described as a beautiful Black woman who had a way with riské language.³⁷ Fanny was thought to be well educated and could be quite refined when she wanted to be.³⁸ They were known to be extremely generous within their community: Roper gave significant monies to the church, though they would never admit to it or show appreciation.³⁹ Both women died penniless; Roper is buried in an unmarked grave in Drumheller.⁴⁰ Female members of the underworld were given little appreciation compared to the proper ladies who came to the town and married reputable men, even though these so-called disreputable women realised opportunities, managed successful businesses and thrived under extremely rough and dangerous circumstances.

Dana Inkster's film exemplifies Rinaldo Walcott's call for cultural workers to create a language that brings image and understanding to the long and unrecognised history of Black Canada.

In Rinaldo Walcott's book "*Black Like Who*", he suggests that it is up to folks engaged in cultural work to help where historians and sociologists have fallen short to, "furnish Black Canada with a discourse that recognizes an almost five hundred year past." He suggests that, "imaginative works often render much more complex and interesting constructions of Black Canada's multiple historical experiences."⁴¹ The imagined is a central element of Inkster's body of work over the past twenty years: "It provides freedom to explore the possibilities of what might be or what might have been. Art-making provides freedom for me. As the youngest of three, I could rarely keep up with my older siblings."⁴² As a result, her imaginary friend became her closest confidante. Her creative practice provides an outlet for childlike possibility and freedom that she has worked to cultivate responsibly in her artwork.

31. Charles Campbell. Ojo Agi, Charles Campbell, Chantal Gibson, Karin Jones. 2022. Interview by Michelle Jacques and Jenelle Pasiachnik. Online via Zoom. May 12, 2022. 38:11.

32. Charles Campbell. 38:50.

33. Charles Campbell. 39:37.

34. Charles Campbell. 41:36.

35. Ibid. 41:10.

36. *Ladies of the Saturday Night*, directed by Dana Inkster, V-Tape, 2012, 11:03.



Charles Campbell. *The Chorus is Speaking*. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.



Charles Campbell. *The Chorus is Speaking*. Installation view Campbell River Art Gallery. Image credit: Bluetree Photography.

37. Ibid. 12:26.

38. Ibid. 12:08.

39. Ibid. 13:18.

40. Ibid. 13:23-13:57.

41. Rinaldo Walcott. 2018. *Black Like Who?* 20th anniversary edition. (London, Ontario: Insomniac Press, 2018), 68.

42. Dana Inkster, Interview with curator Jenelle Pasiachnik. May 18, 2022.

43. Charmaine Nelson. *Ebony Roots, Northern Soil: Perspectives on blackness in Canada*. (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 40.

Acknowledging the complex histories of Black communities on Turtle Island is an important part of honouring several hundred years of history in this country. According to Charmaine Nelson, author of *“Ebony Roots Northern Soil”*, “Unlike other zones of Black Diaspora in which one dominant black presence stands in for the black population, Canadian histories of [B]lack recent and historical migrations (forced and free) span over four hundred years and across various regional and ethnic groups, which has produced today, African-Canadian, African-Caribbean, African, African-American, African-Latin as well as other forms of [B]lackness in Canada.”⁴³ The artists represented in *“The Chorus is Speaking”* exemplify the variety of histories and perspectives present in Black communities across Canada. Their artwork embodies a kaleidoscope of artistic problems addressed through materiality, identity, storytelling, and the exploration of relationships, leaving us with the impression that there is much to learn and many more perspectives emerging and impacting the way we understand culture on Turtle Island. Each artist has chosen what Chantal Gibson has called connotatively rich materials to tell stories of importance and give shape to their fascinations.⁴⁴ They make compelling symbolic connections as they ruminate on the relationships among humans, communities, and the natural world. “The chorus propels transformation. It is an incubator of possibility, an assembly sustaining dreams of the otherwise.”⁴⁵ Where there hasn’t been room they make room; where there haven’t been books they write books; where there haven’t been voices, the chorus is speaking.



Ladies of the Saturday Night. Film still. Dana Inkster. 2012. Courtesy of Dana Inkster.

44. Chantal Gibson, Interview, 1:28:45

45. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, 347

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