



away, completely: denigrate

Libita Clayton, Halima Haruna, Ashley Holmes, Eburn Sodipo
curated by Languid Hands

14th November 2019 – 1st February 2020

Private view 14th November, 6-8pm

narrative projects is pleased to invite you to the opening of our upcoming exhibition *away, completely: denigrate* curated by Languid Hands.

This group exhibition brings together four artists: Eburn Sodipo (London); Ashley Holmes (Sheffield); Halima Haruna (Lagos/Boston/London); and Libita Clayton (Bristol) to present new commissions responding to the etymology of the word denigrate, its etymology “to blacken, completely”, or “to make black” and the ideas that its lineage evokes across a range of mediums.

‘Did we surprise our teachers who had niggling doubts about the picayune brains of small black children who reminded them of clean pickaninnies on a box of laundry soap? How muddy is the Mississippi compared to the third-longest river of the darkest continent? In the land of the Ibo, the Hausa, and the Yoruba, what is the price per barrel of nigrescence? Though slaves, who were wealth, survived on niggardly provisions, should inheritors of wealth fault the poor enigma for lacking a dictionary? Does the mayor demand a recount of every bullet or does city hall simply neglect the black alderman’s district? If I disagree with your beliefs, do you chalk it up to my negligible powers of discrimination, supposing I’m just trifling and not worth considering? Does my niggling concern with trivial matters negate my ability to negotiate in good faith? Though Maroons, who were unruly Africans, not loose horses or lazy sailors, were called renegades in Spanish, will I turn any blacker if I renege on this deal?’

Harryette Mullen, Denigration, From Present Tense: Poets in the World

In popular lexicon, the English word *to denigrate* is used to describe the act of defaming, belittling, maligning, disparaging or slandering someone or something; specifically affecting the reputation or social standing of it. However, the etymological root of the word illuminates the anti-blackness that is inherent in the English language and it is as follows. *-Niger-* is Latin for "black"; *denigrationem* is Late Latin for "a blackening." The Late Latin *de-* does not mean "the opposite or reverse of," as *de-* so often does; in this case, as in *denude* and *declaim*, it means "away, completely"; and so, the etymological root of the word *denigrate* is "to blacken completely."

Afro-pessimist theorist Frank B Wilderson III employs a linguistic analogy to describe that which is unspoken as it relates to suffering and anti-blackness, referring to these fundamental yet un(der)articulated concepts upon which the world as we know it is built as "ontological grammars". Grammar is that which goes unspoken when we speak, underwriting and structuring speech itself. Poet Harryette Mullen's poem *Denigration* attempts to speak the ontological grammar which structures language. She takes this linguistic exploration further than the simple and limited black/white good/bad dichotomy to analyse a number of commonly used English words which have this, seemingly hidden, anti-black sentiment whilst also interrogating the complex corporeal effects of this psycholinguistic association. Her work explores how language reinscribes blackness with inferiority, not as a negative stereotype but as an ongoing act of psychological anti-black violence which has placed the black in a "zone of nonbeing", or as Wilderson calls it, social death.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a satellite programme that will take place between November 2019 and January 2020, inviting artists to contribute live performances across various sites. The full programme and locations will be announced shortly. Follow @languidhands and @narrative_projects on instagram for updates.

Languid Hands (Imani Robinson & Rabz Lansiquot, formerly of sorryyoufeeluncomfortable collective) is a London-based artistic and curatorial collaboration between DJ, filmmaker and curator Rabz Lansiquot and writer, facilitator and live art practitioner Imani Robinson. They began collaborating together in 2015 through their work with sorryyoufeeluncomfortable (SYFU) collective. Their work is informed by ongoing explorations in Black and queer studies, Black creative practice, Black liberatory praxis and queer methodologies. They are currently showing their latest work *Towards a Black Testimony Prayer/Protest/Peace* at Jerwood Arts, U.K. as part of the group exhibition *Collaborate!* and also at Stroom Den Haag, NL.

Libita Clayton is a UK based artist, her solo and collaborative projects explore performance, print, text, and sound to reflect/refract containers of memory. She creates installations and poems that are immersive, visceral and disruptive. Applying techniques in collage to build a polyphony of voices that reposition notions of marginalised and hidden histories. In doing so, Claytons practice cultivates the holes and gaps exposed in dominant colonial narratives, to fertilise decolonial processes of thought. Sampling from within these abundant gaps, the work wanders a territory of trauma, memory and vision to remap a fugitive landscape inspired by; speculative fiction, oral/aural histories, subcultures, sound ecologies, archives and activism.

Libita has recently been awarded the; Developing Your Creative Practice, Arts Council England Fund, (2019-2020), Frelands Foundation Programme in association with Gasworks (2018-19), Triangle Network Fellowship, Bagfactory, Johannesburg (2018). Claytons selected works include; *Quantum Ghost*, solo

exhibition, Gasworks and Spike Island, UK (2019), *I'm not my...my injuries are healed now but I still don't remember things*, Cabaret Voltaire, Switzerland (2019) and Royal College of Art, UK (2018), *Acqua Alta - typical political*, Diaspora Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale, (2017).

Halima Haruna is a Nigerian artist and designer living in the U.S. Her creative practice revolves around cultural theory based on Nigerian socio-politics, mediated through performance and video. Her research interests are at the intersection of the decolonisation of knowledge and epistemology through spiritual practice. She recently completed a fellowship with Digital Earth 2019, a program formed around the construction of images of the Earth's technosphere. Her most recent work is part of the 2019 Bamako Encounters - African Biennial of Photography in Mali.

Ashley Holmes (b. Luton 1990, based in Sheffield) is an interdisciplinary artist working across moving image, installation, performance, music and radio broadcasts. Holmes' work and research considers the traditions and language of visual and aural histories of the Black identity, with an in-depth consideration for how they are carried across generations throughout history. Ashley Holmes studied at Sheffield Hallam University graduating with a BA (Hons) in Contemporary Fine Art in 2013. Recent selected exhibitions and projects include; Survey, Jerwood Arts, London, UK; ...and their tooth, finest gold, Les Urbaines, Lausanne, Switzerland; Cry Then Win Then Lose Reaction, Two Queens, Leicester, UK (solo); Money Cyant Fool Them Again 1.1, Basel, Switzerland (solo); Starless Midnight, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.

Ebun Sodipo is a writer and visual artist. Sodipo's work interrogates and excavates knowledge production, identity construction, the everyday and online social networks. They also produce immersive dissonant installations and short videos. The work aims to provoke questions about categories and their specific histories, to trouble notions of a 'natural' state of being and of knowing, and most importantly to give place to everyday diasporic, marginalised practices as forms of art: as forms of creative living, of lives that constantly offer alternatives to hegemonic ways of being and knowing. Sodipo's work finds its impetus in their social positionality/ most salient identities: they are queer, non-binary, migrant, African, AMAB, middle class, artist and Black. Their written work attempts to examine the category of blackness and its relationship to modernity as an originary concept. Sodipo has spoken on panels about race, skin colour, history, masculinity, religion, intersectionality. As part of the collective The Black House, Sodipo temporarily takes over spaces and transforms them to create warm, inviting, familiar, and rejuvenating black homes. They presented work in the group show Making Ground at Edinburgh's Embassy Gallery and had writing featured in Issue 9 of Arcadia Missa's How To Sleep Faster publication.



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