

A Black Canadian Art History Recipe Book

Research Proposal

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by

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Framework

In this portfolio of documents, I creatively present all of the elements of a traditional research proposal. I am interested in histories of black creative practice, collaboration and organizing that demonstrate anti-colonial intent. I see black creative practices as illuminating unique methodologies and aesthetics that are invested in shaping narratives of liberation that do not rely on black victimhood. In particular, I am interested in black Canadian art history and how black creative practice can be memorialized and commemorated without being simplistically included into the existing Canadian art history canon.

I want to see how the archive might be a new site in which to find traces of art workers, exhibitions, collaborations, and creative networks that sustained black creative practice in Canada. My methods of analysis will be informed by anti-colonial thinkers—not straightforward data collection, but rather reading across texts, theorizing gaps, and positioning art and theory as relational—to encounter black artists, black art, and black art history in various forms, including text, photography, art, pamphlets, catalogues, film and video, and other ephemera.

In academia, theories of change are often about visibility and inclusion. These have been called a ‘documenting damage’ approaches to research.¹ According to this theory of change, raising awareness to the damage done will lead to change. Yet documenting damage as an approach to research does not challenge the system that created the conditions for the damage in the first place. Rather, documenting damage provides the existing power

¹ Eve Tuck, “Biting the University That Feeds Us,” in *Dissident Knowledge in Higher Education*, edited by James McNinch and Marc Spooner (Regina, Saskatchewan: University of Regina Press, 2018): 149–167.

hierarchies within these systems with data, in the form of detail and descriptions, that reinforces the marginalization and violence they enact.

My research has to do with finding a just and ethical way to honour our creative histories and the knowledge that has been shared through cultural practice. I won't be simply inserting a black art history into pre-existing Canadian art history, as this approach would neither challenge nor dissemble the hierarchical order that underlays the current discourse. I do not want to document excluded practices, but rather I want to experiment with new ways we might create a black Canadian art history. Both my portfolio research project, and this research proposal are reflective of that experimental intent.

This proposal is divided into two parts. The first is an epistolary text written to a Black Studies colleague and the second is a set of recipes for possible black Canadian art history(ies). In the letter I present a new concept, a black sense of aesthetics, based on Katherine McKittrick's a black sense of place, arrived at through an analysis of texts by key anti-colonial thinkers. If the letter is an intellectual roadmap, the recipes are a methodological roadmap.

I have eschewed the traditional format of a proposal but retained all of the required elements. In *Letter to Onyeka Igwe*, you will find my Research Overview, my Problem Statement, my Key Questions and my Review of Research and Debates. (There is also a more traditional review of Review of Research and Debates related to black aesthetics in Appendix III. My Budget and Timeline are also in the appendixes.) The recipes in *A Black Canadian Art History Recipe Book* contain my Methods of Data Collection and Analysis and Anticipated Contributions. They are preceded by a short section in which I review my Methods and Methodology.

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1 September 2024

Dear Onyeka,

You and I have been working together for years now. Since the early pandemic days of 2021, we've met once a week (over Zoom) to discuss our creative projects. Sometimes it's like a virtual water cooler, where we trade personal experiences and gossip. We've been in reading groups together. You've commissioned my writing. I've programmed your films. For three summers now, we've organized residencies for ourselves, going away together—to Marseilles, to Palermo, to rural France—to focus on specific projects without the interruptions of our everyday lives.

My writing and teaching and workshop organizing have been deeply informed by what I learn from you as a peer and as a friend: you show me other possible perspectives. Sometimes you shatter my assumptions, and other times you affirm what I feel or think. In our own disciplines—you primarily make films and I mostly write—we explore black intellectual history and creative practice. For me, it's about finding the right method or format within which to share and make knowledge. I feel like in your own work, as an artist and educator, you have a similar prerogative. Reading practices, like the one we share, are about thinking across texts, about making connections, and building on and strengthening various ideas and perspectives.²

Our work together, Onyeka, our weekly meetings, the reading groups we've had with others, and our self-created residencies, have been experiments in which we put into practice what we believe in. A set of values that prioritizes black livingness³. We discuss texts we are reading and the issues they bring up. We read and critique films and art works and novels. I have come to understand these inquiries, what we do together, as forms of black

² In *Dear Science* Katherine McKittrick demonstrates what interdisciplinary reading practices can be. Sylvia Wynter, too, has consistently theorized beyond disciplinary confines.

³ According to Katherine McKittrick, "black rebellion, the work of liberation, regardless of scale, is livingness; black livingness is unmeasurable; our despair and heartbreak and friendships and ways of loving and moving, are tethered to a dehumanizing system of knowledge, a monumental story, that is measured (unfaltering) and precise (quantifiable)." Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 186.

study. We enact, while sharing our references, how we know and where we know from.

I am writing this letter to you, Onyeka, to share the PhD research proposal I have been developing as a student in the Department Gender Studies at Queen's University. I am interested in black contemporary art in Canada. I interview and write essays about individual artists, curators and exhibitions in order to critically engage and platform their work. A few years ago, during my practicum at the Artexte Information Centre in Montreal, I sought to trace the connections among black artists who have been a part of the fabric of the Canadian art world. I found so many documents and articles! Yet of everything I found, very little of it have I seen reflected in the canon of Canadian Art History.⁴ Black Canadian contemporary art is still mostly absent from the discipline. This absence is not unusual, as we know.

For the last two summers of our getaways, you have been researching and writing a history June Givanni's Pan African Cinema Archive, and for this research you have done a lot of interviews. Due to a lack of existing public history, oral history has become your main source. Our research, yours reconstructing the biography of the archive and mine trying to piece together a black Canadian art history, are both about shaping a certain history that isn't readily accessible.

Art history is based on the foundational premise that art objects "are uniquely privileged in the degree to which they are able to communicate, symbolize, express, or embody certain deep or fundamental truths about their makers or sources, whether that be a single person or an entire culture or people."⁵ In this discipline, scholars study art from the past to arrive at insights relevant to the present.⁶ These engaged discussions about aesthetic practices are informed by current ideologies, struggles, and realities. Art

⁴ One exception is found in *Towards an African Canadian Art history*, edited by Charmaine Nelson. (Captus Press, 2018).

⁵ Donald Preziosi, "Art History: Making the Visible Legible" in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (USA: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

History as a discipline has been “clearly central to ... the social and political formation of the modern nation-state and its various legitimizing paradigms of ethnic uniqueness and autochthony, or evolutionary progress or decline in ethics, aesthetics, hegemony, or technology.”⁷ In this way, art objects and practices taken up by art historians shape the character of a nation. As Canada has developed, so art and culture, through the craft of art history, have been used to shape a vision of the nation. As the colony continued to consolidate its governmental power, funding was put into place to support the creation of particular kinds of art that would promote a solidly Eurocentric national identity and underwrote an idealized version of the nation. The Group of Seven paintings of Canadian landscapes, for example, supported the terra nullius premise of conquest.

I was reading a roundtable in *Artforum* recently, convened by the Black art historian Huey Copeland. In it, the Black Studies Scholar Faye Gleiser points out the colonial workings of traditional art history. She says: “From Black studies, I’ve learned that the call is not to become an expert on these subjects but to literally find ways to survive and collectively dismantle these structures. This approach has been critical to helping me understand that art history doesn’t merely tell stories about artists and art. It’s really through its own structural insistence on chronology, comparison, and classification that it reproduces anti-Black and colonial power structures.”⁸

The problem I have found is that in Canada, what we need is a bespoke Black Canadian Art History. This art history would reflect a diasporic presence and the discourse and analysis of this art history would be sustained by black and other nonblack communities interested in how we are represented, more than how we are consumed. While the discourses and practices of black Canadian art continue to rapidly develop, the different forms of art writing

⁷ “A principal motivation for this massive labour over the past two centuries has been the assembly of material evidence for the construction of historical narratives of social, cultural, or cognitive development.” Preziosi, 10.

⁸ Copeland, Huey. “Let’s Ride: Art history after Black studies,” *Artforum International* 62 (2023): 128-139.

and documentation through which they can be studied remain disparate and scattered.⁹

A dedicated look at the artistic practice of visual art by people of African descent living and working in Canada does not exist yet within the Canadian academic arena. Joanna Joachim and Pamela Edmonds point out “the ongoing institutional failures to memorialize Black diasporic art practices.”¹⁰ They describe how the “lack of critical writing and public acquisitions of the work of Black diasporic artists particularly in Canada, is a key contributor to the dearth of knowledge on the overall historical trajectories of Black diasporic aesthetics, as well as their formal and conceptual sensibilities.”¹¹ In a Canadian context, when institutions and art workers become interested in local black art, they will often ignore the existing histories and start their research, in terra nullius fashion, as if they were pioneers in the field. Senior artists who have not had steady visibility go unseen, and existing networks and creative communities are overlooked. Andrea Fatona points out what is needed, that we must make sure that “we are really aware of the genealogies that have come before—the histories of the kinds of discussion about particular works and their [historical] contexts—so that we ourselves can push the conversations further.”¹²

Thinking of black Canadian art histories, I have come up with these key questions: How can we make an art history that doesn't reproduce the

⁹ Important to mention here the consistent grass roots attempts by Black people to record these histories. At the Crossroads: A Journal for *Women Artists of African Descent* published just 8 issues between 1992-1997. There has been ByBlacks.com; the Black Canadian Arts/History Reading Group Facebook group, the Black Wimin Artist What's App group, The State of Blackness website's "Resources" list. These groups are small or self-funded or semi-private. And often, because of their self-organized nature, they do not stay active for long.

¹⁰ Edmonds, Pamela, and Joana Joachim, “Introduction: Salt. For the Preservation of Black Diasporic Visual Histories,” *RACAR* 47, no. 2 (2022): 4–8.

“Introduction: salt. For the preservation of Black diasporic visual histories,” *RACAR : Revue d'art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review*, Volume 47, Number 2, 2022, pp. 4-8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² Ikiriko, Liz, “Speaking Ourselves into Being,” *C Magazine* 144 (Winter 2020), <https://cmagazine.com/issues/144/speaking-ourselves-into-being>. Andrea Fatona, in conversation with Liz Ikiriko, talks about curators who organize and present the work of Black artists as instances of knowledge production, as well as the creation of an art history that should inform and shape current artists, curators and art writers. They discuss how histories of black Canadian art remain spread out, uncollected.

traditional colonial structure of canonical art history? In the face of systemic exclusions, how have black artists and art workers in Canada formed alternative networks and coalitions? What unique research methods and presentation strategies have been developed by local black artists and art workers? How have local black aesthetic practices been remembered through publishing, exhibitions or other pedagogic, scholarly or organizational projects?

I want to dwell on the term local here. Geographer Doreen Massey's elaboration of the concept of 'local' informs how I describe African diasporic art practices in Canada. Rather than black Canadian art, I prefer to think of the black art in Canada as local black art connected to a global African diaspora. Massey writes about the local as both interdependent and unique, and that that uniqueness and interdependence are always at play. No place can be understood in isolation. In this way, to study something local, like an aesthetic for instance, is actually to understand that it is connected elsewhere. Massey's theoretical elaboration of 'local' allows me to discuss black art practices in this country without always tying those practices back to the nation-state. In my consideration of black Canadian art history, I think beyond the confines of the national and emphasize how the local is always connected in different ways to the wider world, and simultaneous 'elsewheres.' Thus, rather than 'black Canadian art,' I prefer to think of the black art in Canada as local black art connected to a global African diaspora because it illuminates new or different spatial processes. My use of the term local allows me to circumvent national identification. Unlike the possessive adjective 'Canadian,' which establishes an identity linked to nation, local doesn't recapitulate a narrative that either absorbs or casts out historical black diaspora presence.¹³

¹³ The development of a discourse on black art and black art history in the West has been greatly centered on the United States context. Writing from Canada, and with an investment in local black art practices, it is essential for me to note and urge a stretching of the perception of what blackness is and where it belongs.

I know that in England, where you are from, there is a long history of using black to refer to all black and brown people. When I use black to talk about people, I am thinking of new world black people, black Atlantic people, people whose ontological and epistemological narratives are inextricably linked to the middle passage, and the multi-scalar, global reorganization that that resulted from colonization and the slave trade in the Americas. I use black to refer to all Afro-diasporic people. While I am attentive to the ways in which black people were and continue to be exploited, regarded as subhuman, denigrated, taken for granted, extracted from, and to how anti-blackness structures the very social and economic fiber of our societies, I rest and return, always, to a recognition of blackness as outlined by McKittrick in her essay "Worn Out": "black is in the break, it is fantastic, it is an absented presence, it is a ghost, a mirror, it is water, air; black is flying and underground; it is time-traveling, supernatural, inter-planetary, otherworldly; it is in between the lines and it is postcolonial; black is bulletproof and magical and in every dark corner; black is social death, afro-pessimist, afro-optimist, afrocentric, afropunk, afrofuturist, soulful, neosoul, blues; it is negritude, postslave, always enslaved; black is like who/black is like me; black is everywhere and everything; it is make-believe and magic."¹⁴ This is the perspective from which I work, and what I mean when I use black as a designation of identity.

With this research project, I aim to shape a local art history for African diasporic artists. To do this I will study where in Canada black diasporic art practice and the discipline of art history have been aligned or at odds. I will look through archives and documentation, scour institutional histories, review unpublished scholarly research and locate art writing and exhibition catalogues that had only miniscule print runs. How I handle this evidence and primary material will be through collaborative praxis.¹⁵ This endeavor, like our work together, like black study, will require other people. I want to activate

¹⁴ Katherine McKittrick, "Commentary: Worn Out," *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017): 98.

¹⁵ I return to collaborative praxis later when I discuss a black sense of place/aesthetics.

my findings through organized talks or workshops, through publishing experiments, knowledge sharing, and creative projects. In this way, the act of knowledge creation for a local black art history will be evidenced in the many different possible methods for arriving at the desired outcome. Form and process will matter just as much as any outcomes.

I am writing you here, in this letter, about the artists and scholars I am thinking alongside, whose ideas shape the questions I ask as well as the possible outcomes of my research. I poured over my notes from the classes I took in the first years of this PhD, over my research notes for the workshops I organized, the lectures I wrote and the classes I taught. In the margins of books and printed articles, in notebooks and on blank sheets of paper, I underlined and highlighted and recopied quotes and reflections and criticisms of what I read and heard, of lectures I attended and talks I watched online.

My project is a cross between black studies and art history and cultural studies and gender studies. The key themes of this research are anticolonialism/liberation, blackness/diaspora, black culture/politics. I look to the work of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Katherine McKittrick, Edouard Glissant, WEB Dubois, Paul Gilroy and Sylvia Wynter as the foundation of my theoretical framework. To help with my reading, I use 'a black sense of aesthetics' as an umbrella term to draw out the connections between each author's position and my project about a local black art history. A 'black sense of aesthetics' is a way of knowing and perceiving black creative culture. As a concept, a black sense of aesthetics helps me value black experiential knowledge and avoid the analytical traps of modern epistemologies, which frequently reproduce anti-black violence.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Patricia Hill Collins Hill, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 1990); Katherine McKittrick, *Dear science and other stories*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021); Sylvia Wynter, *We Must Learn to Sit down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Decolonizing Essays, 1967-1984*, edited by Demetrius Lynn Eudell, (Leeds, England: Peepal Tree Press Ltd, 2022).

A 'black sense of aesthetics' is born from Katherine McKittrick's 'black sense of place'. She introduces the concept in the context of geography in the essay "On plantations, futures and a black sense of place." The 2011 essay uses Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag* as an example of an approach to geography that avoids the trap of reproducing a closed loop of violence and demonstrates a way to emphasize interdependence and study black geography differently.¹⁷ A decade after McKittrick wrote about 'a black sense of place' in relation to geography, she revisited the concept in her 2021 book *Dear Science*. Referencing Sylvia Wynter's *demonic grounds*, McKittrick describes a black sense of place as a place that black people know from. She describes it as "a location of difficult encounter and relationality. A black sense of place is not individualized knowledge—it is collaborative praxis. It assumes that our collective assertions of life are always in tandem with other ways of being (including those ways of being we cannot bear). A black sense of place always calls into question, struggles against, critiques, undoes, prevailing racist scripts. A black sense of place is a diasporic-plantocratic-black geography that reframes what we know by reorienting and honoring where we know from."¹⁸

A black sense of place is not a single place but rather a way of being and a way of knowing. A black sense of place is a site of struggle, and a perspective that allows you avoid reproducing colonial logics. A black sense of place is a vantage point from which to enact alternative possibilities of interrelation. A black sense of place allows you to develop new methodologies, and to do and look and relate otherwise. In this way the study of blackness is no longer always already linked to a violated body, a closed-circuit loop in which analysis reproduces the very violence it sets out to study. In this later

¹⁷ McKittrick points to the ways Gilmore (1) avoids reproducing violence: "Refusing the commonsense codes that underwrite discreet racial and spatial categories, Gilmore presents us with a meaningful intellectual and activist challenge that circumvents the analyses of injustice that re-isolate the dispossessed," and (2) show ways to work towards change: "We might re-imagine geographies of dispossession and racial violence not through the comfortable lenses of insides/outside or us/them, which repeat what Gilmore calls 'doomed methods of analysis and action,' but as sites through which 'co-operative human efforts' can take place and have a place." Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (2011): 947–63.

¹⁸ Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 106.

discussion, McKittrick revised a black sense of place from a geographic concept to also encompass diaspora considerations.

Both a black sense of place and local are geographic concepts and this is why, when reading them together, their shared connection to diaspora becomes clear. McKittrick's black sense of place is in line with to how Massey sees local as actually allowing for a better understanding and analysis of the nature of what we are looking at, that localities "are always provisional, always in the process of being made, always contested."¹⁹ That the local is not parochial, rather it is expansive and infinitely interconnected, and "it can indeed really make more concrete the links between 'us' and 'them', and to understand not only how the local is affected by the global but how the actions of 'local people' at 'local level' are fully implicated in, and thus have some responsibility for, events in, and conditions of, people in lands which may often seem remote."²⁰ (It is worth noting that in her 2011 essay, where McKittrick first introduces a black sense of place, she uses Massey's concept of a sense of place from *Space, Place and Gender*.)

It was as I read through those anti-colonial scholars I mentioned above with McKittrick's black sense of place in mind that a black sense of aesthetics took shape. I want to talk about their concepts and insights shortly, and how they inform a black sense of aesthetics, but first, I think it's important to clarify what I mean by 'aesthetics' in a black sense of aesthetics.

I have reviewed a black sense of place as it developed from within the discipline of geography. A black sense of aesthetics is a concept within the discipline of art history. Earlier I wrote about how art history scholars undertake their research based on the ideologies, the struggles and the realities of the present moment. I want to elaborate on this. As a new local black art history takes form, it is imperative to anticipate the ways in which black aesthetic practices require a different approach than those of the art historical

¹⁹ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 149.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

methods we know. Art historians apply methodologies based on analytical context, such as Marxism, semiotics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, structuralism and post structuralism, autobiography, feminism, or other perspectives. Their research is shaped by that ideological perspective in so far as it determines the kind of evidence they seek, the questions they ask, and how they apply their analysis. With the concept of a black sense of aesthetics I want to suggest another analytical category. In shaping this concept, I understand black creative practice as liberatory.²¹ Black creative practice is closely tied to knowledge production, diaspora, anti-racism, liberation and anti-colonialism. To critically engage these practices and memorialize them, from a black sense of aesthetics, is thus to challenge colonial knowledge systems and their epistemologies. Therefore, to take my concept as a starting point is to accept as a premise that black aesthetics are liberatory aesthetics.

"What the creative text is, does not matter as much as what it does. And one thing black creative text and black creative praxes do is illuminate narratives of black life and humanity and, at the same time, create conditions through which relationality, rebellion, conversation, interdisciplinarity, and disobedience are fostered," McKittrick writes.²² It follows that a black sense of aesthetics is not a fixed set of visual markers, it is in fact a practice that is worked out relationally, even when the visuals may at first appear static. Take for instance the work of Charmaine Lurch. In a series of drawings, she shows her daughter feeling free in her body and playing and jumping. In a world

²¹ Black culture is critical culture, Hortense Spillers says. According to her, what black creative cultures have in common is a spirit of resistance. From this stance, black art is political insofar as it faces up to, pushes against and has friction with dominant culture. Hortense J. Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 3 (2006): 7-28. See also: Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*.

²² McKittrick wrote: "Thus, the text is not simply a representation; the text is bound up in acts of psychic and physiological rebellion and disobedience that continually unveil the limits of casting black knowledge as only emerging from the violated body. Part of our task, part of creative praxis, is to also honor the creative text as a theoretical text. If we are committed to relationality and interhuman dialogue, if we are committed to academic practices that disobey disciplines, then the song, the groove, the poem, the novel, the painting, the sculpture must be relational to theory and praxis. These kinds of strategies—reimagining the black biologic as creative knowledge, disobeying the disciplines, viewing black texts as verbs rather than nouns, engendering interhuman relationalities, asking the groove and the poem for theoretical insight—provide intellectual spaces that define black humanity outside colonial scripts." Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 152.

where black life is routinely threatened this celebration of black joy and freedom is liberatory.²³

Black aesthetics have long been tied to liberation. Black studies scholar Richard Iton discusses how black people played across both the entertainment and the political stage.²⁴ While sometimes they were not totally effective on a political stage, he shows how in the cultural realm, popular figures became politicised. In this way, black life and black people had a kind of authority outside of electoral politics, and the capacity to influence societal change otherwise. In a similar vein, Hortense Spillers has doubts about hard politics as being more important than culture.²⁵ She talks about black culture as critical culture: "Black culture is not limited to an ethnic group, an ethnicity. It is a critical position taking across the race divide or across lines of race."²⁶ She argues that Black art is about a refusal and a rebellion and that it is a political stance in the making. Thus, according to Spillers, recognizing black culture is less about essentializing the maker and more about seeing what the art does and the intent and effect it has.²⁷ Sylvia Wynter, too, thinks aesthetics are linked to orders of life. In fact, she argues, the stories that we see about ourselves, the stories that we tell about ourselves, all work within a larger social order to maintain or undo certain hierarchies.²⁸ Meaning that if we know that that's happening, if we know that who we are is being influenced by stories and how they are told, we can change the narrative and in so doing,

²³ See Katherine McKittrick, "On quiet happiness, charcoal, wood, and metal: Charmaine Lurch's Being, Belonging and Grace" in *Making History: Visual Arts & Blackness in Canada*, eds. Julie Crooks, Dominique Fontaine, and Silvia Forni (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 2023), 176-183.

²⁴ Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Hortense J. Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 3 (2006): 7-28.

²⁶ UWaterlooEnglish, "Hortense Spillers: The Idea of Black Culture," *Youtube* video, 1:25:36, March 19, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1PTHFCN4Gc>.

²⁷ Spillers cites Raymond Williams and acknowledges the complex, overlapping etymological histories and definitions of the word culture: "culture does not have a name -- it is not "black or "white," "African," or "European," or any other *designation* -- but as the poets have insisted about the work of the poem, the cultural imaginary does not *speak* its meaning, is content to be mute of explanation. It appears from this angle that culture is boundless and undifferentiated." Hortense J. Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 3 (2006): 7-28.

²⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "Rethinking "Aesthetics": Notes towards a Deciphering Practice," in *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* edited by Mbye B Cham (Trenton, N.J: Africa World Press, 1992), 237-279.

change ourselves. Reading Wynter, McKittrick concludes that “inequitable systems of knowledge can be, and are, breached by creative human aesthetics.”²⁹ She theorizes black consciousness and aesthetic labour as liberation, and demonstrates how story is a method that can worry rather than replicate violence. For McKittrick, creative praxis is tied to black liberation.³⁰ That is, liberation happens during and as a result of the manner in which we create and relate: how we read, how we make, how we see, how we do. Liberation is in the method. It is in the processes we use when we enact and imagine change.

Currently, in the nation-states born of empire, citizenship is contested, formed through careful inclusions and exclusions. In many of her essays, Wynter shows that humanism and the discourses of modernity were used to justify colonial expansion through the creation of an ‘other’.³¹ Wynter discusses the development of the idea that Western man is superior to the primitive, racial, native Other. In fact, his invention of the Other is the way in which he defines his own identity.³² Wynter traces how ideas were developed in the imperial center to justify the righteousness of colonial conquest. In short, she traces the epistemology that Western man developed alongside modernity to justify colonialization, genocide and the dehumanization of black people.

Frantz Fanon, whose thinking greatly shaped Wynter’s work, wrote about the many ways in which colonized peoples are made to believe they are a part of empire. Fanon used his own experience as an example of how the colonized are encouraged to believe they belong to empire, and will be welcome in the colonial center, only to be excluded from full citizenship—and

²⁹ Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 152.

³⁰ McKittrick writes: “I do want to honor that living blackness, living as black, is work, and that black people help us think through the ties between consciousness, labor, cultural production, and freedom seeking. The work of liberation does not seek a stable or knowable answer to a better future; rather, it recognizes the ongoing labor of aesthetically refusing unfreedom.” Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 58.

³¹ Aime Césaire and Frantz Fanon have also made significant contributions in this regard, showing how European’s enlightenment project was premised on defining Africans and other black people as Other. See Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*. (Paris: Presence africaine, 1955); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004) and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967).

³² Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.

humanity—when they seek out recognition.³³ These exclusions don't only happen at the periphery. British scholar Hazel Carby writes about how her Jamaican-born father fought in the British air force and lived in Britain for most of his life. He was denied a British passport and refused recognition as a British citizen.³⁴ Time and again the Other proved to be an essential foil, integral to the constitution of the nations of empire.

What becomes evident in these examples is that black people have been denied belonging in the self-fashioning of European colonial nations at the center of empire. Black people, as Other, have been systematically excluded and refused rights.³⁵ These refusals seem to be integral to settler colonial nation states and the European centers of empire. There were lots of schemes to bring black people to work as slaves or domestic servants, but those same people have had difficulty accessing citizenship. Paul Gilroy has helpfully brought diaspora in to the discussion. In *Between Camps* he helpfully pointed out how: “as an alternative to the metaphysics of ‘race,’ nation, and bounded culture coded into the body, diaspora is a concept that problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. It disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness.”³⁶

Looking at the Canadian context specifically, geographer Katherine McKittrick offers the concepts of surprise and wonder in relation to blackness. These concepts show how in a Canadian context, black people are maintained as Other, constantly reminded that they are not supposed to be there.³⁷ She

³³ Fanon writes about growing up in the Martinique where he was raised to revere and mimic French culture, and led to believe that he was a French citizen. When he arrived in France, the motherland, as a young adult, however, he was looked down upon. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967).

³⁴ Hazel V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019).

³⁵ In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* Paul Gilroy writes explicitly about concepts of race in relation to nation. He discusses the concept of Englishness to show race as integral to (and not outside of) the nation when. He argues that race is integral to how British society has developed.

³⁶ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Routledge, 2004), 123.

³⁷ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

writes about the absented presence of blackness in Canada, and how blackness and black people are always placed just outside the nation.³⁸ McKittrick discusses Canada's multicultural policy and how its use of grammar mirrors the way in which afro diasporic Canadians are promised and ultimately refused citizenship.³⁹ Through this policy the nation makes a promise it never has to fulfill, and this promise is exemplary of the relationship between most nations of empire and the African diaspora. This type of political juridical deceit has not been unusual. What is at stake with this fraught relationship of Canada and black people is that our histories get lost. I believe art is key here, as Fatona writes, "I am interested, in general, in how Black Canadian artists use formal aesthetic strategies to communicate Black Canadian collective experiences of belonging to, and being alienated from, the Canadian nation."⁴⁰ What a local black art history might do, using a black sense of aesthetics, is rewrite the history of black people in relation to Canada.

Camille Turner's *Miss Canadiana* (2001-2019) is an example of a performance that exposes the irrelevance and petty, arbitrary laws of the Canadian nation state. From 2001-2019, dressed in a floor length red ball gown with tiara and sash, Turner made appearances as Miss Canadiana: "My image as Miss Canadiana points to the contradiction of the Canadian mythology. My body, as a representation of Canadian heritage, is surprising only because Blackness is perceived as foreign in Canada."⁴¹ This artist performance points out the ways in which, as noted by Fatona, "Black Canadian sensibilities and aesthetics are formed through a process of transculturation and are about webs

³⁸ "Absented presence is evident in several black and black feminist narratives that outline how processes of displacement erase histories and geographies, which are, in fact, present, legitimate, and experiential." Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). 33. On absented presence see also: Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*. (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2018).

³⁹ At best, she writes, blackness is an addendum to the self-fashioned state. The 1985 multiculturalism policy, whose "future infinitive verbs engender anticipatory language" is written in an anticipatory grammar that excises any possibility of black Canada. Katherine McKittrick, "Wait Canada Anticipate Black," *The CLR James Journal* 20, no. 1 (2014): 243-49.

⁴⁰ Andrea Monique Fatona, "In the Presence of Absence: Invisibility, Black Canadian History, and Melinda Mollineaux's Pinhole Photography." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2006): 229.

⁴¹ Camille Turner, "Miss Canadiana (2001-2019)," Camilleturner.com. November 1, 2024. <https://www.camilleturner.com/miss-canadiana>.

of connections to other places—the United States, England, the Caribbean, Africa. Diasporic subjectivity is grounded in the specificity of this place called Canada, yet gestures to locations and histories in the metropole and at the periphery.”⁴²

I want to be clear: I am not advocating a call to inclusion. It is a rhetorical illusion that black people are not already integral to the nation. Several theorists have shown how blackness is not outside or opposed to nation/modernity, but intrinsic to it. Gilroy shows how there is a connection between blackness and modernity by discussing the racial terror of slavery as foundational to the modernity. In *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy repudiates the notion of blackness as outside modernity. Gilroy shows the ways in which the movement of the Black diaspora was closely entwined with the development of modernity and critiques the innocence of euro-modernity by discussing the racial terror of slavery as intrinsic and foundational to it. He argues that race is integral to how the nation and British society has developed. (Here echoes Massey’s comment that “The quintessentially ‘English’ cup of tea was born out of the actions of the East India Company, and the sugar plantations in the Caribbean.”⁴³) So too Iton, in his book *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, argues for black culture as integral to modernity. One of his main arguments is to show how black cultural agency has to do with disentangling from the conception of modern as having no blackness in it, that to recognize black people means to redefine what is modern.

A black sense of aesthetics operates outside nation and its rules of citizenship. It’s not about inclusion or recognition, it’s about a claim to diaspora. Edouard Glissant wrote beautifully about the middle passage, and the

⁴² Fatona, “In the Presence of Absence,” 229.

⁴³ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 145.

Atlantic as a 'womb abyss' that became the origin of new world blacks.⁴⁴ Most black people in the new world share an ancestral connection to that abyss. Over the centuries, many migrations were routed through that original middle passage. Black culture is based on a commonality (experiences of exile or displacement, for example) and is constantly shifting and changing, adapting and responsive to its present circumstances. The diasporic nature of black identity is always between two poles—elsewhere and a fictive or real home.⁴⁵ When understood in the context of diaspora, Massey's concept of the local, which I mentioned before, becomes important. It signals something special and unique about a specific place that is also, like diaspora, tethered and defined by far away contexts. Furthermore, as Rinaldo Walcott wrote, "Diaspora sensibilities are methods for overcoming the problem of locating oneself solely within national boundaries."⁴⁶

Wherever the black diaspora ends up, they remain in tension with their place of origin. Diaspora, cultural studies founder Stuart Hall wrote, is really about difference and continuity, and Caribbean identity is always between two poles.⁴⁷ Gilroy developed the concept of the Black Atlantic to talk about these diaspora cultures. The concept identifies the ways in which the transatlantic slave trade dispersed African peoples and in so doing engendered whole new diasporic cultures. Diaspora, Gilroy wrote, "identifies a relational

⁴⁴ "This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all the coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you." Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* edited by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 6.

⁴⁵ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* edited by Susan Manning (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 131-138.

⁴⁶ Walcott wrote: "Diaspora sensibilities resurrect all that communities and nations destroy, foreclose and prohibit in their dominating narratives of collective belonging. Diaspora sensibilities are methods for overcoming the problem of locating oneself solely within national boundaries. Diaspora conditions work to produce black peoples in the contradictory space of belonging and not," and "Diaspora sensibilities use the nation to make ethical claims and demands for social justice. Diaspora sensibilities speak to nations' limitations and demands nations be remade in a constant and restless ethical search for home." Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*. (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2018), 22-23.

⁴⁷ Hall suggested cultural identity is always in the making. Identity is a "'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." He also wrote that "identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes. The one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with, the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of profound discontinuity." Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* edited by Susan Manning (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 131-138.

network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering. It is not just a word of movement, though purposive, desperate movement is integral to it.”⁴⁸ This common point of origin becomes a shared black sensibility; a diaspora sensibility. Similarly, Dionne Brand discussed the door of no return as a metaphor and a real place in order to examine our common relationship to that point of origin. She wrote about blackness in relation to empire, and how these two relationships—to the door of no return, and to empire—came in to being at the same time.⁴⁹

Just as a blackness is defined by its diasporic nature, so a black sense of aesthetics is diasporic. A black sense of aesthetics allows us to regard blackness and black culture outside of, and in contradiction to, colonial logics, rather than re-enacting them. On the terrain of struggle – manifest in various places and times – that grounds Black experience, the way in which we act and react constitutes black culture. A black sense of aesthetics is a way to recognize that aesthetic: an aesthetic that rewrites, eludes, and ignores colonial circumstances as needed. A black sense of aesthetics allows us to recognize the unfixed, multiplicity of black culture.

Michèle Pearson Clarke's *Suck Teeth Compositions (After Rashaad Newsome)* (2018) is an example of a 3-channel HD video art installation that uses a common Black diasporic gesture (sucking teeth) as a thread to weave together a composite portrait of blackness. In this work of contemporary art, “West African in origin, this verbal gesture is used to signify a wide range of feelings, including irritation, disapproval, disgust, disrespect, anger and frustration. Given that representations of African-American Blackness dominate and define mainstream understandings of the Black experience, when it comes to anti-black racism, most white Canadians are allowed to feel comfortable and are supported in their comfort by the historical and ongoing narratives of “not me,” “not us,” “only them, down there.” *Suck Teeth*

⁴⁸ Paul Gilroy, *Against race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001).

Compositions is thus a response to the frustrations of living within this denial, and an expression of the anger and pain that many Black people often experience living in Canada, where we are always assumed to be better off, if not completely free of racism.”⁵⁰

Thank you for following me through this long description of my research, Onyeka. It has helped me to be able to describe it to you in this way. Ultimately, my aim with this research is not to rectify Canadian art history through gestures of inclusion: I will not approach black art as either a peripheral or additional activity to mainstream Canadian art and art history. By looking again at the activities of black artists and making new connections that had not been attended to previously, my research is meant to foster the possibility for new narratives.

Along with this letter I am sending you a Recipe Book. It contains speculative recipes for the research projects that I will do to experiment with different ways of making art history. My interdisciplinary research will explore different approaches to building a robust art-historical memory for local black art practices. I want to demonstrate ways that those invested in black creative practice in Canada are always already working with and within shared African diasporic histories, both local and global. I intend my final portfolio to show a variety of different experimental approaches.

The portfolio will be comprised of four components including a novella, a black Canadian art history chapbook, an online archival aggregation project called the Black Art History Scholarship Database project, and a workshop template for teaching art writing and criticism. My interdisciplinary way of doing archival research allows me to look for and aggregate existing scholarship about black art in Canada in disparate disciplines. I chose this experimental format so that the outcomes of the research will creatively reflect

⁵⁰ Michèle Pearson Clarke's, "Suck Teeth Compositions (After Rashaad Newsome) (2018)," michelepearsonclarke.com. November 1, 2024. <https://michelepearsonclarke.com/suck-teeth-compositions/>

and be formally responsive to the subject of my investigation. I will find writing and documentation about local black art. I analyze the aesthetics of the black diaspora. I will read academic research about black art and artists from universities across Canada. I will visit archives and exhibitions. I write new stories.

Here's to our continued friendship and Black study together,

My best,

Yaniya

Black Canadian Art History Recipe Book

How do we make a black Canadian art history from a black sense of aesthetics? Referring to my initial research questions,⁵¹ and applying the methods and methodology I will outline below, the last part of this proposal is a set of recipes (research design). “Appendix IV: Research Recipe Ingredients” contains a sample list of ingredients (evidence) of the sort that will be needed for each recipe. Each recipe’s methodology is a suggested approach to the ingredients and the method is a set of instructions on how to use them.

Along with *A Letter to Onyeka Igwe*, this second part of my proposal uses the recipe form as a way to outline my project’s research design. The recipes are informed by anti-colonial forms of knowledge production and the expansive flexibility and unbounded movement of diaspora.⁵² While the form of the recipe is itself rigid, I use a black sense of aesthetics to populate these recipes with new and different experiments towards the formation of black Canadian art history. They can be modified, shared or repurposed in any way that could prove useful.

⁵¹ How can we make an art history that doesn’t reproduce the traditional colonial structure of canonical art history?; In the face of systemic exclusions, how have Black artists and art workers in Canada formed alternative networks and coalitions? ; What unique research methods and presentation strategies have been developed by local Black artists and art workers?; How have local Black aesthetic practices been remembered through publishing, exhibitions or other pedagogic and organizational projects?

⁵² Again, life a refrain, I return to McKittrick, who writes “Black studies and anticolonial thought offer methodological practices wherein we read, live, hear, groove, create, and write across a range of temporalities, places, texts, and ideas that build on existing liberatory practices and pursue ways of living the world that are uncomfortably generous and provisional and practical and, as well, imprecise and unrealized,” Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 11.

A Preamble on Method/Methodology

“Poetry is the agent and product by which man names the world,” Sylvia Wynter writes, and “to *name* the world is to *conceptualize* the world; and to conceptualize the world is an expression of an active relation.”⁵³ I’m interested in how Wynter reads poetry, and how this reading suggests creative practice as an agential way of being in the world. Like a black sense of aesthetics, the ‘active relation’ Wynter discusses is about how poetry allows us to see and make change – how art allows us to see and make change. Applied to a research method and methodology, this perspective refuses uncritical, presumptive approaches. I want my research to be similarly dynamic.

Dynamic research is interdisciplinary research and its outcomes exceed tidy categorization. Interdisciplinarity is a principal feature of Black Studies scholarship and it guides how I have conceived of the experiments in black Canadian art history that will make up the components of my portfolio. My methods and methodology are primarily modelled on three texts: *Golden Gulag* (2007) by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *The Hawthorn Archive* (2017) by Avery Gordon, and *Dear Science* (2021) by Katherine McKittrick. Each of these books presents new forms and ideas by challenging the bounds of its academic discipline, and the conventions with which it is traditionally practiced.⁵⁴ Their research and theory draw from multiple disciplines and as a consequence do not allow them to be passively consumed by the reader or scholar.

In *Golden Gulag* Ruth Wilson Gilmore takes a multiscalar and interdisciplinary approach to answering the question: what factors led to the dramatic proliferation of prisons

⁵³ Sylvia Wynter, “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 2, no. 2 (1976): 86.

⁵⁴ These are not the only texts that do this, just the most relevant ones for this project. Other examples are *Woman, Native, Other* by Trinh T Min Ha, *Dark Matters* by Simone Browne, *Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy, *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois, and *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon.

in California over the 20th century?⁵⁵ She sources evidence from the social, geographic, economic, political, environmental and historical realms, and combines what she finds with anecdotal evidence from personal relationships and interviews.⁵⁶ As a Marxist geographer, her material approach is primarily spatial and she uses that perspective as the ground for an analysis of the other areas. In this way Gilmore formulates a comprehensive understanding of the complex, interrelated factors that led to the last few decades' researches the expansion of the current prison industrial complex (a term coined by Gilmore). The research looks at the macro history of land use and development and economic policy going back several generations. In her multiscalar approach, no single aspect is ever looked at alone: each detail and piece of evidence is brought into context with other aspects of the research to draw a full picture of the 'hows' and the 'whys' of the system. *Golden Gulag* shows that considering factors beyond the disciplinary boundary is a helpful way to draw a picture of a researcher's subject. Such a method/methodology could be helpful to the formation of a black Canadian art history. Since the goal is not simply to add a black art chapter to Canadian art history textbooks, consideration should be given to the multiple and overlapping contexts of black people in Canada, and to the black creative cultures of the black diaspora more broadly, as a way to shape what a local black art history could be, or already is.

In *The Hawthorn Archive*, Avery Gordon critiques the field of utopia studies by inventing a whole new form.⁵⁷ With the utopian margins as a subject, her book uses both real and imaginary components to create a new research site. Gordon's careful collection of correspondence and case studies present an alternative version to the de facto disciplinary

⁵⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ Much of the book's footnotes are elaborations of interviews Gilmore did during her research.

⁵⁷ In Gordon's own words, "the form of the book essentially is trying to fuse critical theory and creative writing in a historical context so that fact, fiction, theory and image can speak to each other in an environment that, again, not quite academic, not quite artistic, but something in between or more combined." Bhandar, Brenna, and Rafeef Ziadah, "Revolutionary Feminisms: Avery F. Gordon." *Verso* (blog), *Verso Books*, September 2 2020, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/4842-revolutionary-feminisms-avery-f-gordon>.

understanding of what a utopia is. Instead of theorizing utopia as a “homogenous perfect future no place,” Gordon suggests that utopia can be a standpoint for living in the here and now. She finds this standpoint by recognizing the knowledge and experience of many who were previously overlooked. She uses “the subjugated knowledge of slaves, prisoners, runaways, war deserters and other troublemakers” as evidence for another conception of utopia.⁵⁸ For her, their knowledge is theory. She wants to find a perspective, a language and way of recognizing a revolutionary truth. This book, in the form of an archive, allows for the speculative breadth of such a search: by creating a real/imaginary archive in this book, Gordon creates the kind of space that utopias are understood to be. In this way, her methodology and methods offer a more expansive understanding of utopia as not only a location, but a way of living. The construction of *The Hawthorn Archive*, a research site that is an archive of subjugated knowledges, upends traditional disciplinary approaches to the study of utopia and their predetermined outcomes. The method and methodology of this project, in which fact is mixed with fiction, and previously subjugated knowledge is revalued as important, is a good example for black Canadian art history because through its experiments with form it offers a material approach to disciplinary intervention. It also shows that researchers can be playful and use their imagination, and that building new forms and structures is a just and possible way to undertake research and arrive at new conclusions. In my project I will also try to use new forms to work through my research questions.

Katherine McKittrick’s *Dear Science* is an experiment in breaking academic form. Her subject and research site are black cultures and the black intellectual and radical tradition (in both theory and creative practice). The book suggests that methods and methodology are the beating heart of Black Studies, and our approach to research is the thing that can and must

⁵⁸ Avery Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

be changed in order to escape the racist closed epistemological loop of the humanities, and to challenge the conventions that scholars are usually expected to replicate. “Method-making is the enactment of black life and bursts through disciplined abjection,” McKittrick writes.⁵⁹ To critique a discipline, this work seems to argue, you must challenge its form. Formally, the book shows different instances in which usual disciplinary methods have been deconstructed, and from this deconstruction, new ways of making and sharing knowledge become possible. McKittrick reinvents the classic scholarly essay format by playing with images and layout and paper and textual form. In this way she explores on the page how Black Studies can be reimagined. For her, the work of liberation (that perennial concern of anti-colonial and black radical scholars) is always incomplete; it is neither fixed nor knowable. McKittrick suggests the goal for scholars is not to only to seek solutions and answers: she encourages experimentation that is not beholden to the aim of a single, tidy conclusion. This text gives the researcher permission to experiment without the necessity of a hard and fast conclusion. *Dear Science* is an important example of how to deconstruct disciplinary conventions. The repetitions and references and experimentation in this book will prove useful to the formation of a black Canadian art history. The book underscores that a perfect solution is not necessary, that we can explore many ways of making history.

The liberatory of possibilities offered by Black Studies and black creative practice provide the context for my anticolonial art history research project and the problem of the black Canadian art history. The research questions I developed attempt to honor local black creative practice all while undermining nation. The discourses and disciplines I’ve reviewed inform those questions, as well as what the research outcomes of this investigation can be. The most

⁵⁹ McKittrick, *Dear Science*, 46.

meaningful tenet of this work, for me, is a regard for black creative practice as a just and insightful source of knowledge.

What I have tried to outline in my letter to Onyeka Igwe and throughout this brief overview of research projects by Gilmore, Gordon and McKittrick, is that that I aim to use an experimental methodology based on concepts and approaches developed by anti-colonial thinkers who demonstrably challenge disciplinary norms. Their methods support the idea that the story is important, that how we tell the story matters, and that narratives count towards what we understand as truth.

Black Canadian Art History Recipe: Book about Black Canadian art

Write about and document black art. Be involved and responsive to black creative cultures in Canada. Become a critic. Apply a black sense of aesthetics to ask new questions of the artists and their practices, as well as the contexts they work from. Generate research that avoids reproducing the implicit hierarchies of canonical art history. As demonstrated in the writing, theory and criticism of M. NourbeSe Philip, bell hooks, Sylvia Wynter, Adrian Piper, Barbara Christian and others, making books about black art is a sure way to challenge “the ongoing institutional failures to memorialize Black diasporic art practices.”⁶⁰

Ingredients:

1-Black art

- one work of art or an exhibition by a black artist
- a group exhibition of work by black artists

Preferably you experience the work in person, but a thorough review of available documentation is a workable substitute.

2-Black artists or curators

- interviews, biographies, artist statements, images, reviews, any and all documentations and media coverage of current and previous work by the artist(s)
- interviews, curatorial statements, essays and all accessible information about previous exhibitions by the curator(s)

3-Contextual information

- information about the presenting institution’s mandate, its history, its previous presentations, its funding sources, the composition of its board of directors, and its employee make up (an organizational chart, if possible)
- information about the materials or media used by the artist, the history of its use by artists, as well as its provenance, value and significance

4 -Publisher

- a publisher should help with getting an editor, a copy editor, a designer, as well as a printer and a distributor

The Preparation Method – instructions for individual steps:

Step one – Witness

- Select an artwork or exhibition
- Go see the work or exhibition
- Be attentive to how the art feels
- Take notes
- Engage
- Ask questions, analyze and discuss the work with others

⁶⁰ Edmonds, Pamela, and Joana Joachim, “Introduction: Salt. For the Preservation of Black Diasporic Visual Histories,” *RACAR* 47, no. 2 (2022): 4–8.

Be attentive to what the art *does*

Step two – Research

If the art is historical or you can't see it in person, research and read everything you can about it

If you have seen the art in person, research and read everything you can about it

Reflect

Consider the particular significance of the presenting institution to this work/exhibition

Do more research

Talk, write and ask questions

If you can, go and experience the work again

Go back to your original notes after your research and come up with a preliminary interpretation

Step three – Write

Write a rough draft

Based on this draft, decide what kind of text this will be

Set parameters

Revise, edit, and refine until you have a completed article or manuscript

(Noted: It is possible to publish individual articles before a final manuscript)

Share your writing with friends and people you trust

Accept constructive feedback

Incorporate these responses into your work

Step four – Publish

Create a summary outline of your book and send to publishers

Negotiate and sign a contract

Work closely with the editor, copy editor and designer towards a polished manuscript

Print, publish and share your work widely

Outcomes and anticipated contribution:

A published book or article about black Canadian art!

Having this information in the public will allow black artists and critics and curators situate themselves within a community

Hopefully, publications like this will encourage alternative ways of seeing black art through anti-colonial analysis and anti-racist interpretations

Notes:

-Publishing individual articles is a way to be financially sustainable as you do this work

-The time frame for publishing a book varies between 6 months and ten years. Sometimes more! It is different for each writer

-Be engaged, connected and a part of your arts community. Stay informed about what's going on. As much as you can, go and see exhibitions, and learn about artists whose practices you didn't know about

-A note on catalog essays: A black Canadian art history needs a strong multiplicity of coverage and perspectives, but the art historical value of a catalog essays exists in a gray zone.⁶¹ This writing is usually commissioned, paid for and produced by the presenting institution which risks having undo influence on the content of the writing

-Edited collections are an alternative possibility to this recipe. Replace steps one and two with locating already written materials about black art and artists. Follow steps 3 and 4 to put together a manuscript for presentation and publication

Examples of successful books about Black Canadian art that align with this recipe:

Rude: contemporary black canadian cultural criticism (2000) by Rinaldo Walcott; *Blank: Essays and Interviews* (2017) by M. NourbeSe Philip; *Towards an African Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, and Resistance* (2019), edited by Charmaine A. Nelson

⁶¹ James Elkins, *What happened to art criticism?* James Elkins (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2011).

Black Canadian Art History Recipe: Black Art Resource Database

Find documentation about black art. Black art history in Canada is hiding in plain sight, and a black sense of aesthetics will help you locate its documentation. Researchers must carefully listen for and observe the unusual or unexpected places they may encounter these artefacts. It's almost certain these documents won't be properly labelled or classified. Only dedication and diligence will yield results. And if what you find is not as expected, imagination may be useful.⁶²

Ingredients:

1 – Documentation

- Writing in all fields whose subject is black art/artists/exhibitions/curators, including but not limited to arts journalism, criticism and scholarly texts
- Artist files (sometimes collected and held by archives or museums)
- Photographic documentation
- Exhibition pamphlets
- Artist monographs
- Art history books
- Films and documentaries
- Exhibitions
- Artworks
- Magazines
- Podcasts

Individual steps:

Step one – Prepare

Research similar databases and archives. Notice their methods of collection, presentation and distribution

Set search parameters. Narrow down the precise scope of your database's subject

Decide what sources and what types of documents you will collect to populate your database

Find your sources, and where they are housed, research how to access them

Step two – Search

Now that you know what you are looking for and where to look: search, search, search

Continue to expand your resource pool: contact curators, artists, colleagues, peers, librarians and professors and gather as much insight as you can from them

When reading, study footnotes and reference lists

Start collecting your materials

Create a spreadsheet with an organizing system to keep track of your findings

⁶² "Any discussion of archival loss asks that we recognize the archives as tracking the incomplete project of freedom. This incompleteness opens up the work of imagination— iterations of black life that cannot be contained by official history. Keep trying," McKittrick, *Dear Science*, 141

Once you have begun to populate your spreadsheet, go back to your search parameters and triage your findings

Step three – Publish

Come up with a name! The name should clearly describe the content of your database
Devise your sharing platform. Where will your database be hosted and how will it be shared/accessible? Is it online, or in a physical place?

Start building. If your database is online, will you use an already existing social media platform, or design a new website? Create new accounts and hire people accordingly
What will the lifespan of this database be? This will be determined by nature of the platform you choose, and the resources you have to maintain it

Populate your database and make it public. Share information about its existence as widely as possible

Outcomes and anticipated contribution:

A public database about black creative practice in Canada!

As a resource your database will contribute to the field of black contemporary art, as well as the discipline of Canadian art history by bringing together and centralizing important materials

Having the information in your database in the public realm will allow black artists and critics and curators situate themselves within a community

Notes:

-You will have to decide if your database is a fixed repository of items or an ongoing, expanding collection. If it is the latter, clear instructions will have to be put into place for the additional input of entries

-Similarly, if you decide to have input from outside contributors, clear guidelines will have to be written and shared

Examples of databases about Black Canadian art that align with this recipe: Black Art/History Reading Group, administered by Deanna Bowen and hosted on Facebook⁶³; The State of Blackness Resources hosted on the State of Blackness website⁶⁴ initiated by Andrea Fatona; the digital companion to the Blackity exhibition⁶⁵ curated by Joana Joachim

⁶³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/245510715628345/>

⁶⁴ <https://thestateofblackness.format.com/resources>

⁶⁵ In the 2021 exhibition “Blackity” at ArtexTe, Dr. Joana Joachim gathered and presented documents related to black artistic practice from the 40-year-old ArtexTe fond. Documents pulled demonstrated a fulsome history from all corners of the collection. The artefacts have been digitized and built into a publicly available online platform.

<https://www.artexte.art/en/blackity/exhibition>

Black Canadian Art History Recipe: Creative Text

Art is also a trustworthy path to knowledge.⁶⁶ Make a creative text that redefines the absented presence of black Canadian art history. A black sense of aesthetics allows for a freedom of approach. Negotiate past experiences, rumours, anecdotes, science, archives, and the materials histories of how black people negotiated the art world. Use fiction, art, exhibition or sound to narrate these relations. The stories you tell through creative text will be integral to black art history.

Ingredients:

The inspiration for creativity can be anything from the world of ideas and forms right down to your own personal experience. Use history, science, stories, gossip, lived experience, wonder or news

Preparation Method – individual steps:

Step one – Conjure

Imagine the world of your creative text, how do things work here, what rules, rhythms, forms and methods prevail?
Establish the morals and values that regulate this world
Go back to the creative texts the have shaped you, look at how they are made
Experiment with the forms and rhythm and language and materials of your creative text
Through these experiments a single avenue you want to pursue should emerge
Make something you want to see in the world. Do not be self-conscious

Step two – Work⁶⁷

Make working on your creative project a daily practice
Set a timeline for project completion and work backwards to break it in to manageable steps
Keep showing up to work on your project, even if you feel stuck or lost
Make, revise, rework, share, repeat
Finish your project

Step thee – Share

⁶⁶ “If we are committed to relationality and interhuman dialogue, if we are committed to academic practices that disobey disciplines, then the song, the groove, the poem, the novel, the painting, the sculpture must be relational to theory and praxis,” McKittrick, *Dear Science*, 52. Accordingly, using art to reimagine art history is a legitimate approach.

⁶⁷ In 1967 Sister Mary Corita Kent created this helpful set of rules for making art: “RULE ONE: Find a place you trust, and then try trusting it for awhile....RULE FOUR: Consider everything an experiment....RULE SIX: Nothing is a mistake. There’s no win and no fail, there’s only make. RULE SEVEN: The only rule is work. If you work it will lead to something. It’s the people who do all of the work all of the time who eventually catch on to things. RULE EIGHT: Don’t try to create and analyze at the same time. They’re different processes.”

While you are working on your creative text, take every opportunity to share your work in progress. Show it to people you trust for impressions and feedback. Present it publicly at events and readings and performances and exhibitions

Step Four – Publish/Present/Exhibit

Closely follow step four from the recipe for a “Book about Black Canadian art.”

Depending on the type of creative text you are making, you may need have to reach out to producers, promoters, curators or programmers instead of publishers

Outcomes and anticipated contribution:

A creative text that tells a story unique to you, in the medium or your choice. This work is a form of knowledge and when you share it with others, you destabilize the top-down organisation of the world

Once shared, this work will enter into and strengthen an important diasporic conversation that has echoes and reverberates around the world

We need more art and more stories by black people. When you are brave enough to share your work, it allows others to feel like they can do the same

Notes:

- While the discipline of black Canadian art history is still nascent, black creative practice, locally and around the world, has an incredibly long history. Find artists and movements you connect to and learn more about them. By making work, you are entering into a dialogue with them

-You are the only person who can determine the measure of success of your creative text. You are a unique and singular person, it won't serve you to compare what you make to what others have done. There is a difference between being inspired and being intimidated. Good art will always make you feel like anything is possible

Examples of creative texts about Black Canadian art that align with this recipe: *Long Time Comin'* (1993), documentary directed by Dionne Brand; *Zong!* (2008) poem by M. NourbeSe Philip; “To Be Free, Everything You Most Hate and Fear?” (2020) Centre A exhibition by Lucie Chan

Black Canadian Art History Recipe: Symposium

Organise a gathering that brings together black artists and art workers and anti-colonial thinkers. These types of gatherings of people from the black diaspora have a long history, with such events as 1968 Montreal Congress of Black Writers, Toronto's international festivals of black art Celafi in 1992 and 1997, or the seminal Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, also known as Festac '77, held in Lagos, Nigeria. These events were a point of convergence for artists and practitioners who from all areas of the diaspora to come together and share their work and ideas.

Ingredients:

1-Funding and Location

- A place where you will hold the event. This can be a partnership of many institutions, which can be beneficial for sharing resources
- Funding and a funding strategy. Any gathering, big or small, will need financial support.

2-Team

- Keen, like-minded people with community connections and experience planning events and fundraising. Ideally this will include, curators, programmers, artists, fundraiser, administrators, accountants, and art workers
- Volunteers. Outside of the core organizing and planning leading up to the event, you will need help during on the actual day (or days). Hospitality is important, and having a dedicated legion of staff or volunteers can ensure that everyone has an easy time
- Participants. Including but not limited to Black artists, scholars, thinkers, writers, activists, archivists, researchers, musicians, dancers, and poets

3-Concept

Starting from black art, determine the theme of your event. The team should all be on board, and have worked together to decide on a title and envision an outline for your event

Preparation Method – individual steps:

Step one – Fundraise

- Make a list of available public and private funding
- Write grants, fundraise, solicit donations
- Submit applications, hopefully well in advance of your event date
- Approach local, national and international patrons who might want to support your event

Get sponsorship for your event, this can be in kind support from organizations that align with your purpose

Step two – Plan

Envision the entirety of your event down to every minute detail. Will there be exhibitions? Panels? Keynotes? Studio visits? Will you organize dinners for the participants, or have guided tours? Do you have to put ramps in to make your venue accessible?

Develop a detailed preparation timeline, with clear responsibilities for the whole team

Make a shortlist and a longlist of your choice guests, reach out to them

Create a promotion strategy

Develop a visual identity

Step three – Host

Working during your event will be like a marathon – be as prepared as possible. Rest.

Have snacks. Drink water. You will need to be responsive and level-headed

Have food and catering and coffee abundantly available to participants, staff and volunteers during the event

Be prepared for the unexpected. Difficulties will inevitably come up, you will need to deal with each situation in a decisive and effective way

Communicate as much as possible with your staff and volunteers and guests

Try to have fun – in the midst of things it may be difficult enjoy what you've set in motion, take small pauses to appreciate what you've achieved

Document your event! Find a way have images and recordings, internally, and also to get journalistic coverage where possible, both in advance and during the event

Step four – Post-production

Follow up as soon as possible with vendors and guests. Pay fees and settle accounts

Have a meeting with your core team and with your volunteers to see how everything went and work through any residual issues

Rest and take a well-deserved break. Events like this can be draining and it's important to recover before returning to your work routine

Outcomes and anticipated contribution:

Informal gatherings within arts communities and among black creatives are a regular and important part of how we share information and learn from each other. An organized public symposium may not have the intimacy of a more grassroots event, but it can be an important introduction for people who don't have a connection to these communities, and want to join

Knowledge sharing through creative practice is open ended and ongoing. An in person gathering around black creativity is generative in unquantifiable ways. Black art history is sustained in the relation between people. The space you make as an organizer is valuable

Notes:

- More lead time for fundraising is always beneficial. Start as early as possible
- Be attentive to personality when building your team, seek willing, harmonious and cooperative people
- When pursuing sponsorships and collaborations, a helpful strategy can be to offer an approach that makes your partner/patron feel included, like sponsoring a specific events or productions
- public outreach is important. If you want to make your symposium an open, generative space, you must dedicate part of your organizing strategy to seeking out and brining in a multiplicity of audiences, beyond those already within your immediate realm
- Be attentive to hospitality. Support the invited guests that you bring in to be a part of the event and take care of the audience. This meant food, and having a place to rest, and being ready for assistance and conflict resolution and whatever else may come up
- Symposiums and other gatherings are often one-offs because of the amount of energy and resources they take to organize. Think about sustainability from the very beginning of the process. If this is something you think should happen again, consider a process you can put into place so that other edition won't have to start from scratch

Examples of black Canadian art gatherings that align with this recipe: “The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation”⁶⁸ interdisciplinary conference in Toronto, organized by Andrea Fatona, 2014; “The Feast”⁶⁹ dinner for 100 black women artists organized by Anique Jordan and the Black Wimmin Artist collective at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 2019; “Bodies, Borders, Fields”⁷⁰ a public symposium about blackness and the arts organized by Denise Ryner and Yaniya Lee in Toronto, 2019; Black Studies Summer Seminar <BLK-S3tudies>⁷¹ an annual week-long black studies research intensive co-found by Mark V. Campbell and Kristin Moriah, 2021-2023

⁶⁸ <https://thestateofblackness.format.com/the-state-of-blackness-home>

⁶⁹ <https://ago.ca/agoinsider/feast-dinner-100>

⁷⁰ <https://orgallery.org/events/bodies-borders-fields/>

⁷¹ <https://blk-s3tudies.com>

Conclusion

I have presented several recipes for possible ways of making black Canadian art history. They offer a template, open for anyone to use and adapt. The aim is to encourage participation in the continued formation of a local black art history, and to do so be creating multiple modes of presentation that will allow for greater access. I will spend the next months trying different version of these recipes. What I bring to the discipline of Canadian art history is a black sense of aesthetics, and in the outcomes of my research, I hope to show that this concept offers a just methodology for honouring a rich, local history of black diaspora art practice.

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Appendix III - Timeline

Fall Year Five

Research and prepare the Black Art History Scholarship Database component

Complete short fiction component

Winter Year Five

Draft introductory essays (5-7 pages) for each component

Spring / Summer Year Five

submit and defend portfolio

Appendix IV - Budget

I received a 6000\$ Black Studies award which will fund the Black Art History Scholarship Database website and research.

Artex, Galerie Eli Kerr and Dr. McKittrick have supported the financing and production of two black art history chapbooks.

I do not have or need any additional travel or research budgetary needs at this time.

Appendix I - debates in black aesthetics - notes from ongoing research

In the following section I draw a comprehensive overview of the themes, key concepts and theoretical debates that guide my interdisciplinary research project. Black art history and aesthetics are related to my effort to find new or alternative and hidden methodologies that can attend to a nascent **local Black Art History**. I understand black creative practice as liberatory.¹ Black art is the vector through which the world can change. Black creative practice is closely tied to knowledge production, diaspora, anti-racism, liberation and anti-colonialism. To critically engage these practices and memorialize them is thus to employ methodologies that challenge colonial knowledges systems and their epistemologies.² I begin with an overview of the history of black aesthetics, and then review the disciplinary aims and methods of art history.

LITERATURE REVIEW >BLACK AESTHETIC

Speaking of her craft as a writer, Toni Morrison explained the major influence Black music had on her work in a 1988 conversation with Paul Gilroy: "Black Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art, above all in the music...my parallel is always the music, because all of the strategies of the art are there. All of the intricacy, all of the discipline.... Music makes you hungry for more of it. It never really gives you the whole number. It slaps and it embraces. The literature ought to do the same thing. ... I have wanted always to develop a way of writing that was irrevocably black. I don't have the resources of a musician, but I thought that if it was truly black literature, it would not be black because I was, it would not even be black because of its subject matter. It would be something intrinsic, indigenous, something in the way it was put together—the sentences, the structure, textures and tone—so that anyone who read it would realize."³ I cite this quote at length because Morrison addresses several of the central questions around black aesthetics, importantly for my project: *What is black art?* and *What does black art do?* These concerns have informed black criticism for over a century. What the following theories, concepts, movements, and ideas share is how black culture is linked to global capitalism, the transatlantic slave trade, modernity and diaspora. Black aesthetics, and the theories that describe them, are linked to movement and migration.

In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" **Stuart Hall** suggests cultural identity is always in the making: identity is a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."⁴ For him, black culture is based on a commonality (experiences of exile or displacement, for example) and is, as well, constantly shifting and changing, adapting and responsive to its present circumstances. The **diasporic nature of Black identity** in the Caribbean means it is always between two poles—elsewhere and a fictive or real home, to put it simply—so it is constituted through both difference and continuity.⁵

I bring in this notion of cultural identity here at the beginning of this section because I am conscious that the **debates about Black aesthetics** I review below are mostly of United States origin. And though I

¹ Black culture is critical culture, **Hortense Spillers** says. She terms black creative cultures as having the commonality of resistance. And in this description, it means that black people are not the only ones that can make black art. From this stance it can be seen or taken that black art is political in so far as it faces up to, mirrors and pushes and has friction with dominance culture. Spillers, Hortense J., "The Idea of Black Culture," CR: The New Centennial Review, Volume 6, Number 3, Winter 2006, pp. 7-28. See also: McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*.

² Sylvia Wynter, McKittrick "Smallest cell" *Dear Science*

³ Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts* essay "Living memory: a meeting with Toni Morrison," 181

⁴ Hall, Stuart. "'CULTURAL IDENTITY AND DIASPORA'". *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, pp. 131-138. (p222)

⁵ Hall Ibid.

will bring in contributions from the UK, the Caribbean and from Canada, the development of this discourse in the West has been greatly centered in the **American context**. Writing from the North, and with an investment in the memorialization of local Black art practices, it is important for me to note and urge a stretching of the perception of these debates. **Black identity**, as Hall writes, is constantly becoming, and never fixed to a single place or way of doing or being.⁶ I keep in mind the material and very local circumstances of the following ideas and try to maintain a fluid and expansive consideration of the black aesthetics (and attendant urgencies) that exist beyond the United States.

Several theories of black aesthetics share the middle passage, movement and migration as a starting points. In *The Black Atlantic* **Paul Gilroy** offers a set of themes and ideas that shape my preliminary thoughts on the circulation of Black art and aesthetics. Gilroy critiques the innocence of euro-modernity by discussing the racial terror of slavery as intrinsic and foundational to the **modernity**. He also draws attention to **the movements of empire and colonial expansion** and how the life and labour and culture of Black people previously excluded from European modernity and its legacy of intellectual thought are, in fact, integral to its development.⁷ His concept of the **Black Atlantic** traces the effects of African diasporic culture's movement across continents. He shows that Blackness is never only local, but always in some way connected to a global Blackness. He identifies how the transatlantic slave trade dispersed African peoples and in so doing engendered diasporic network of cultures that continually mutually influence each other. Gilroy argues that black creative cultures, like song, music, dance, story, and literature, articulate a need and a desire that could not be expressed directly or overtly under slavery.⁸ These complex histories and modes of expression, these **Black aesthetics**, are still present in black creative texts and can be tracked through the global and diasporic circulation of black ideas.

Eduard Glissant's writes about the black Atlantic as the birthplace of Black people in new world, and also sourceplace of black creative cultures, originated as a response to that original tear and displacement.⁹ His concepts of **opacity and relation**...

Sylvia Wynter, upon her return to Jamaica right after its independence in 1962, was very intent that Black art should be giving people a sense of their culture and Jamaicanness in a way that is counter to what had happened under colonialism and slavery. She argued that the point of black art should be empowerment and self-representation.¹⁰ She spoke about Black art as directly linked to the sound cultures of early African diaspora, and argued that blacks in the new world had the sharpness of **aural cultures** despite all their other differences. This cultural and aural history developed into popular music and other visual modes of **art and representation**.¹¹ Wynter was dedicated to exposing the connection between narrative, in literature and film, and the fictive hierarchies between humans that were generated by and through white supremacy.¹² Her interdisciplinary research showed the transformative possibilities of the **stories** we tell, and how we tell them.¹³

⁶ Hall Ibid. "Cultural identity," he writes, "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation."

⁷ Paul Gilroy *The Black Atlantic*

⁸ Paul Gilroy 57

⁹ Eduard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 73.

¹⁰ *We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture*, this argument, and when she made it, was in line with the Black Arts movement and its aims in the United States. More on that below in text.

¹¹ Sylvia Wynter "Culture of Black Revolution" video of 90 minute, with a talk by Wynter followed by a Q and A session.

¹² Wynter Sylvia 1971 *Novel and History Plot and Plantation*; Wynter Sylvia 1992 *Rethinking Aesthetics Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice*.

¹³ Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "UNPARALLELED CATASTROPHE FOR OUR SPECIES? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations" in Sylvia Wynter- On Being Human as Praxis - Katherine McKittrick

Négritude was an artistic and culture and political movement formed by Caribbean and west Africans from colonized countries living in France in the 1930s. **Aime Césaire**, Léon Gontran Damas and **Leopold Senghor**, who met as students in Paris, joined with others from the diaspora and discussed the experiences they shared despite different geographic origins. They recognized their transatlantic commonalities, and came to recognize the relation of the Black culture that emerged from all of their respective homelands. Their movement used this as a basis for a **diasporic solidarity** that could counter the aims and effects of dehumanizing, colonizing separating imperialism. Negritude was about focussing on what was specific to being Black, across cultural differences.¹⁴ They operated in the fields of the arts but also in philosophy and politics.¹⁵ In their creation and study of Black literature and arts, they envisioned an ideal aesthetics that would reflect a common African diasporic experience.

The first half of the 20th century in the United States and across the entire continent saw artistic movements that shared this goal of black revalorization.¹⁶ In the United States, the **Harlem Renaissance** was at its height between 1925-1929. For African Americans it was about self-discovery, a process of recording their successes and changing the negative perception of black people by showing how Black people could excel within **European aesthetic standards**.¹⁷ Artists of the Harlem Renaissance believed that black culture and creativity was evolving towards a point where it would meet and match the standard level set by Euro-American culture and literary traditions. In other words, they believed in an objective and **universal standard of beauty**, and thus their aesthetic standards and values were not different than the standards and values white people had for themselves. **Alain Locke** was very aligned to the aims of the movement. His concept of the 'the new Negro' exemplifies the guiding sentiment of the movement.¹⁸ Locke thought literature was about fostering positive black self-image, outside of white people's definition of black culture. Black writers should, Locke thought, present black people in a positive and good way, different to and opposed to the racist way they are usually shown in racist stereotypes. **William S Braithwaite** wrote about how black writing could be at its best when meeting a universal ideal, away from a specific black experience.¹⁹

W.E.B. Dubois was one of the first scholars to theorize Black culture. His *Souls of Black Folk* was an important work. In his 1926 essay "**Criteria of Negro Art**" writes about how Black art must deliver a message, and that it should be proscriptive.

A movement of humanist and ethical critics followed the Harlem Renaissance, and developed alongside the Black power movement.²⁰ These critics were in reaction to the type of offerings of the Harlem Renaissance, seeing how they indeed reproduced European humanist values, and that in so doing they reproduced dehumanizing stereotypes of Black people. These critics embraced an **aesthetics of separatism**: they were against integration and reproducing white values and perspectives of black life. Their interest was in **reshaping aesthetics** itself as a way to counter colonialism and racism.²¹ What's distinct about this group or kind of critics is that they themselves were often creative writers, and also

¹⁴ See: Césaire, Aimé. "Discours sur l'art africain." *Etudes Littéraires* 6, no. 1 (1973): 100-109; Senghor, L. S. African-Negro Aesthetics. *Diogenes*. 1956, 4, 23-38.

¹⁵ From "Rethinking the role of the arts in politics: lessons from the Négritude movement" by Gemma Bird.

¹⁶ "The approach involved working to effect the revalorization of black being, its skin color, and Negroid physiognomy, as well as that of the equally stigmatized black cultural forms, while also directing these revalorizations to an even more central purpose." Notes from Aesthetics encyclopedia entry Sylvia Wynter

¹⁷ Angelyn Mitchell, *Within the Circle*, 4

¹⁸ The New Negro: *Alain Locke*, 1925

¹⁹ "The Negro in American Literature" William Stanley Braithwaite, 1925

²⁰ Angelyn Mitchell in *Within the Circle*, edited anthology

²¹ Ibid, Mitchell

literary critics.²² Writers **James Baldwin** and **Ralph Ellison** were against writing that reproduced white values and aesthetics and perspectives on black life.

In "Blueprint for negro writing," **Richard Wright** suggests Black art and literature should explicitly or impolitely reference the historic oppression of black people.²³ Wright, a novelist himself, wrote this kind of **proscriptive literature**.

The **Black Aesthetic Movement** which followed spanned roughly 1964 to 1972, alongside the civil rights movement. Like the work of the humanist and ethical critics, this was called by some an aesthetics of separatism. **Leroi Jones**, **Addison Gayle Junior**, **Hoyt Fuller** and **Amiri Baraka** were part of the movement. **Gayle Junior** saw the will of black writers and artists to this separateness and independence as "de-americanization."²⁴ In 1968 Neal outlined the aims of the movement: "The Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The **Black Arts** and the **Black Power** concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics."²⁵ The aim across all different types of creative production and activity was to change the self-view of black people, away from 'negro' and the white perception towards black and self-regard.²⁶ Black art and literature was meant to be related to and demonstrative of an essential black experience. It was about Black artists making their own forms instead of mimicking Europeans ones. **Fuller** pushed back on how white critics judged black art, and called for black critics to recognize and apply these forms.²⁷ The Black Aesthetic Movement wanted the eradication of "**Eurocentric cultural sensibilities**" and the codification of their own aesthetics, a development of a "**counterevaluative criteria**"—a black iconology unique to African American culture.²⁸ Black forms applied to Black art.²⁹

Baraka, who had been involved in the **Black Panther movement**, felt that black art should be representative of the richness of Black cultures and promote Black beauty and reverse the negative racist stereotypes that existed in culture. He wanted to get back to a dignified African past before slavery. It was at time as the prominence of 'Black is beautiful', and Baraka wanted to set aside European aesthetic values and for black people to have an aesthetic that would also demonstrate a proud and dignified black culture.³⁰ Similarly, critic **Larry Neal** wanted black artists to make their own forms, to no longer follow European ways for making and doing.³¹ He argued that the goal of a revolutionary Black aesthetic should be to eradicate what DuBois had called **double consciousness**. Neal thought Black aesthetics achieved revalorization by linking present cultures to **African religions, sounds and syncretized Afro-Christian forms**. For Neal musicians, writers, singers, preachers and dancers all expressed an essential middle passage and African memory.³² He and others of this movement were all in different ways practicing and writing and searching for this new Black aesthetic.

²² Ibid, Mitchell

²³ "Blueprint for negro writing," Richard Wright. 1937.

²⁴ Addison Gayle Junior, "Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and the White Aesthetic" from *The Black Aesthetic* (1971).

²⁵ Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" in Bracey, John H., Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst, eds. *SOS -- Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk2mr>.

²⁶ Aesthetics encyclopedia entry Sylvia Wynter

²⁷ Hoyt W. Fuller "Towards a Black Aesthetic"

²⁸ Mitchell, within the circle

²⁹ Within the Circle

³⁰ "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'" LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) 1966

³¹ He eventually changed his idea and shifted to structuralist theory in 1972

³² Notes from Aesthetics encyclopedia entry Sylvia Wynter

Appendix IV

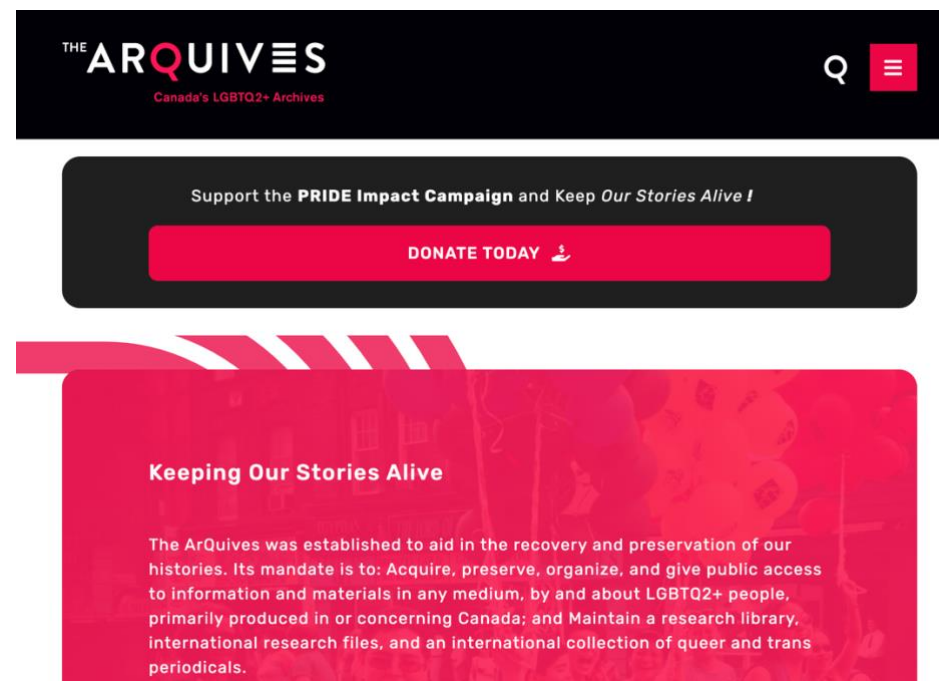
Research Recipe Ingredients

This list of Research Recipe Ingredients is an evidence folder of sorts. It gives an incomplete list (although still rather exhaustive one) of sources and references that could be used as evidence for the creation of a black Canadian art history. They have been classified alphabetically with a single image and information regarding the place, event, document, text, artwork, photograph, panel, book, exhibition, historical event, archive or database.

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Author/Title/Organizer	The ArQuives
Format/Form/Media	Archive
Location/Publisher/Archive	Toronto https://arquives.ca
Date	1973 - present
Subject/Description	“The ArQuives is the largest independent LGBTQ2+ Archives in the world. Its mandate is to: Acquire, preserve, organize, and give public access to information and materials in any medium, by and about LGBTQ2+ people, primarily produced in or concerning Canada; and Maintain a research library, international research files, and an international collection of queer and trans periodicals.”



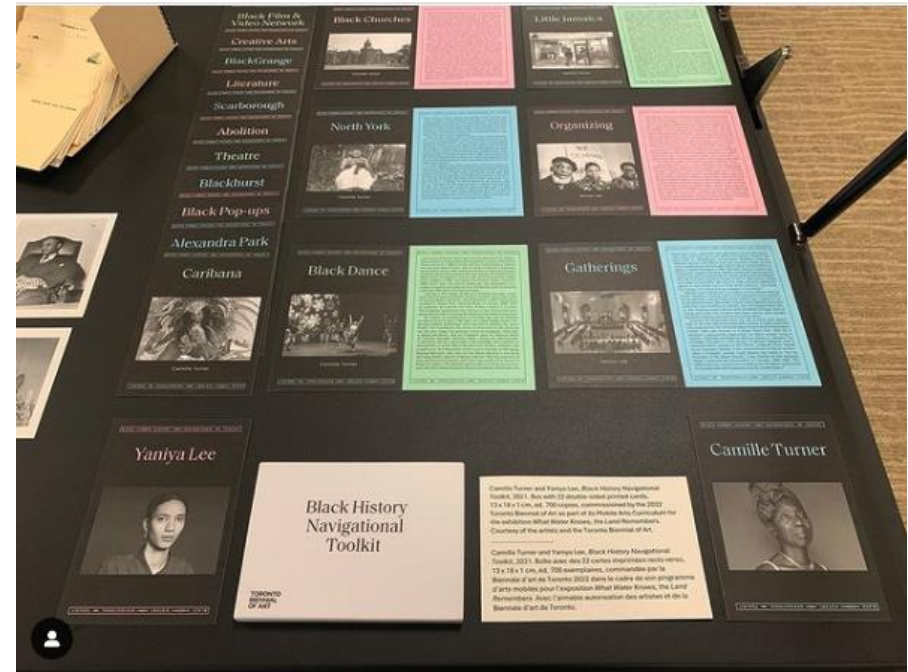
Author/Name	Artex te Information Centre
Format/Form	Non-circulation of over 50 000 document files, artist files, art periodicals, artist books, zines and multiples.
Location/Publisher/Archive	Montreal, 2 rue Sainte-Catherine Est, salle 301. Montréal, Québec H2X 1K4
Date	1980 - present
Subject/Description	Non-profit organization, “Artexte affirms the presence of experimental, innovative and critical components of this field. Its activities touch on all aspects of contemporary visual art from 1965 to today, with special emphasis placed on Quebec and Canada.”



Author/Title/Organizer	At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women Artists of African Descent Karen Miranda Augustine editor
Format/Form/Media	Magazine, print https://karenmirandaaugustine.com/at-the-crossroads.html
Date	Published 1992-1997



Author/Title/Organizer	Black History Navigational Toolkit Yaniya Lee, Camille Turner
Format/Form/Media	Deck of Information Cards
Location/Publisher/Archive	Toronto Biennial of Art
Date	2022
Subject/Description	Conceived as a deck of cards, The Black History Navigational Toolkit explores Black histories in the city of Toronto and beyond, with Turner and Lee drawing from personal experiences and often overlooked histories. They contextualize the chapters—neighbourhood, categories, and events—by outlining the critical histories and peoples that have influenced them. The project also exists in a different form as an online, interactive Milanote board. The online version present the cards with supplementary reading, watching, and listening in a non-linear way.



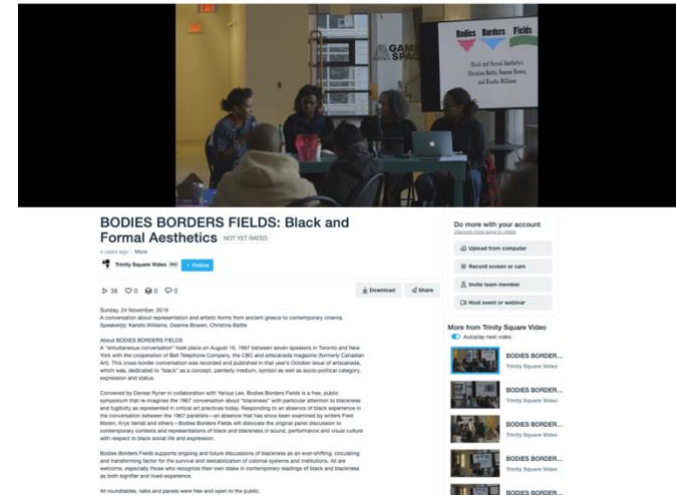
Author/Title/Organizer	Blackity Joana Joachim curator
Format/Form/Media	Exhibition
Location/Publisher/Archive	Artex te gallery Montreal
Date	2021
Subject/Description	“ <i>Blackity</i> delineates the trajectory of contemporary Black Canadian art as witnessed by Artex te’s collection between the 1970s and the 2010s.”



Author/Title/Organizer	Charmaine Lurch <i>Blueprint for a Mobile and Visible Carriage</i>
Format/Form/Media	Sculpture MDF painted with metal based paint, stainless steel, antique wheel, wood, LED Lights, 10'x11'
Location/Publisher/Archive	First shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario, for exhibition <i>EVERY. NOW. THEN: REFRAMING NATIONHOOD</i>
Date	2017-2018
Subject/Description	The sculpture reflects upon the relationship between space and place and practices of belonging.



Author/Title/Organizer	Bodies, Borders, Fields Yaniya Lee, Denise Ryner
Format/Form/Media	Symposium
Location/Publisher/Archive	Toronto, Trinity Square Video
Date	22-24 November, 2019
Subject/Description	“A free, public symposium that re-imagines the 1967 conversation about “blackness” with particular attention to blackness and fugitivity as represented in critical art practices today. Bodies Borders Fields supports ongoing and future discussions of blackness as an ever-shifting, circulating and transforming factor for the survival and destabilization of colonial systems and institutions.”



Author/Title/Organizer	Canadian Artists' Network: Black Artists in Action (CAN:BAIA) fonds
Format/Form/Media	Archive Fonds
Location/Publisher/Archive	National Archives of Canada Ottawa
Date	Fonds prepared by Emily Staresina in 2002 for the Social and Cultural Archives
Subject/Description	A collection of reports, correspondence, meeting minutes and contracts, as well as artists files, related to collective founded in 1988 by a group of artists, including Ayanna Black, Glace W. Lawrence, Marva Jackson, Karen Tyrell, David Zapparoli, Adrienne Shadd, Charles Gray, Cameron Bailey, Hazel Da Breo, Chloe Onari, Janis Bragman, Errol Nazareth and Yasmin Newson and others. "Canadian Artists Network: Black Artists in Action (CAN:BAIA) was a national, multi-disciplinary organization representing black artists in Canada."

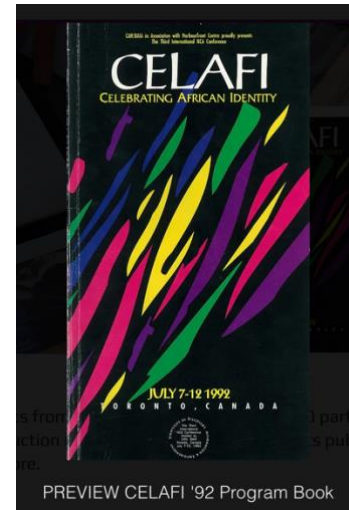
Canadian Archives Direction des archives
Branch canadiennes

**CANADIAN ARTISTS' NETWORK:
BLACK ARTISTS IN ACTION
(CAN:BAIA) FONDS**

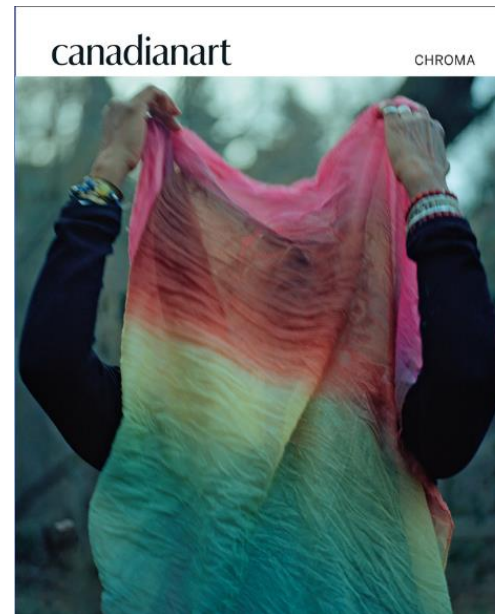
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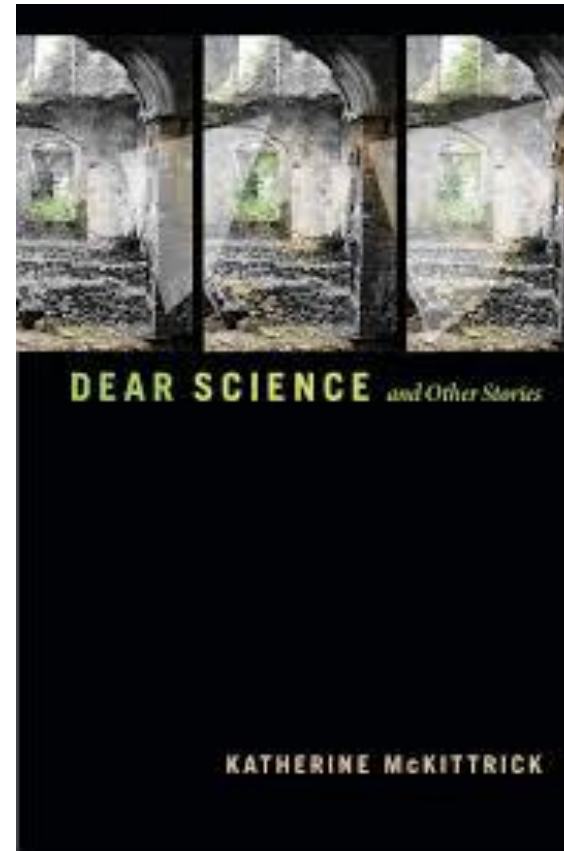
Author/Title/Organizer	Celafi '92, Celafi '97
Format/Form/Media	Black Arts Festival
Location/Publisher/Archive	Toronto https://www.celafi25.com/
Date	1992, 1997
Subject/Description	“with the theme 'Celebrating African Identity: Strategies of Empowerment, Affirmation and Discovery [Celafi] was an un-precedence undertaking which had Canadian Black Artists stand shoulder to shoulder with their international counterparts. ”



Author/Title/Organizer	<i>Chroma</i> Yaniya Lee, Denise Ryner editors
Format/Form/Media	Magazine special issue
Location/Publisher/Archive	Canadian Art Magazine
Date	2020
Subject/Description	“A year in the making, the fall 2020 issue of <i>Canadian Art</i> , available now, surveys the aesthetic practices and legacies of Black art production in Canada and beyond.”



Author/Title/Organizer	Dear Science and Other Stories Katherine McKittrick
Format/Form/Media	Book
Location/Publisher/Archive	Duke University Press
Date	2020
Subject/Description	"A creative and rigorous study of black and anticolonial methodologies."



Author/Title/Organizer	Free Black North Julie Crooks curator
Format/Form/Media	Exhibition of photography
Location/Publisher/Archive	Art Gallery of Ontario
Date	2017, April 29 – October 1
Subject/Description	<i>Free Black North</i> features photographs of men, women, and children living in Ontario in the mid-to-late 1800s, descendants of Black refugees who escaped enslavement in the Southern United States.



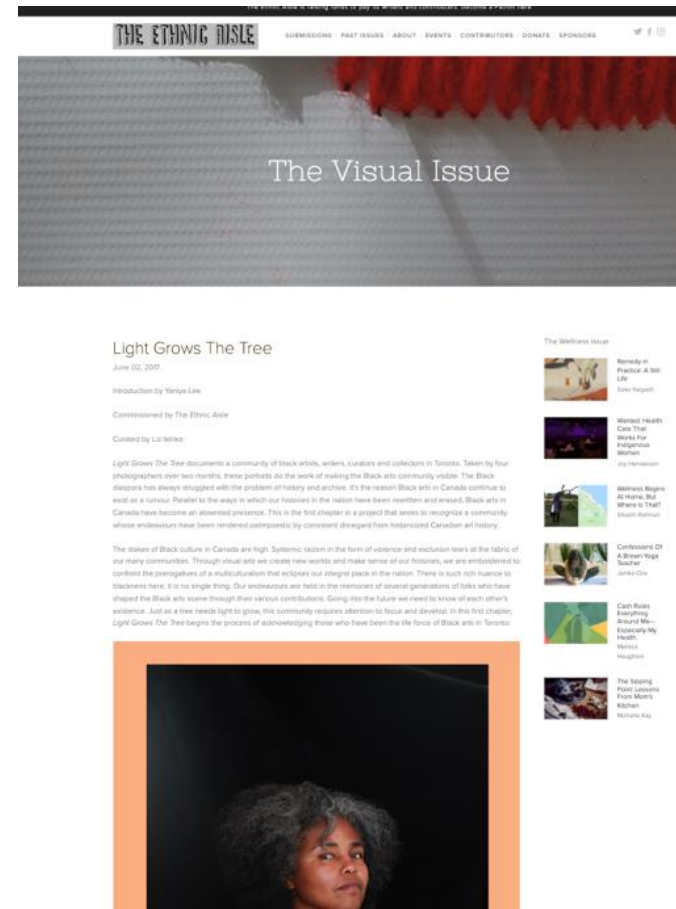
Author/Title/Organizer	Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art Silvia Forni, Julie Crooks, Dominique Fontaine co-curators
Format/Form/Media	Exhibition
Location/Publisher/Archive	Royal Ontario Museum Toronto
Date	2018
Subject/Description	“a multimedia exhibition featuring nine black contemporary Canadian artists exploring black Canadian history and identity.”



Author/Title/Organizer	Legacies in Motion: Black Queer Toronto Archival Project Courtney McFarlane curator
Format/Form/Media	Exhibition
Location/Publisher/Archive	Black Artists' Networks In Dialogue (BAND) Gallery and Myseum Intersections Festival Program
Date	2019
Subject/Description	Legacies in Motion: Black Queer Toronto Archival Project unearthed and shared the stories of the rich, vibrant period of political organizing and cultural activism of Black LGBTQ communities in the Toronto of the 80's and 90's.



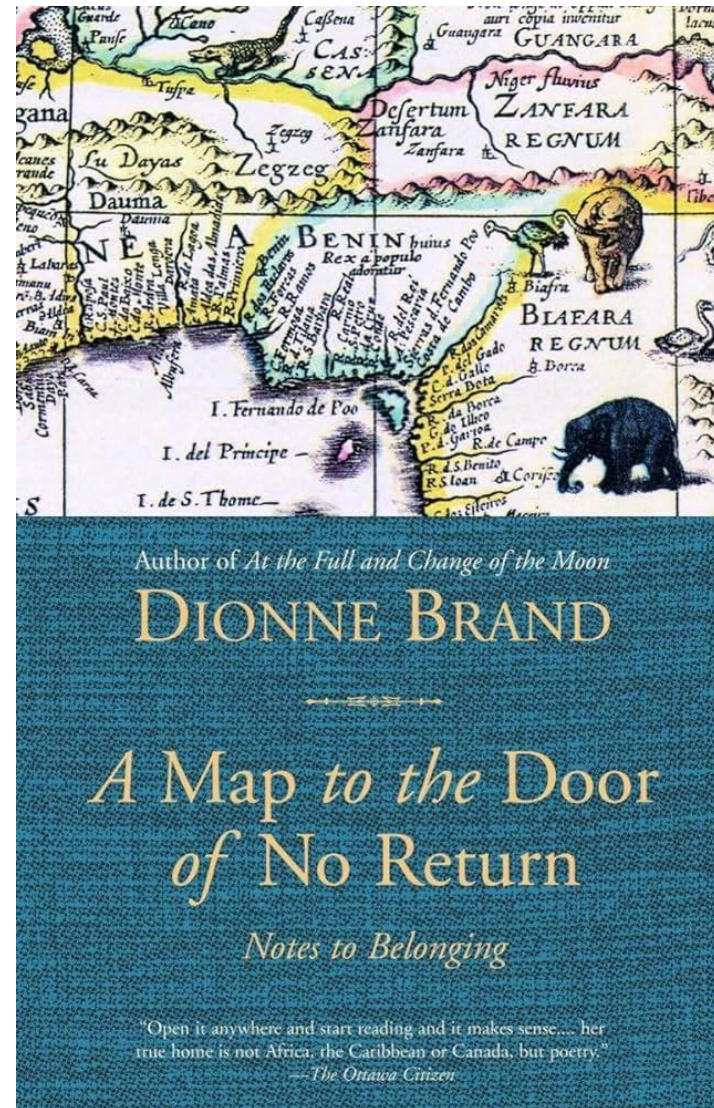
Author/Title/Organizer	Light Grows the Tree Liz Ikiriko, editor, photographer
Format/Form/Media	Online magazine issue
Location/Publisher/Archive	The Ethnic Aisle
Date	2017
Subject/Description	“ <i>Light Grows The Tree</i> documents a community of black artists, writers, curators and collectors in Toronto. Taken by four photographers over two months, these portraits do the work of making the Black arts community visible. ”



Author/Title/Organizer	Long Time Comin' Dionne Brand, Director
Format/Form/Media	Film, video
Location/Publisher/Archive	NFB – National Film Board https://www.nfb.ca/film/long_time_comin/
Date	1993, 52 min
Subject/Description	“Two African-Canadian lesbian artists give back to art its most urgent meanings--commitment and passion.”




Author/Title/Organizer	A Map to the Door of No Return, Notes to Belonging Dionne Brand
Format/Form/Media	book
Location/Publisher/Archive	Picador
Date	2001
Subject/Description	"Through shards of history, memoir, lyrical investigation, and the unwritten experience of so many descendants of those who passed through the door, Brand constructs a map of this indelible region, culminating in an enduring expression, both definitive and seeking, of what it is to live, think, and create in the wake of colonization."



Author/Title/Organizer	Camille Turner Miss Canadiana
Format/Form/Media	Performance
Location/Publisher/Archive	Various, international
Date	2001 - 2019
Subject/Description	Miss Canadiana is a persona created and performed by Camille Turner since 2002. She has made appearances across Canada and has represented Canada internationally in countries including the UK, Germany, Senegal, Australia, Cuba, Jamaica and Mexico.



Author/Title/Organizer	Rise Up! a digital archive of feminist activism Volunteer collective
Format/Form/Media	Digital archive
Location/Publisher/Archive	https://riseupfeministarchive.ca Toronto
Date	2014 - present
Subject/Description	Rise Up! is a digital archive of feminist activism in Canada from the 1970s to the 1990s. We were part of a worldwide wave of liberation and anti-oppression movements that won some victories, changed some attitudes, and radically altered the gendered and political landscape.




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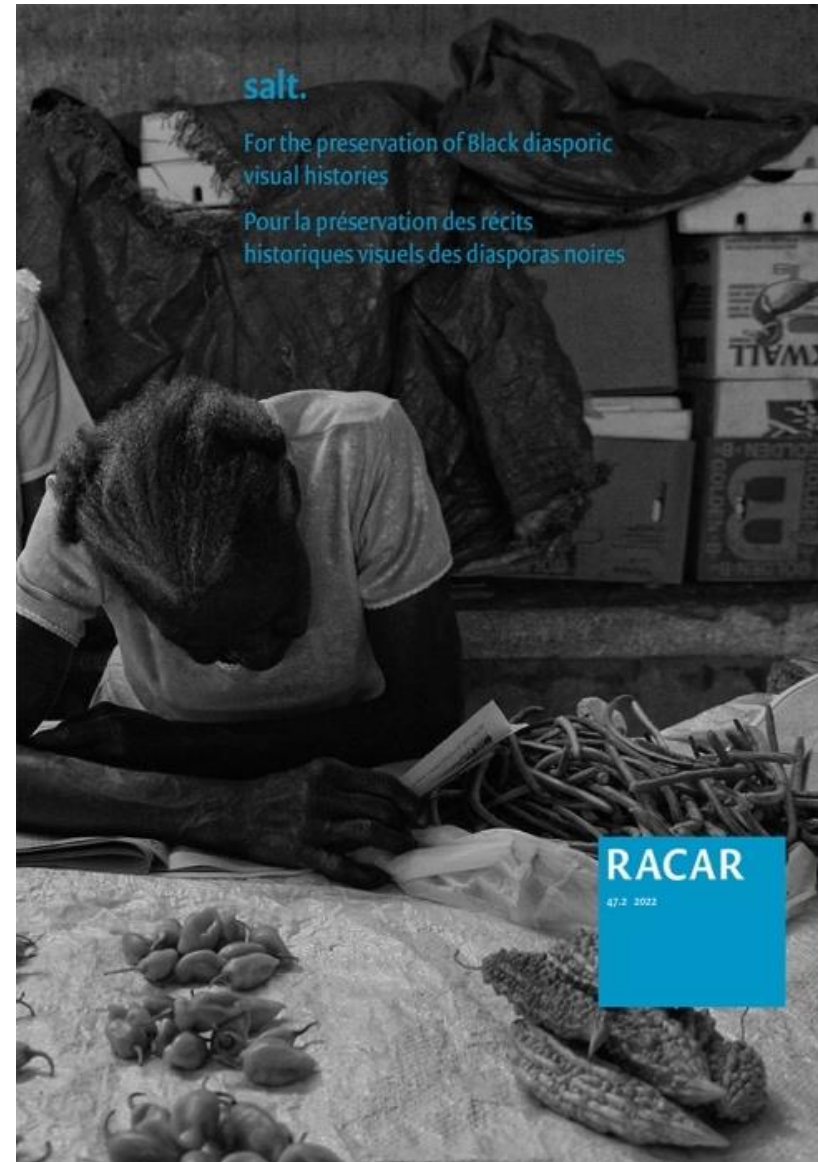
Our Lives: Canada's First Black Women's Newspaper

Our Lives was the first newspaper in Canada by and about Black women. Produced by a Toronto-based collective of Black feminists, Our Lives centred on the lived experiences of Black women in Canada. Employing an intersectional analysis, the newspaper documented struggles with education, healthcare, poverty, and racism, and celebrated the past and present lives of Black women.

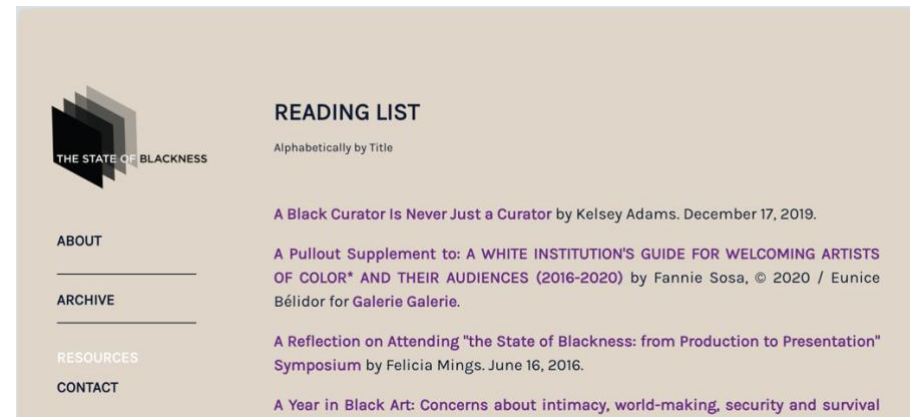
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Publisher:	Black Women's Collective
Region:	National (all of Canada)
City/Town:	Toronto

	Title	Date
	Our Lives - Vol. 1, Issue 2 - September/October 1986	September, October 1986

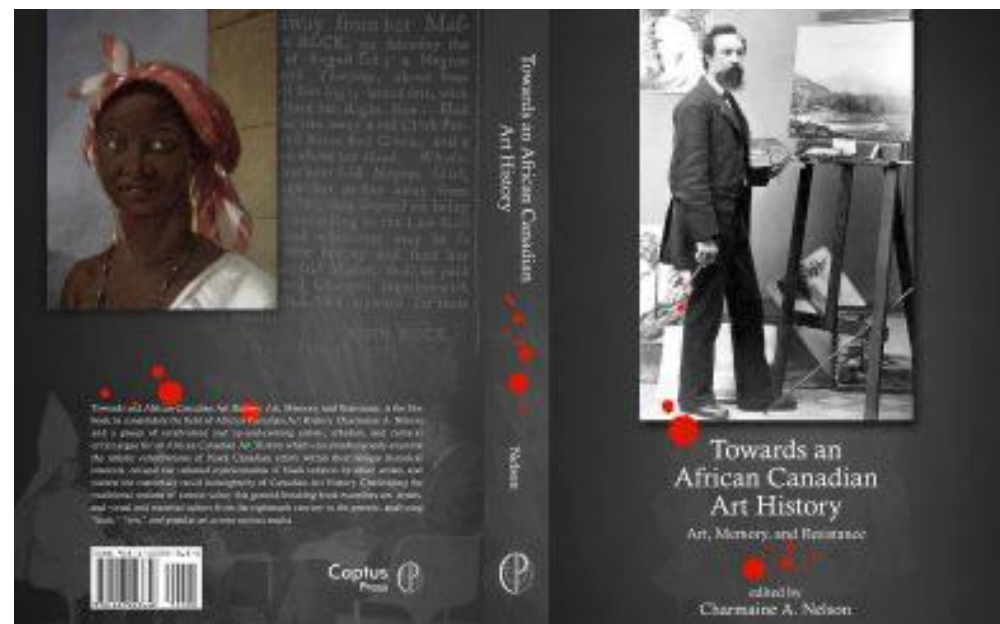
Author/Title/Organizer	salt. For the preservation of Black diasporic visual histories Pamela Edmonds and Joana Joachim co-editors
Format/Form/Media	Journal special issue
Location/Publisher/Archive	RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review
Date	2022, Volume 47, Number 2



Author/Title/Organizer	Andrea Fatona State of Blackness reading list
Format/Form/Media	Resource List – Reading List
Location/Publisher/Archive	State of Blackness website https://thestateofblackness.format.com/resources
Date	2014 - ongoing
Subject/Description	<i>The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation</i> website serves as an archive of the activities of a conference of the same name that took place in 2014. <i>The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation</i> was a two-day, interdisciplinary conference event held at the Ontario College of Art and Design University, and Harbourfront Centre for the Arts, Toronto, Canada.



Author/Title/Organizer	Charmaine Nelson, editor Towards an African Canadian History
Format/Form/Media	Book, 400pp.
Location/Publisher/Archive	Captus Press
Date	2018
Subject/Description	" <i>Towards an African Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, and Resistance</i> , is the first book to consolidate the field of African Canadian Art History."



Author	Vtape
Format/Form	Artist-run, not-for-profit distributor of video art
Location/Publisher/Archive	Toronto
Date	1980 - present



Author/Title/Organizer	Yaniya Lee, Cason Sharpe, Zoe Sharpe “WhAt She SaId”: Promiscuous References & Disobedient Care
Format/Form/media	Online workshop series Milanote, Zoom and pre-recorded videos.
Location/Publisher/Archive	Online
Date	June, 2021
Subject/Description	In this workshop, the siblings share the development of their own collective canon and engage participants in collaborative writing that explores the resonances and contradictions of our personal reference banks.



