

Reparative Encounters:

Stitching fragmented histories through artistic research

ABSTRACT

This article explores what happens when artists, who have been separated by coloniality, meet across different geographies. Which experiences, vocabularies and strategies resonate across different spaces, how are different practices transformed through encounter, and how can they, in dialogue, reveal new horizons for repairing colonial legacies? The article explores these questions drawing on the ongoing work of the Reparative Encounters network for artistic research. Established in 2023, Reparative Encounters brings together artists and curators from the US Virgin Islands, Ghana, Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark, locations differently impacted by Danish colonialism. Throughout 2023-2024 we have organised three encounters — in Nuuk, St. Croix and Kumasi — where we met to share artistic practices with each other and to learn from each context. In this article, we reflect on these three encounters to create an “alterarchive” of the insights and possibilities that began to emerge from these meetings. Activating our method of working alongside each other, we write alongside, bringing together reflections, images and poems, to consider what happens when our bodies, histories and practices meet across various locations. Throughout, we reflect on the relation between artistic research, repair and coloniality, and foreground artistic praxis as a means for creating new vocabularies and spaces for inserting other forms of knowledge and being.

KEY WORDS

DANISH COLONIALISM, ARTISTIC RESEARCH, REPARATIVE, US VIRGIN ISLANDS, GHANA, NUNARPUT/KALAALLIT NUNAAT

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INTRODUCTION

What happens when artists, who have been separated by coloniality, meet across different geographies? Which experiences, vocabularies and strategies resonate across these different spaces, how are their practices transformed through encounter, and how can they [artworks/artists/curators], in dialogue with each other, reveal new horizons for repairing colonial legacies? In this article, we speculate on these questions drawing on the ongoing work of the *Reparative Encounters* network for artistic research. Established in 2023 after prior collaborative experiments in the artistic and academic spheres, *Reparative Encounters* brings together artists and curators from the US Virgin Islands (USVI), Ghana, Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark, locations differently impacted by Danish colonialism.

Our premise is that Nordic colonialism had — and continues to have — both entangling and disconnecting effects: while it forcefully connected regions through the material entanglement of people, capital and technologies, it also displaced and severed people from their own histories, identity, kinship, archives, cultural and spiritual expressions (Bastian, 2003; Graugaard & Ambrosius Høgfeldt, 2023; Hunter 2023). While Danish colonialism was enforced, experienced and contested in fundamentally distinct

Julie Edel Hardenberg, Columbus Landing, Saint Croix. 2024. Video still.

ways in Kalaallit Nunaat, USVI and Ghana, our network works from the premise that there are numerous connections across these experiences that remain to be explored. We draw inspiration from historian Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) in which she investigates the "often obscured connections" between European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Lowe, 2015, p. 1).

The transatlantic slave trade is one example that caused a massive uprooting of people and a radical cut from their history and kinship between the African continent and the plantations in the Americas. The forced assimilation of Inuit people through historically disruptive practices such as the removal of Indigenous children from their contexts and forced adoption into Danish families is another example of split and alienation from one's own history and identity. While these practices differ in time, space and scope, they produce colonial legacies that can be explored in dialogue. We suggest that connecting such legacies has the potential to create a critical vocabulary to name structures of power, to foster mutual and self-knowledge, and to animate solidarity across different struggles for decolonisation, sovereignty and liberation.

Our network is composed of core members La Vaughn Belle, visual artist based in Saint Croix, USVI; Julie Edel Hardenberg, an Inuk-Kalaaleq visual artist and researcher from Nuuk, currently a PhD fellow at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and University of Copenhagen; Dorothy Amenuke, a visual artist based in Kumasi and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST); Bernard Akoi-Jackson, artist, curator, writer and educator who works from Accra/Tema/Kumasi, and Lecturer in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST. Both Amenuke and Akoi-Jackson are members of the artist collective and art incubator blaxTARLINES. Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, a visual artist, independent researcher and educator based in Denmark; and Daniela Agostinho, Portuguese visual culture scholar and curator, working from Aarhus University.

Our work as a group builds on previous collaborations that grew out of the 2017 centennial of the sale of the former Danish West Indies to the U.S.A. and the digitisation of the Danish colonial archives, including *Archives that Matter. Infrastructures for Sharing Unshared Histories* (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al, 2018; Agostinho et al 2019); *Connecting with the Archives: Reclaiming Memory* (CHANT, 2018); La Vaughn Belle's exhibition *For Alberta and Victor: A Collection of Conjurings and Opacities* (Belle, 2021-2022); and the audio walk *Voices in the Shadows of Monuments* (Tshibanda et al, 2022).

Building on these projects, we conceive the network's artistic practices and collaborations as a process of making *alterarchives* (James, 2024). We draw on curator Erica Moiah James' usage of the term "alterarchive" – which she mobilises to describe Belle's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* – to situate our artistic practices as interventions in and disruptions of the colonial archive. These interventions not only inscribe perspectives that have been left untold, but also create new aesthetic forms with which to record those perspectives. With the prefix *alter*, we signal that we view these practices as transformative, as

actively reshaping historical archives and narratives, not least by engaging in *poiesis*, that is, in creating new artistic forms that reimagine what an archive can do.

We share an understanding of artistic research as a practice that "seeks to create new questions and new forms of knowledge, using the kinds of embodied-material-conceptual thinking that goes hand in hand with art making" (Cotter, 2024, p. 15). Artistic research's critical potential lies in posing questions to the limits of our most established ways of knowing, while at the same time acknowledging that the limits of knowing are tied to the limits of being. In this approach to artistic research already lies a relationship to feminist and decolonial practices, in that we have run up against the foundations and limits of knowledge and of who counts as a subject (imposed by modernity/coloniality).

The notion of the titular *Reparative* signals our various approaches to decoloniality through artistic research. Central to our practices is an understanding that colonialism separates and alienates, creating ruptures that remain to be repaired. We understand reparative not as the reconstitution of something to its previous whole, but as being tied to the poetic and creative dimensions of repair, as the possibility of telling varying stories that colonisation occluded or thwarted. Artistic research intervenes in these spaces of rupture by creating new aesthetic forms and relationships. We conceive repairing as a process that is ongoing, rather than something that will ever be complete. And we see conversations between communities that have been differently impacted by colonialism, and creative solidarity between them, as central to this process. Inspired by Ferreira da Silva (2022), we approach the reparative as an ethics and "unattainable horizon" that we must strive towards. There is no repairing without decolonisation, without dismantling and unraveling the structures that have been put in place by modernity to segregate and exploit.

Our previous collaborations showed a need to de-center Denmark and its terms of discussion on the legacies of colonialism, to instead facilitate conversations across the USVI, Kalaallit Nunaat and Ghana, to center the knowledge, vocabularies and practices which are often erased from historical archives and contemporary discussions about the ongoing legacies of Danish colonialism.

Throughout 2023-2024 we organised three encounters — in Nuuk, St. Croix and Kumasi — where we met to share artistic practices with each other and local publics and to learn from each context.

In Nuuk, we gathered around Hardenberg's exhibition *Nipangersitassaanngitsut // Those Who Can't be Silenced* at Nuuk Art Museum (Hardenberg, 2023) with the public programme *First Encounter*. In Saint Croix the encounter occurred around Belle's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* (Belle, 2023-2024), curated by Erica Moiah James, at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted, with the programme *We Were Never Meant to Meet*. The third encounter was in Kumasi, Ghana, organised around Amenuke's exhibition *FIGURES OF STITCH AND OTHER FIGURES* (Amenuke, 2024) at the Great Hall Foyer, KNUST, curated by Bernard Akoi-Jackson, in collaboration with the Department of Painting and Sculpture (KNUST) and blaxTARLINES KUMASI.

The exhibitions became entryways into each artist's practice, which gave us an opportunity to get to know the practice of each artist in more depth, whilst also working as a lens into the context that they emerge from and speak to. These anchor exhibitions became a vehicle for dialogue between the artists of the network and brought us into active contact with practitioners and communities who are becoming valuable associates to the network.

In Kumasi, we also curated an experimental collective exhibition/programme entitled "... flowing and floating like fragments and extensions: of waters, lands and skies..." (Reparative Encounters network, 2024) at Opoku Ware II Museum at KNUST, which was a first experiment in exhibiting our practices together,

featuring works that we created in conversation throughout the project.

When we met in Nuuk, we more or less by chance created a method of working alongside one another. This became a repeated method throughout the encounters in St. Croix and Kumasi, with the artworks traveling and changing through the different spaces, enfolding contexts and conversations into the pieces. This method has also shaped this article: we are writing alongside one another, sharing reflections, images, poems and artworks (e.g. Acharya & Muasya, 2023; Diallo et al [Kollektiv Omsorg, 2023]), to consider what happens when our bodies, histories and practices meet across various locations. Eschewing a linear form, the article attempts to preserve the rhythm and eruptions of sensation and thought sparked throughout the encounters. Inspired by our joint exhibition *flowing and floating like fragments and extensions*, we experiment with fragments as carriers of meaning to be stitched and as vehicles for conversation.

I. FIRST ENCOUNTER: NUUK

Of Perceptions and Realities

What makes perceptions and what constitutes realities?

What are those markers that inform whether one is considered "this" or "that"?

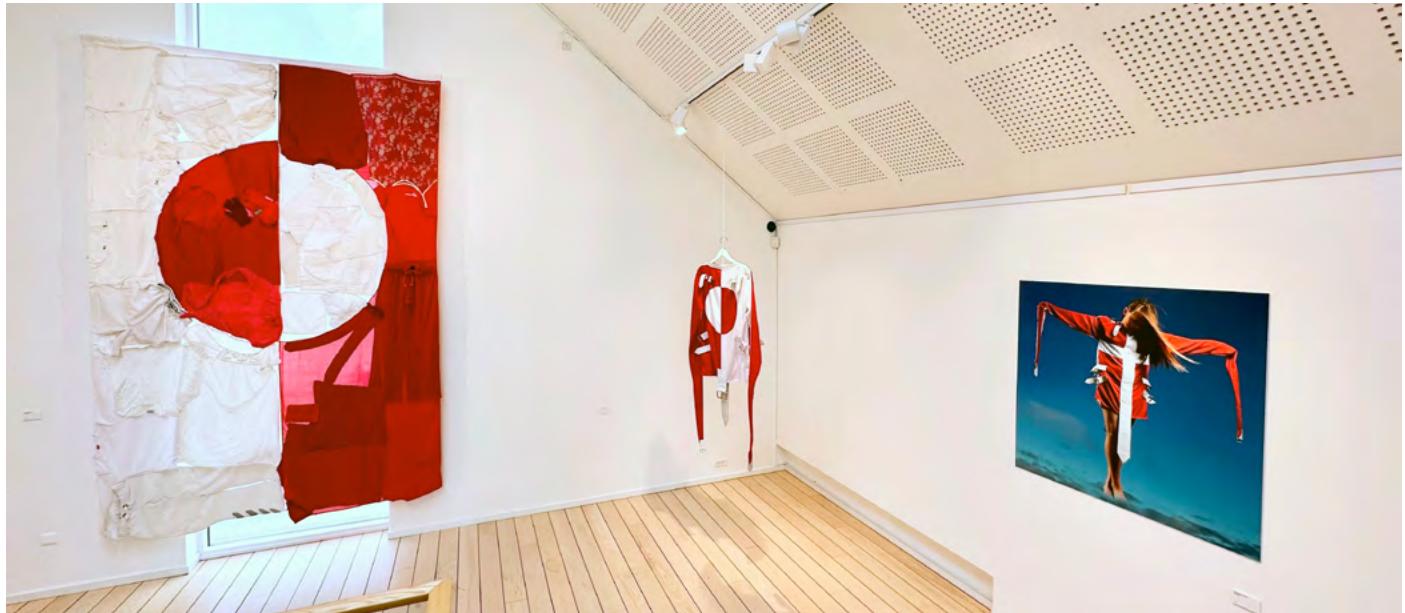
How are our Norths, Easts, Wests and Souths designated?

Who determines who we are and what we can be called?

There is always a palpable tension between what is seen and what we wish to show

There is often a rift between what is intended in perceptions and the intent that is aroused by realities

In the end, realities are what they are and as for perceptions...



MY FIRST ENCOUNTER

My first introduction to Greenland comes in 2017, 100 years on the anniversary of the sale and transfer of the former Danish West Indies to the United States. There was a renaming of course. We are now called the U.S. Virgin Islands even though officially we are the Virgin Islands of the United States. This transfer also began the U.S. relinquishing their claims to Greenland, leaving Denmark to claim it entirely for themselves. This part we do not learn when we commemorate *Transfer Day* every year on March 31st. So, in a way it makes sense that my first encounter with Greenland would be inside a Danish museum in a new exhibit on the cusp of the centennial called “Voices From the Colonies”. The introductory text reads:

The Danes colonise areas of their own. From Greenland in the north, to India in the south. No colony is the same. The only thing they have in common is that the colonised are always non-European. Each colony has its own terms for existence and the power relations between people. This is where we begin. In the Danish colonies and the encounter between the colonisers and the colonised.

I know we have something more in common than ‘we are not European’. I also know we have a begin-

Julie Edel Hardenberg, *Nipangersitassaanngitsut // Those Who Can't be Silenced* at Nuuk Art Museum, 2023. Installation view.

ning before encounters with Europeans. In the next panel text I read I am so bothered by it all I take a picture of it to remember.

There are always souls to be saved. Danish missionaries come to Greenland to convert Inuit Greenlanders to a life as good Christians. But they are to continue their traditional life as hunters. Because the Danes can make a tidy profit on sealskins, whale blubber and baleen. The Danish colonial power establishes a trade monopoly and system that regulates the lives of Greenlanders. The Greenlanders themselves are skeptical. Danes are not the only people they can trade with. Whaling ships from other countries regularly sail by the coast of Greenland.

Whose voice is this? It's as if the museum narrator's voice suffered from some kind of disease of colonial entanglement. Or maybe they were never separate and distinct at all. Regardless, and for the record, there are not always souls to be saved, and the “good” before Christian is relative, and there is no need for permission to continue your traditional life as hunters of whale, seal or baleen. Isn't it a wonder how words can be so damn obfuscating all while seemingly telling a truth.

Years later when I actually go to Greenland I first feel the familiar smell of salt in the air even though it's in the summer and very cold. At Julie's house that sat on a mountain I saw bits of glaciers floating in the harbor like broken teeth. They were gleaming even though they were still evidence of some kind of decay. There were no trees, yet there was still something familiar to me in the landscape. It was the attempt to order nature, to be in charge of the ice and the mountains and the sea.

Nearby I saw a statue of the missionary from the museum text. I won't bother to mention his name, but he towers on top of a hill facing the sea. It reminded me of the sugar mills we have at home and I know that may seem unrelated. One is human and the other destroyed humans. This structure of a man is singular while there are over 100 sugar mills dotting the landscape on St. Croix. It is true though that they both brave the wind. What I feel is akin is how they seem to express time, how the tall bronze man seems to collapse time and how the coral and brick sugar mills ruin any possible division of past, present and future. They all are there to haunt us.

When we visit the Tunniit artist Ikimaliq Pikilak in her home I am entranced by the orange walls in her living room. They look like the kind of warm glowy orange of a sun receding beyond the horizon line. I can see Nuuk is like home in that way that there are horizon lines everywhere so it makes sense to me too that they would be on their faces marking the transitions of life, girl-woman, woman-mother. It's true these things deserve their own kind of monument.

In Julie's exhibition there is a picture of an Inuit girl that has braids and is wearing a t-shirt with the colors of the Jamaican flag. Her skin is light brown and as I look at Julie's play on race and presentation I realize that this girl looks so much like my own daughter that I take pictures of them both and create a collage on my phone to see them side by side. I show the group and we all marvel at the resemblance. It makes me wonder about the places where lines are not fixed, where there is slippage and the contours are unable

to hold the power of rigidity and the separateness it creates. Instead, the power transfers in an ability to amble and yield.

On our last night we take a picture together. It harkens to the picture taken in 1912 with people who were brought from the colonies to Denmark to take a craft class. This time we bring ourselves together redrawing the colonial lines.

I KNOW YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN

I recall our film-screening and conversation in Nuuk, where your works appeared "alongside" one another — your voices crossing by chance or association: A coin in Julie's *My First Coin* (2022) echoed the coin in La Vaughn's *In the Place of Shadows* (2021), given by the Queen of Denmark to Alberta Viola Roberts and Victor Cornelius, two children taken from the Danish West Indies to be exhibited at the 1905 Colonial Exhibition at Tivoli gardens. Their stories of forced removal echoed the many Inuit children taken from families in Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark until this day (e.g Hunter, 2003). In your film, La Vaughn, you speak to Alberta and Victor, while recalling your own move as a child from the USVI to Wisconsin:

"When you leave a colony to go to the mainland, you basically migrate to the same country. You did that too in a way, leaving the Danish West Indies to go to Denmark. But a place inside a place does not mean that is the same thing... different rules, different gaze, I know you know what I mean".

I remember how the film resonated deeply within the audience...



Julie Edel Hardenberg, Blondigenous, 2024.

WHITENDIGENOUS

J: You know, as an Inuk Kalaaleq - Greenlander I was thinking about whether I would be considered white when I go to Ghana?

B: Yes, you will be considered white.

J: But I don't consider myself a white person. For example, when my daughter was studying at an international high school and took part in a discussion about representation, she was perceived as white, even though she told them that she is an indigenous inuk – with blond hair and blue eyes.

B: Yes, but she will still be considered a white person.

WORKING ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER

In Nuuk, we gathered at Julie and Svend Hardenberg's café, Kaffivik, to work with our different artistic practices "side by side" in an intimate café setting. Customers came and went, we met new people who brought new perspectives to the conversations. The warmth in the room and the smell of the materials at hand — jute sacks, sealskin, Dannebrog flags, watercolour, charcoal, coffee — gave me a glimpse of what an artistic research environment shaped by other affects and materialities might look and feel like. This vision deepened during our third Encounter in Kumasi, visiting the MFA/PhD programme at The Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST. The department has succeeded in decolonizing the curriculum and stifled Eurocentric conceptions of art handed down by the British colonial system. As members of blaxTARLINES and through their teaching, Dorothy and Bernard have contributed to the development of their own pedagogy and a "quiet revolution" (Kissiedu & Simba, 2021) that involves concepts such as transforming art from "commodity to gift" and the "gown must go to town". Practices and pedagogies that are material consciousness, collaborative and community oriented, and turn away from the art object as commodity and something only to be enjoyed by a privileged elite.



La Vaughn Belle, *Being of Myth and Memory*, Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts, Frederiksted, 2024. Installation view.

II. WE WERE NEVER MEANT TO MEET: SAINT CROIX

The second encounter took place within the framework of Belle's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* (Belle, 2023-2024) held at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted, Saint Croix. In the text introducing the exhibition, curator Erica Moiah James writes:

Living requires us to remember. But how does one live, thrive, dream about futures when so much of one's memories have been erased; when remembering requires our bodies to relive the violence and shame of the past, making forgetting a form of protection? How do we live fully when the landscape we encounter daily holds histories of our subjection? And how might we craft post-colonial futures in this landscape, the same arena as our abjection?

In the exhibition, we sensed how colonial histories are present and make themselves felt everywhere,

in landscapes, bodies and atmospheres, as Belle creates a sensorium with which to register them. But her work also registers how landscapes, bodies and atmospheres have always had a poetic capacity to transform and become an unruly pathway towards their own kind of sovereignty. Belle's work remakes the fragmentary traces of subjection into new narratives, images and forms that create spaces for other stories, subjects and possibilities to emerge.

Belle's practice offers a vocabulary with which to articulate our work with reparative encounters: she makes it possible to re-member ruptured histories, register colonial effects that continue to be obfuscated and unacknowledged, and at the same time she creates forms and narratives with which to reimagine and reorient oneself, opening up portals that give us access to other versions of past present and future (Sewer, 2023).

In Saint Croix, we titled our screening and public programme *We were never meant to meet*, a reference to

La Vaughn's video work *Between the Dusk and Dawn (how to navigate an unsettled empire)* (2023), in which Belle positions herself between two locations, Point Udall in St. Croix and Point Udall in Guam, spaces that represent the eastern and westernmost points of the American empire. Filming the sunrise in St. Croix and the sunset in Guam, Belle draws a video-cartography, bringing together two distant locations that "were never meant to meet". In a similar vein, our network brings together disparate positions within the Danish empire whose connections are obscured by the very workings of coloniality. By meeting across differences, sharing experiences and reflections, we unearth and create new "intimacies" — not only the historical intimacies between continents concealed in archival silences, but also new creative relations that give rise to new vocabularies from those silences.



Julie Edel Hardenberg, *Meant to meet*, 2024.

MEANT TO BE

We were never meant to meet. The sentence struck me, especially the words *meant to*. I read the lines on a poster advertising the evening's film screening and artist talk in which I would participate as part of La Vaughn's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted.

Being born in Kalaallit Nunaat in the 1970s was a time of baby booms — a period when Danish workers came to Greenland seeking opportunities, like

my father. My mother had me when she was young, so I grew up in a household not just with her, but also with my grandparents, uncles, and aunties. They all gave me a lot of positive attention, especially my grandfather, who was my beloved mentor and friend.

One day, while playing with other kids, some of them asked me whether I had a father or not. Until then, it hadn't been an issue for me, so when I got home, I asked my mother about him. When I learned he was a white Dane that had moved back to Denmark, it surprised me, but it also sparked my curiosity towards the Danes in my hometown and the presence of Danish culture.

I soon realized that many other kids typically had an Inuk mother and a Danish father, and apparently, most of them didn't know their fathers, just like me. For me, it often created a sense of ambivalence, because it became obvious that I wasn't "meant to be" since I was a result of a brief romance between two young people. To cope, I created my own narrative about myself, that gave me legibility and allowed me to dissociate from the feeling of alienation.

At the time, I didn't have a perception of colonialism, or being a subject of coloniality. I just knew that I often felt alienated in my own hometown, as if I didn't belong there. There was always this sense of being observed and measured in society. I felt home with my Inuit Kalaallit family and peers, those who spoke my mother tongue Kalaallisut.

Later when I entered the institutions, like the public school system, I was again confronted with the feeling of being alienated. As a child, I quickly sensed an expectation to identify with one culture over the other, accompanied by the underlying question: Who do you belong to? — as if there was something at stake between the Kalaallit and the Danes.

This became clearer when we were divided in two classes — a Danish class and a Kalaallit class — a white class and a non-white class. I soon realized there were ethnic hierarchies, ranging from fair skin to dark skin, and that you weren't considered white un-

less you had blond hair and blue eyes, just like the angels I'd seen in pictures. And I knew I didn't look like an angel.

Later, when I decided to study abroad, I got in touch with my father and met his family. It gave me an insight into Danish culture and the narratives around Denmark's presence in Kalaallit Nunaat. Studying in other Nordic countries made me aware of the limits of the discussions concerning colonialism, since most Scandinavians lack both the foundational understanding and the vocabulary to address Nordic colonialism (Lynge, 2006).

I later understood why, when I became familiar with the term "Nordic Exceptionalism" (Loftsdóttir &

Jensen, 2016). My mere presence and articulation of alternative perspectives often felt challenging for others. I was often seen as the one creating awkward situations, particularly among Danes who still perceive themselves as helping us "develop" our society. From a historical perspective, they view themselves as the most humane colonizers in a world of inhumane ones and often expect gratitude in return.

Over time my perspective and longing for a place where I could belong to, has shifted from striving to be accepted, to instead appreciating places and communities that have experienced coloniality. This has given me a profound sense of belonging — a feeling of being *meant to be*.

Rigsfællesskab

i en verden

af magtkampe

slås i om mig

som var jeg jeres egen

blive til noget

men helst vor egen

som et lille redskab

vi bruge kan

Kapital

du ser mig som et stykke inventar

henvist til mørke og forglemmelse

altid forbundet med handel

og ideer om storhed

men hør

se og mærk mig

for det menneske jeg er

for den jeg er



Julie Edel Hardenberg, Empowerment & Empowered, 2024.

Danskhed

der var engang
en fortælling
om de mest humane kolonisatorer
blandt de inhumane

danskhed i Danmark

danskhed i Grønland

danskhed på Færøerne

Nordatlanten og Island

danskhed i Dansk Vestindien

Tranquebar

Guldkysten og mange andre steder

Veltilfreds

Min brune 'etnicitet'
står i kontrast
til min danske
værtalenhed

ENCOUNTERING THE REPARATIVE ENCOUNTERS...?

Experiencing art is not just about a final product or object in an exhibition space but more importantly the process of making/creating. It thus involves all the gatherings within the experience in various spaces.

Spaces are identified through various means and impregnated with the duality of homogeneity and heterogeneity with their inherent politics of inclusion and exclusion or centre and periphery. These characteristics of space exist within the everyday, where spatial perceptions have grown to include diverse aspects of the individual's social life and experiences and social relations, where space is socially produced as reiterated in Tuan's (1990) notions of topophilia and topophobia. Consequently, Space is produced by subjectivities and psychic states in which social relations take place (Rogoff, 2000). Traveling from Ghana to Nuuk and the USVI thus comes with personal and communal experiences that reveal how space and the art experience are bound.

Commonalities hit spaces in the presence of movements and exchanges. This was the case of the art experience in Nuuk Art Museum, when we experienced each other's practice in Julie's exhibition, our film screening and presentations. Ensuing conversations brought along similarities and differences in art experience of artists and audience about "the everyday" as expression in and of art. In Hardenberg's café, Kaffivik, where remnants of jute sacks from the café's roastery were used by artists, art experience was not just about the use of the jute sack for artwork but the aroma in the atmosphere. Coffee here, coffee there... Hmm!!! The aroma. The café space became an art studio for the moment of our visit. Swimming in the coffee aroma brought my mind to my own work, *Coded*, from my exhibition, *Twists, Turns and Broken Doors* (Amenuke, 2017). *Coded* was the experience of aroma too, but that of cocoa. A room filled with empty cocoa jute sacks. These sacks filled the exhibition space like the way the fermented cocoa smell engulfed the exhibition space, so similar to the

art-making experience at *Kaffivik*. Spaces may be similarly different...

St. Croix also possessed the experience of the familiar and unfamiliar. Moving through the township of Saint Croix comes along with memories of colonial histories, similarities in objects and spaces of St. Croix and Ghana. Ghana's forts for example, Cape Coast and Elmina Castle, which were encountered in the third encounter and that of Fort Christiansvaern in Christiansted beamed the thought of independence as one engages these historical spaces. What could be freedom to an artist as she engages these spaces? Could these lead an artist to engage elements of flight and/ or swimming off?

At the studio of La Vaughn in St. Croix, discarded materials from the Frederiksted carnival witnessed in the second encounter became a language of "flight" in the work *Over the Sea* I created. Feathers picked from the neighbourhood after the carnival became the main material for this work. Bold colours of the feathers were the choice for this "freedom flight". The feathers, arranged in an undulating manner on the upper surface of a plaid fabric from La Vaughn's studio, came with a painted expression of a seascape at the lower part of the work.

The experience of being together with colleague-artists, getting meals, drinking coconut at the beach etc. presents the practice of the everyday within the practice of art creation in a special way.



Dorothy Amenuke, *Over The Sea* (2024)

III. FLOWING AND FLOATING LIKE FRAGMENTS AND EXTENSIONS: OF WATERS, LANDS AND SKIES.... & FIGURES OF STITCH: GHANA

Flowing and floating

When in the skies,

Water flows

And so does the land.

When in the water,

The sky floats

And so does the land

And as for us,

We all flow and float

THE FIGURES OF STITCH AS A FIGURE FOR REPARATIVE PRACTICES



Dorothy Amenuke, *Multiple Layers*, FIGURES OF STITCH AND OTHER FIGURES, KNUST, Kumasi (2024)

The third encounter took place within Dorothy Amenuke's exhibition *Figures of Stitch and Other Figures* (2024). In her artist talk, Dorothy explained: "I understand stitch as a term binding and holding together thought. When a human being is opened up through surgery, you have to bring them back together through stitching" (Amenuke & Akoi-Jackson, 2024). She described how community is also stitched into the work through participatory practice. Encountering the work physically revealed the materiality of the "stitch": burned, cut, sewn, woven, glued, moulded from paper pulp, dyed by hand, or patched over other stitches. "Stitch" itself becomes the figure, reflecting Dorothy's sculptural and spatial sensitivity.

Through this expansive notion of the stitch, Dorothy's praxis prefigures the reparative as invoked in our network, *Reparative Encounters*. In previous work we noted that the legacy of slavery may be irreparable — it's "beyond repair" (Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2022; Scott, 2018). Rather than signaling a finite gesture, we emphasise the "reparative practice" as processual and transformative. A feat we may never fully complete, but one that compels us to build infrastructures



Bernard Akoi-Jackson, *Slow walk* (2024), performative intervention at Opoku Ware II Museum, Kumasi.

of solidarity that foster a different present and future. Here stitch expands our notion of the reparative to become an ability to bind and hold thoughts together through the material encounters. With Dorothy's analogy to surgery, I am reminded that, as we engage in reparative practices, we continue being broken anew. This physicality and materiality of the reparative practice that stitches and pieces fragments together, also became apparent in the physical and material encounter with the work of Julie's exhibition in Nuuk and La Vaughn's exhibition in St. Croix. What all of your work reveals is the multilayered, temporal aspect of the reparative practice: as an enduring, long-term process, that layers new stitches over old ones.

In Dorothy's large-scale installations, pillows grow into and out of each other, occupying and reshaping space. The pillow-works stem from the saying "let's go see Abrewa": the elderly woman in the community whom everyone turns to in times of difficulty. To "go see Abrewa" also means to sleep over a problem, to "give it to the pillow".

I can't help but think of the story of Abrewa as a metaphor for artistic research. A process of dealing with problems and questions considered and woven into fabric, some long, some short, some soft, some firm and entangled. The story of Abrewa also invites us to consider the opacity (Glissant, 1997) of artistic research as a process of unfolding and folding, through which some knowledge is revealed, while other parts remain concealed. Through Abrewa, the matriarchal figure, it also asserts artistic research as a form that emerges from feminist, decolonial art practices that actively engage with problems in our communities. This also recalls your pillows, Julie, that you have produced between Nuuk, St. Croix and Ghana and throughout your PhD. They become a way of working through your research questions on the embodied experience of colonial alienation — and giving those concepts and experiences a body (Hardenberg & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2023).

THE LAST BATH ON MY WAY HOME

The very first time I really understood my place in the world happened while reading *Roots* by Alex Haley (1976). It happened when I was 12 years old while reading the description of the journey that is described as the Middle Passage, the one where captured Africans cross the Atlantic ocean packaged together with their skin rotting in their own vomit and shit. It was then that I understood why I was living on these mountaintops peeking out of the Caribbean Sea, how my five grandmothers got here before me. For hours an upset of tears and sorrow reached back toward a home that I could only hold in my imagination. That imagined home was fraught with other people's description of what Africa was, it was as fragmented and colonized as most people's imag-



Assin Manso Ancestral Slave River Site, Ghana.
Photos: La Vaughn Belle & Julie Edel Hardenberg

inings of where I was. So I knew that my first trip to Africa would be another kind of reckoning.

One of the most moving and surprising parts of the journey occurred at a place called Assin Manso. It was known as the location of “The Last Bath”, the last place where captives would be bathed before the 40 mile walk to the castles on the coast. This place was in a lush bamboo filled forest with a river that parted in two. One side of the river was where the dead and dying were thrown and the other was where people would be bathed while still in chains. When I stepped up to put my feet in the water I was amazed to find gold dust glimmering in the sand. As I rubbed some of it along my forearm, the specks of gold remained. I then realized that those who were to be sold into slavery would have walked this leg of the journey glittering in gold. It’s not something I have ever heard or read anywhere, but only something I would have known after experiencing it myself. Such is the beauty and power of bodily knowledge which has become increasingly important in my practice.

Many people died on their way to this part of the Transatlantic Slave trade. Many more died on their way to the coast, then at the forts along the coast, then on the ships and then of course we know the cane fields were death camps. I understood in a new way what a miracle I am. On this side of the Atlantic to have survived is to be a fraction of the fraction of the fraction that did.

I loved being in Ghana. And although there is evidence in everything of the shared history of being colonized, it’s the first place I’ve been where I felt the colonial gaze wasn’t winning. There were so many moments of reprieve. Like when we visited Bonwire and witnessed kente cloth being made. I thought this was here before, after and will be in the future. It didn’t feel under threat in the way it feels to be constantly under threat at home.

What I left feeling is a sense that I must return. And not once, but forever, that this is a place I must always go back to, like the sea.

OUTRO: CRAFTING FUTURES



Dorothy Amenuke, *...Through the Sun.....* 2024.

What we know:

The past

The present

And the future?

That's not for us to know

But on this, we can speculate

And that's exciting enough....

We began this article with a series of questions: What happens when artists, who have been separated by coloniality, meet across different geographies? Which experiences, vocabularies and strategies resonate across these different spaces, how are their practices transformed through encounter, and how can they, in dialogue with each other, reveal new horizons for repairing colonial legacies?

Throughout our encounters, we have witnessed glimpses (of possibilities) that emerge when working alongside in the spaces created by colonial rupture. In the sun stitched by Amenuke in response to the sun setting on the horizon of Belle’s exhibition in Frederiksted. In Hardenberg’s strands of hair blow-

ing under the relentless wind on the shore of Columbus Landing in Saint Croix, a space of Indigenous resistance honoured in Belle's sculpture *Sovereign*. In their dialogue, they open up spaces of relation that Glissant theorised as new forms and epistemologies that emerge from the cracks inflicted by coloniality (1997).

In this article we have created an encounter between our practices, to share with each other and our readers the insights that emerge when our bodies, histories and practices meet across time and space. We conveyed our understanding that through collaborative artistic research, the forced ruptures of coloniality can be reimagined to produce a space for other vocabularies and experiences to emerge. We share

these insights to contribute to ongoing conversations about the relation between artistic practice, artistic research and decoloniality. We offered our evolving reflections on repair/reparative as a framework for thinking about the role of artistic practices in contexts of decolonisation: rather than striving towards an impossible reconstitution and closure (there is no restoring of what has been), the reparative creates new infrastructures, forms and possibilities from within the ruptures. These forms make it possible to reveal the overlooked, confront and reframe colonial structures, hold together different thoughts and experiences, and issue forth new concepts (*stitch, freedom flight, meant to be...*) with which to imagine and craft other futures.

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[2] The audio-walk Voices in the Shadows of Monuments featured contributions by Julie Edel Hardenberg, La Vaughn Belle and Bernard Akoi-Jackson among others. Reparative Encounters builds on previous research projects Entangled Archives, Archival Encounters, Min(d)ing the Academy and Reparative Practices in the Cultural Archive of Colonialism.

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