



NINE YEARS OF DETANGLED AFRO HAIR

Stephanie J. Woods

SEPTEMBER 16 – OCTOBER 26, 2021

the wait of it, 2020

Site specific vinyl banner installation and moving audio photograph

“the wait of it” speaks about the nine years Woods spent growing and collecting her hair as well as the psychological weight of being Black in America and the politicization of afro hair. Accompanying this work is the poem “Bleached” by Laura Neal and an original score by Johannes Barfield that includes the sound of fire and the sound of water. The audio was inspired by the 2020 Minneapolis uprising and the following Martin Luther King, Jr. quote: “We have fought hard and long for integration, as I believe we should have, and I know that we will win. But I’ve come to believe we’re integrating into a burning house.”



A Radiant Revolution Vinyl images, 2018

"A Radiant Revolution" was inspired by graphic t-shirts featuring phrases such as "My Black is Beautiful," "Strong Black Girl," and "Black Girl Magic." The t-shirts are captured in a series of photographs that relate these expressions of empowerment to the history of head wraps. There was a time in history when sumptuary laws banned Black women from showing their hair. However, the head wrap then and now represents courage, ancestry, collective identity, and a uniform of rebellion that signifies the resistance to loss of self-definition.

Sumptuary laws are laws that try to regulate consumption. They were used to try to regulate the balance of trade by limiting the market for expensive

imported goods. They made it easy to identify social rank and privilege, and as such could be used for social discrimination. The tignon laws were a result of the sumptuary laws.

The tignon laws were passed in 1786 by Louisiana Governor Esteban Rodriguez Miró and aimed to prohibit "creole women of color from displaying excessive attention to dress in the streets of New Orleans." The law stipulated that they must wear a tignon (a type of head covering) or scarf to cover their hair. This was meant to cover any adornments that were added to their hair, such as beads and jewels.

When the Hunted Become the Hunters, 2020

Moving audio photograph, 7 minutes 39 seconds

"When the Hunted Become the Hunters" is a defensive performance that the artist calls a moving audio photograph because there is no beginning or end. It's essentially a video capturing a performance of Woods sitting still in a guarded, unwavering position while everything around her is moving. She is wearing hunting clothes and a satin bonnet featuring an American flag that was dyed lavender and embellished with the text "The Right To Life." The text was taken from a written reflection she received in response to the question "What is worth fighting for?"

The work is accompanied by Fourth of July audio that she captured on the porch of her childhood home in Charlotte, NC. In the audio, you can hear fireworks, cicadas, and karaoke. It sounds like a war zone, but at the same time it's accompanied by the sound of people singing and celebrating.



"Every Fourth of July feels weird to me. It does not feel like a day of celebration but a day that personifies the reality of constantly feeling at war in a country that was built off of free labor by my enslaved ancestors. Essentially the performance is about agency and no longer claiming or allowing ourselves to take on the labels of victimhood, but to reverse the roles and put power back in our hands. Those that are often preyed on assume the role of predators through confidence, strength, and the unwavering knowledge of self-worth." - Stephanie J. Woods

Weave Idolatry

Vinyl images, woven synthetic/
human hair weave, and black
body paint, 2016

"The "Weave Idolatry" series explores the tactile and visual dimensions of hair, portraying the "weave" as a mask that both obscures and highlights Black female identity. The photographic portraits combine visual and narrative elements that cut to the heart of long-standing cultural tropes surrounding the presentation and perception of Black hair." - C24 Gallery



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work fuses a relationship between fiber and digital technology to examine performative behavior and the cognitive effects of forced cultural assimilation. My research surveys the psychological impact of intergenerational trauma, the politicization of afro hair, and unravels the everyday coping devices and affirmations we establish to survive. In addition to fiber, I further explore these concepts by employing photography, video, sculpture, and community-engaged projects in my practice. My passion for interdisciplinary approaches and material language is evident through my cross-disciplinary collaborations, the implementation of symbolic materials and imagery that examines domestic spaces, and alternative realities that reference Black American culture and the American South.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Stephanie J. Woods is a multimedia artist from Charlotte, NC, currently based in Albuquerque, NM, where she is an assistant professor of interdisciplinary art at University of New Mexico.

Woods' earned an MFA in new media sculpture and is the recipient of several residencies and fellowships, including Black Rock Senegal, the Fine Arts Work Center fellowship, ACRE Residency, the McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists Residency, and Penland School of Craft. Her work is featured in the permanent collection at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art in Richmond, VA. She has also exhibited at Smack Mellon and at Tiger Strikes Asteroid, both in Brooklyn, NY. Additionally, her work has been featured in BOMB Magazine, Art Papers, Burnaway, and the Boston Art Review.

Gallery Hours: Monday-Friday, 1-5 PM

Cowles Myles Collier East and West Galleries

Porter Family Memorial Fine Arts Building

Frances P. and Dennie L. McCrary Gallery

Valeria McCullough Murphey Art Building



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