

ABOUT THE ARTIST

La Vaughn Belle makes visible the unremembered. By exploring the material culture, looking for hidden stories and connections, Belle creates narratives from fragments. Working in a variety of disciplines her practice includes: painting, installation, photography, writing, video, and public interventions. Her work with colonial era pottery led to a commission with the renowned brand of porcelain products, the Royal Copenhagen. She has exhibited her work in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe in institutions such as the Museo del Barrio (NY), Casa de las Americas (Cuba), the Museum of the African Diaspora (CA), and Kunsthal Charlottenborg (DK). Her art is in the collections of the National Photography Museum and the Vestsjælland Museum in Denmark. She is the co-creator of *I Am Queen Mary* (2018), the artist-led groundbreaking monument that confronted the Danish colonial amnesia while commemorating the legacies of resistance of the African people who were brought to the former Danish West Indies. The project was featured in over 100 media outlets around the world including the *New York Times*, *Politiken*, *VICE*, the *BBC* and *Le Monde*.

Belle holds an MFA from the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, Cuba and an MA and BA from Columbia University in NY. She was a finalist for the She Built NYC project to develop a monument to memorialize the legacy of Shirley Chisholm and for the Inequality in Bronze project in Philadelphia to redesign one of the first monuments to an enslaved woman at the Stenton historic house museum. As a 2018-2020 fellow at the Social Justice Institute at the Barnard Research Center for Women at Columbia University she researched the "citizenless" Virgin Islanders in the Harlem Renaissance. She is currently working on a manuscript entitled *How To Survive Colonial Nostalgia*. Her studio is based in the US Virgin Islands.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Daniela Agostinho, PhD, is a visual culture scholar, curator, and Assistant Professor at the School of Communication and Culture, University of Aarhus in Denmark. She works in the fields of visual culture and artistic and curatorial research with a particular focus on colonial archives and the care and display of contested histories. She is co-editor of the books *(W)archives: Archival Imaginaries, War and Contemporary Art* (Sternberg Press/MIT Press, 2020) and *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data* (MIT Press, 2021).

Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, PhD, is a visual artist, independent researcher, and educator. Her artistic research explores how to develop "reparative critical practices" through assembling fragments of cultural memory, colonial histories, and migration embedded in the built environment, in public spaces and in archives. Recent works include: *Voices in the Shadows of Monuments* (2022); *Archives that Matter* (2018-2019), *Entangled Archives* (2020-22), *Rematerialisations* (2022), and *Reroutings* (2022).

Together they co-direct the network "Reparative Encounters: a transcontinental network for artistic research and reparative practices" with La Vaughn Belle and colleagues from the US Virgin Islands, Ghana, and Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland).

RELATED EVENTS

Events are free and open to the public, unless noted. Check halsey.cofc.edu for up-to-date information.

OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, August 25, 6:30 - 8:00 PM
Free for Halsey Institute Members, suggested \$5 donation for not-yet members

ARTIST TALK

Saturday, August 26, 2:00 PM

CURATOR COFFEE CLUB

Friday, September 15, 9:00 - 11:00 AM
Open to Halsey Institute Members
Sponsored by blüm in Charleston

WGS INTERSECTIONS PANEL

Thursday, September 28, 4:00 PM

POETRY READING WITH MARLANDA DEKINE AND A\$IAHMAE

Thursday, October 5, 6:00 - 7:30 PM

HALSEY AFTER HOURS

Wednesday, October 25, 5:00 - 7:00 PM
Free for Halsey Institute Members, suggested \$10 donation for not-yet members

HALSEY OFFSITE CAW CAW INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Saturday, November 4, 10:00 - 11:30 AM
Space is limited.
Email HalseyRSVP@cofc.edu to sign up.

FAMILY DAY!

Sunday, November 12, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

ROADSIDE BLOOMS WREATH MAKING WORKSHOP

Saturday, December 2, 5:30 PM
\$25 Participation Fee. Space is limited.
Email HalseyRSVP@cofc.edu to sign up.

THE HALSEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART at the College of Charleston School of the Arts

LOCATION

The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts
College of Charleston
161 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401
halsey.cofc.edu

PARKING

Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

GALLERY HOURS

During exhibitions
Monday - Saturday, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays
FREE FOR ALL

CONTACT




(843) 953-4422 or halsey@cofc.edu

IMAGE CREDITS:

cover: La Vaughn Belle, *For Those of Us Who Live at the Shoreline* (detail), 2022. Digital collage
reverse side, left: La Vaughn Belle, *Storm (how to imagine the tropicalia as monumental-as in amending)*, 2022. Charcoal, ink, and acrylic with cuts and burns on paper, 65x85"
reverse side, right: La Vaughn Belle, *Swarm (003)*, 2020. Cuts and burns on printed archival photograph, 24x36"
All works © La Vaughn Belle

This exhibition is supported by the Quattlebaum Artists-in-Residence Fund.

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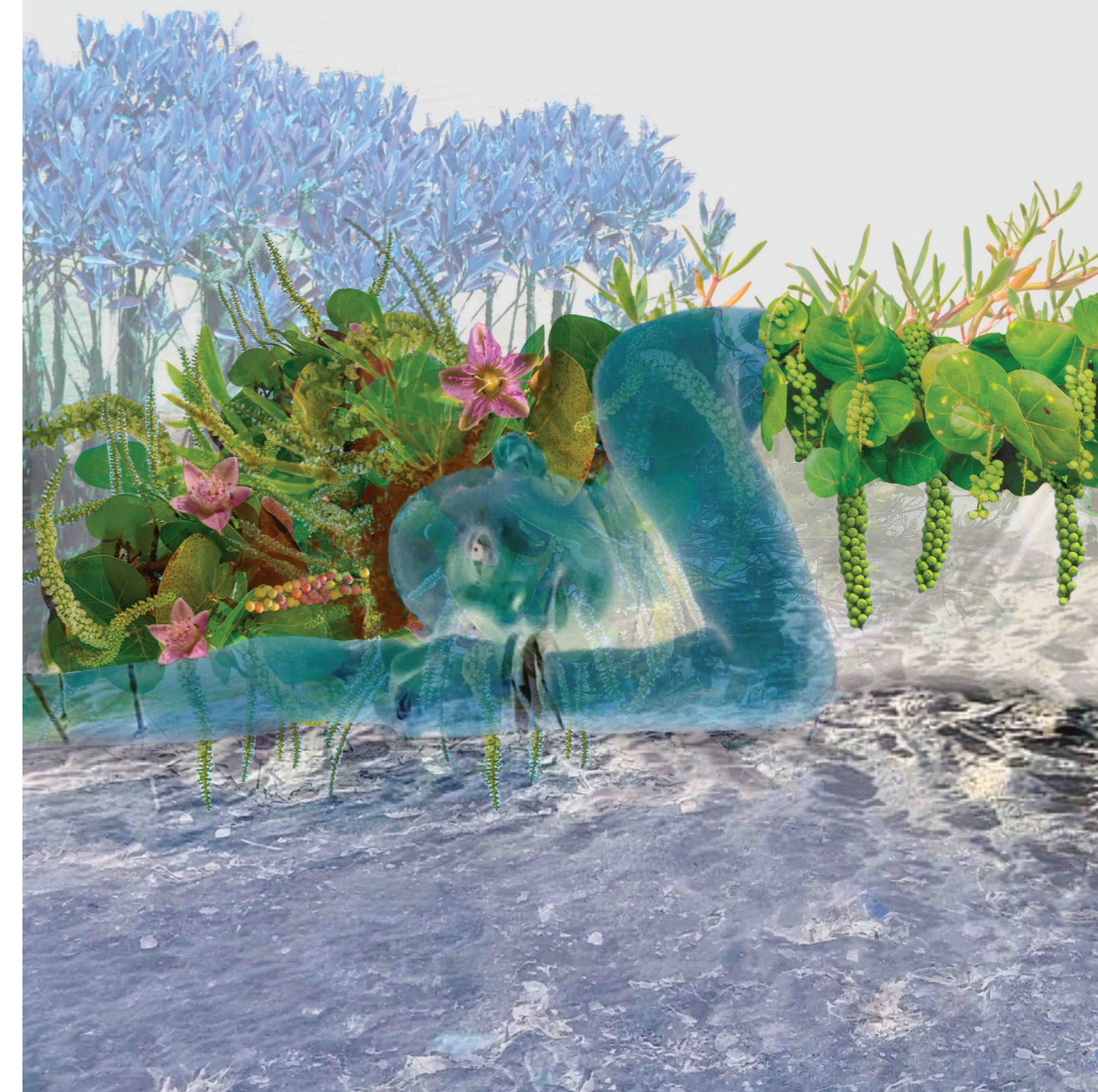
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LA VAUGHN BELLE

When the Land Meets the Body

August 25 - December 9, 2023





When the Land Meets the Body

Dear La Vaughn,

Allow us to address this text for your solo exhibition *When the Land Meets the Body* at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art in the form of a letter to you. We want to express how inspired we are by your impressive body of work and how grateful we are to have you as a friend, colleague, and mentor. Our conversations on art, coloniality, archives, and love have guided and enriched our practices as artists, scholars, curators, educators, and women. It is our hope that this letter can help unfold the generosity that surrounds your artistic practice, and the manifold layers that your work embodies.

Your artistic practice makes “visible the unremembered,”¹ by invoking, probing, and recombining colonial archives, bodies, spirits, land, and the built environment. In pulling from these various materials, you create new forms to register presences that have been obliterated by the most violent histories.

Literary scholar Saidiya Hartman coined the writing method of *critical fabulation* to redress archival omissions, weaving imagination and storytelling with archival records to imagine what was and “what could have been,” drawing out care for the lives of the enslaved people, unaccounted for in the archives.² Visual culture scholar Tina Campt extends Hartman’s method beyond narration through “the Black body itself” and its capacity to manifest “Black (counter)gravity,”³ a term Campt uses to counter the weight of anti-Blackness with the Black body’s capacity to

evoke obliterated experiences, create different traces, and hold a deeper reservoir of memories. Your artistic practice extends these methods into a material critical fabulation, through a bodily sensing of the material evidence in the environment that registers the afterlives of slavery and the presence of Black lives across space and time: From the miniature fragment—a fingerprint of an enslaved child-laborer, forever engraved in the hand-molded bricks; to the coral stones dug out of the water in St. Croix by the enslaved laborers and used as the foundations in colonial buildings; to the *Chaney*, scattered porcelain shards that surface after a heavy rain—you unearth the discarded and unnoticed, rearrange the elements, and unfold a different relationship of care for the past, present, and future by reconnecting the parts into new conceptions of space, time, the landscape, the body, and the human.

In anticipation of the new video you created in South Carolina, you asked “What if my body was more like a tongue and it could feel the old of water and the sweet of dirt, what if it could taste like a whisper? What if it could do things we don’t have verbs for yet?”⁴

Throughout the exhibition, the land meets the body meets the archive to both test and expand the boundaries of each, rearticulating Spinoza’s question of what does a body do? What do the land, the sea, the shoreline, and the horizon remember? What kind of contacts do they register? What forms do they give rise to when they meet? What other histories does an image contain?

Your own body becomes the primary medium to explore these questions, as you plunge into the dirt of the rice fields, or gently caress a dogfennel. You draw a “ciné-geography”⁵ that counters the maps drawn by Empires that have fractured lands and bodies. Through your bodily remapping, you open to a possibility of drawing relations to other sites impacted by colonization, based on the particularity and ecology of the sites you engage and extended through different media: In your large-scale collage series *Storm (How to Imagine the Tropicalia as Monumental)* (2021) you collapse space and time, layering land, sea, and storm to “transgress temporal limitations, cross infinite distances, and invent multiple horizons.”⁶ In your watercolor series, where the land meets the sky and the sea, the horizon “refuses to bend in sorrow,”⁷ exploring the question of what do islands do? In the *Swarm* series (2023), by cutting and burning your way through archival images, you listen to the “lower frequencies”⁸ of the photographs, where overlooked histories register. In the digital collage *For Those of Us Who Live on the Shoreline* (2022), the sea purslane, sea grape, manchineel, and mangroves are the keepers of boundary, constructing a “living archive as the roots systems hold in the erosion of memory and time.”⁹



What constitutes your *material critical fabulation* is that you sculpt with concepts and percepts, you make videos with fabula and frequencies, you rip, cut, and burn with affect and shadows, and you paint with time and space. You treat your subject matter with the mind of an artist-scholar, while treating the materials with the haptic knowledge of an artist. In doing so your practice ushers in a cosmology, or what we might situate with Édouard Glissant as a poetics that gives rise to new concepts, through which we can make sense of the world around us.

With love,

Daniela Agostinho and Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld,

Lisbon/Beirut/Provence/Copenhagen

Summer 2023

Notes

1. La Vaughn Belle, artist statement.
2. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26 (2008): 11.
3. Tina M. Campt, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021), 47.
4. Instagram post, artist’s profile, July 20, 2023.
5. We draw on Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray’s notion of ciné-geography, which describes “situated cinecultural practices in an expanded sense, and the connections—individual, institutional, aesthetic and political—that link them transnationally to other situations of urgent struggle.” Kodwo Eshun & Ros Gray, “The Militant Image: A Ciné-Geography,” *Third Text*, 25:1 (2011): 1-12.
6. In the words of La Vaughn Belle.
7. This is a quote from Belle’s video *In the Place of Shadows* (2021).
8. Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
9. In the words of La Vaughn Belle.

