

JULIANA HUXTABLE

In her multidisciplinary practice, which comprises photography, music, writing, and text-based prints, **Juliana Huxtable** examines the nature of subjectivity and signification. Her work across these varied mediums is unified by a characteristically futuristic, post-Internet aesthetic that enables a complex critique of race, gender, and sexuality at a distance from the traditional strictures of identity and representation.

Originally from Bryan-College Station, Texas, a conservative town within America's Bible Belt region, which the artist describes as unforgiving of racial and sexual difference,¹ Huxtable first came to prominence in New York as a DJ and creator of SHOCK VALUE, a weekly club event and self-described "nightlife gender project."² The strategies of remixing, juxtaposition, and appropriation central to DJing are also deployed in her visual art, wherein fantastical self-portraits or diaristic texts often reference or repurpose diverse sources, from fashion, science fiction, and personal memory to YouTube comment threads and right-wing political rhetoric.

In her large-scale, text-based works, Huxtable's poetry appears in uppercase type against celestial backdrops. *Untitled (For Stewart)* (2012) chronicles the childhood navigation of identity through video-game avatars: The piece invokes the genre's enforcement of damaging gender binaries, evident in both the "UN-INTERESTINGLY PHALLIC/KAMEHAMEHA SUPER-HEROES,"³ as masculine archetypes or the "HYPER-PORNOGRAPHIC" bodies of femme avatars. Yet, it also touches on the possibility of queering virtual space through transgressive identification across this spectrum. "I DISCOVERED, USING MY VIRTUAL PUSSY TO STRADDLE THE BEEFY TRAPEZIUSES OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC CYBORG ATTACKERS," she writes, "THAT THE AWKWARD SHORTCOMINGS OF PUBESCENT LIFE COULD BE OVERCOME ONE PELVIC HEAD CRUSH AT A TIME." This perpetual overlaying and enmeshing of physical and virtual bodies reveals the artificial construction of gender in either realm, whereby identity is forged dialogically between self and society.

Though Huxtable often writes in the first person, her narrative style is not entirely autobiographical. She describes her writing process as "schizoanalytic," suggesting that the dominant voice within any given text encompasses multiple subjects.⁴ Her cadence shifts seamlessly between points of view and grammatical tenses. Treating language as fluid and associative, Huxtable's texts reflect the many lenses through which we process, and are processed by, others and the world around us.

Untitled (Casual Power) (2015) complicates the notion of place; the narrative centers around a walk through Harlem and the Bronx presenting the urban landscape via spatial and temporal movement rather than from a fixed position.

Huxtable interweaves architectural, political, pop-cultural, economic, and ecological perspectives on the city. The city is described as un-mappable, "BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF GPS SOFTWARE UNABLE TO SENSE THE WALL OF ASHES (FROM BUILDINGS BURNT FOR INSURANCE MONEY) AND AMASSED SMOKE FROM CRACK PIPES." Ever-changing and anachronistic, her portrayal of the city favors intimate knowledge and personal association over public monuments and maps: New York manifests in "BANTU KNOTS AND BALD HEADS," in the echoes of Aaliyah and Octavia Butler, in the "NEAR TROPICAL HEAT OF A TOPOS UNDER GREENHOUSE EFFECT," and in a century of civic policies that have engendered and capitalized on racial disenfranchisement.

Huxtable's photographic works likewise disrupt categories of representation, merging self-portraiture and fantasy. She has long been fascinated by the Nuwaubian Nation, a religious cult which emerged in the 1960s and combined elements from Abrahamic and animistic belief systems, Black Power philosophy, popular science, and conspiracy theories. Her imagined, Nuwaubian persona was famously monumentalized in Frank Benson's 3D-printed nude portrait of the artist, *Juliana* (2015), which was exhibited in *Surround Audience*, the 2015 New Museum Triennial. Invoking the classical archetype of the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, her reclining figure is given a sleek, metallic finish in synthetic shades of indigo and green.

Huxtable positions this character alternately in post-Internet, planetary dreamscapes and more familiar, earthly environments. In *Nuwaub Chair* (2012), she poses nude atop a table in a snowy yard, surrounded by wooden fencing, bare trees and a stars-and-stripes-patterned fold-out chair. Huxtable appears mystical and other-worldly, her upper body a gradient of cosmic hues, her gaze fixed intensely on the viewer. Defying the destructive visual representations of black women's bodies throughout history, Huxtable appears transcendent, freed from the constraints of categorization and body politics.

ALLISON YOUNG

¹ Hanna Hurr, "Juliana Huxtable," *Mask Magazine*, accessed August 2017, <http://maskmagazine.com/the-street-issue/work/juliana-huxtable>. In a 2014 interview with Mask Magazine, Huxtable recalls that, in her hometown, "there was a lot [of] gay-bashing, anti-abortion and racial tension."

² Petra Collins, "Petra Collins selects Juliana Huxtable," *Dazed*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/20742/1/petra-collins-selects-juliana-huxtable>. As Huxtable elaborates in the text, "Where was the nightlife run by women, cis, trans or otherwise? I just wanted a space where all of my friends could come together...where all of my trans friends could come without dealing with the anxiety that comes with many spaces."

³ Kamehameha is a common attack technique in the *Dragon Ball* franchise, in which a character thrusts an explosive beam of energy towards his target. In the context of Huxtable's critique, the attack mode serves as an analogy to the representation of male virility in the manga series.

⁴ Alex Fialho, "500 Words: Juliana Huxtable," *Artforum*, May 9, 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/words/id=68284>.

I ALWAYS PICKED THE GIRLS WHEN I PLAYED VIDEO GAMES. IF FOR NO OTHER REASON, THAN OUT OF SHEER SPITE AT THE EASE OF IDENTIFICATION THE BOYS AROUND ME HAD WITH THEIR UN-INTERESTINGLY PHALLIC/KAMEHAMEHA SUPER-HEROES... WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE WAS SOME SORT OF INHERENT OR TRAGIC FLAW IN PRINCESS PEACH'S MARIO KART 64 PERFORMANCE. CHUN-LI'S ABSURD CURVES AND THE CUNT'S MEOW SCREECHING FROM EVERY TURN OF HER HYPER-PORNOGRAPHIC BODY FUELED MY RAGE AGAINST BOYHOOD, ALBEIT THROUGH ARGUABLY THE MOST 'BOYISH' OF MEANS. I DISCOVERED, USING MY VIRTUAL PUSSY TO STRADDLE THE BEEFY TRAPEZIUSES OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC CYBORG ATTACKERS, THAT THE AWKWARD SHORTCOMINGS OF PUBESCENT LIFE COULD BE OVERCOME ONE PELVIC HEAD CRUSH AT A TIME. LIKE MOTOKO KUSANAGI, MY WOMANHOOD WAS ENTIRELY ARTIFICIAL, SAVE MY MIND AND THE TINGLING SENSATION IN MY SPINE PRESENT AT THE REVELATION OF A NEW LEVEL, ESPECIALLY ONE UNLOCKED AS A SECRET—EACH TIME MY ARTIFICIAL LUNGS LIFTED INTO THE AIR AS IF I WAS ÆON, BRAVELY DENYING VERTIGO OF ITS AFFECT AS I SPREAD MY AMAZONIAN LEGS AND TAKE IN THE RAPIDLY MOVING AIR THAT TRACES THE FANTASTICAL SKYSCRAPERS OF BREGNA. IMMERSSED IN A WORLD OF POST-APOCALYPTIC INDUSTRIAL WAR-ZONES, I ASSUMED THE ETHICAL AND POLITICAL TASK OF FIGHTING OFF THE TENTACLE AGGRESSION OF HENTAI RAPE AND THE CHUCKLES OF MY PEERS SIMULTANEOUSLY. I WENT TO EVERY LAN PARTY IN HOPES THAT I COULD WITNESS THEM LOSE BATTLE AFTER BATTLE TO HYPERBOLIC DEPICTIONS OF THE SAME FIGURES THEY WOULD LATER JERK OFF TO; THE SAME FEAR-INSPIRING FEMME FATALE'S WHO THEY WOULD, AT SOME POINT ATTEMPT TO BATTLE IN THE REAL; THE SAME IMAGINARY CUNTS AND PHANTASTICAL PUSSIES THAT WOULD (AND STILL DO) TEMPT THEM TO TOUCH AND CONQUER THE VITAMIN-ENRICHED TUNA OF MY BODY.

Juliana Huxtable, *Untitled (For Stewart)*, 2012. Color inkjet print, 20 x 30 inches (50.8 x 76.2 cm).