Lab Meeting
Toyin Ojih Odutola's Art Practice as a Technology of the Skin

TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA
New Growth (Maebel), 2013
pen ink and bronze marker on board
13 x 14
22 3/4 x 23 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches framed
©Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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Introduction

Engaging Toyin Ojih Odutola’s work is a practice in the productive deployment of “more.” In her prolific artistic career, she has produced mesmerizing drawn portraits that ask the viewer to go deeper, and to follow her hand and her pen in order to see the nuanced articulation of the skin that she engenders in her work. In a session moderated by Catalyst board member Kimberly Juanita Brown, Brown and Dell M. Hamilton are joined by filmmaker Cheryl Dunye (The Watermelon Woman). The subject of the lab meeting is Toyin Ojih Odutola’s art practice as a technology of the skin.

Ojih Odutola’s art practice is imbued with a precision that the study of race, gender, and a poetics of the skin necessitate. In this she has few peers, as her art process is as unique as its eventual product. From film and photography to multimedia and visual iconography, we sought to parse out the multilayered possibilities present in Ojih Odutola’s visual texts.
**Kimberly:** I'm Kimberly Brown. I'm Assistant Professor of English and Africana Studies at Mount Holyoke College and part of the Dark Room collective. This is our 5th year, we are entering our 5th year of having conversations about critical race theory and visual culture study... Oh, I'm done with my introduction.

**Dell:** My name is Dell Hamilton. I'm an artist, an independent curator and a writer. I'm based in Boston and I also work at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, at Harvard. My studio practice is everything from photography, and performance, and video, drawing and painting, and then I have a sort of research practice that I've been developing as well. And that's where Dark Room has been really important for me in terms of me trying to think through how I create a studio practice that's research-based and thoughtful, but still exists in a kind of intuitive, kind of really raw but visceral, kind of way of working stuff.

**Kimberly:** Dell is our first and only artist, right?

**Dell:** Yeah, we need more artists, man. I can't be the token artist.

**Kimberly:** I sent that to you, but you were at the talk, so you kind of know what she said about her art practice and about her relationship to it, particularly. I just wanted to put that talk in the context of the images that I pulled out; we don't have to talk about all of them but definitely, the one I chose for the cover is the one that the editorial board at Catalyst approved. I wanted to make sure that the image that was on the cover represented some form of black womanhood immersed within the study and also thinking about black studies. And I just love, I love...that image.

**Cheryl:** I love it too.

**Kimberly:** And then I chose some other ones, one because I knew it was famous, the one that's in the episode from “Empire.” The one with the Cloth...
TOYIN OJIEH ODUTOLA
*Hold It In Your Mouth A Little Longer*, 2013
charcoal, pastel, and graphite on paper
40 x 30 inches
48 x 37 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches framed
©Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Dell: That's the one from “Empire.” It's really, really cool.

Dell: And then this one. I can't remember what medium this one is so this one's actually low...I'm printing it too. That one. So I think that I printed out five of them, there may be more of them, but I printed out five.

Kimberly: So the one with the feet...

Dell: Yeah. I want to say, I think it's watercolor but I mean I know that.... Yeah. It's weird, I think this reproduction is a little bit odd because it reads as watercolor to me. I don't know but I think that's what it is, so that's why I kind of want to look at this one a little more.

...Yeah, it's like a bait-and-switch that she's doing, and it's very, very clever. It's really, really smart, but the other thing, too, that's interesting to me about when she's talking about her work in terms of the interviews that I was watching before, when I had to do her introduction, was the fact that, for her, it's not only like a kind of emotional, kind of psychological underpinning that she's trying to get at, but it's also really, it's a bodily sort of sensation that's she also.... Because she talks about her hand getting really tired and injured because she had been working many, many hours and she had this crazy deadline and had to, you know...but she also talked about insisting on the fact that she's a draftsman and not a painter. It had to do with the fact that the way the brush feels on a surface, that it's too soft for her and there's something about the concreteness of pen on paper that does something for her.

That resonated with me because I'm very much a materials person as well, so it feels very performative...not just in terms of how the images look on the surface, but it feels performative for her, her process.

Kimberly: Right. I wanted to ask a question about what you think the viewer encounters when the viewer encounters an image of hers, what you see that you had to engage with that other art practices maybe don't allow for. I'm trying to get at what people assume it to be and then what people see when they look at these images, that makes them so compelling for very different kinds of people. I wouldn't think that this
would appeal to an “Empire”...and is [also] appealing for a larger group of people, I guess. I'm kind of asking why people love her work so much. Like we love it, but why, but how, what does it offer, maybe.

**Dell:** What work does it do.

**Kimberly:** Right.

**Cheryl:** It represents so many landscapes and textures and feelings of moving forward, and moving backwards at the same time. With nostalgia and just blackness in itself, and even in its form it really does play with sort of mapping...two spaces at the same time, so there's a lot of layers. That simple word, that really are “pleasing”. I think patterns are pleasing, but I think the truth is the darkness and the type of black people that she portrays are very similar to the ones that I'm attracted to with my work: so it's that black girl. *That* black girl, you know, not Marlo Thomas, but *that* black girl.

**Kimberly:** Can you talk about what your engagement was with her as a student and what you were teaching? How that came about?

**Cheryl:** I was teaching narrativity a lot to graduate students. I had to really think about narratives down to their smallest unit and building stories from those units. You know, sort of fábula and building outward from that, and the strength of storytelling and how events tend to tell stories and you need to kind of hone in on it. And you also need to have, really, an ability to make jumps within the kind of context.... You don't need to fill a space up with so many things for discovery.

You need people to take things away and I feel like what's left with her work is exquisite in that sense of filling up spaces. She has a real sense of the narrative of space, and texture, and material, and stroke. Finding the sweet spot on a screen too, or a screen, or a canvas. Places where your eyes will go because of color, because of what's happening there, you know, placement. It's very traditional, in one sense, it's not radically correct. It's pleasing, it's very pleasing.
**Dell:** But I think the fact that it's traditional is probably one of the reasons why people do like the work. People within the art world, they don't always necessarily always like to be uncomfortable. They want you to sort of give them some, you know.... Sometimes they're looking for meaning, but mostly looking for pleasure. And I think color itself—like how she's using color with her drawings—I think that that's definitely, for me, one of the things that initially kind of drew me to her images.

Seeing it from across the room, seeing the colors—that it is kind of also flickering with the light on the surface—and then getting closer and realizing that it's pen-ink on paper, and I'm just like, "Oh, wait a minute, this looks really, really interesting." It's kind of maybe, I think, there's a level of pleasure, and surprise, and kind of unexpectedness, but I think in that regard, I think convention serves her work really well in this case.

**Kimberly:** Right.

**Cheryl:** I think the sense of loneliness in Africa, too, and I feel like—I know for me as an African...I was born in Africa... so we come from African heritages—the loneliness in between and figures are alone, but we did talk about that issue of growing up in... I think she's from Texas or something, I don't remember exactly, someplace lonely, I mean every where is lonely for the ...

**Dell:** Right. Was it Alabama?

**Kimberly:** Yeah. That's where her father was teaching, right?

**Dell:** Huntsville, Alabama, I think.

**Kimberly:** Yeah. I think so.

**Dell:** That's it. Yeah, because that's where she got her B.A. is from University of Alabama, Huntsville.

**Cheryl:** The odd black girl in spaces where we don't even exist. You
have to create your own....

**Dell:** Right. World. Yeah, that's exactly right.

**Kimberly:** It gets back to—we read *Shine* last year, last September—our first meeting, our first book last year, and it gets at the lighting because, to me, it was like a shine there, a light there, the life that you are talking about, the layers. You know—what Cheryl was talking about. And then the traditional portraiture history. Portraiture all in the same space, but what she does to the skin is so intricate for me because it is so dark and it's so full of life...I want to combine those two things because it's phenomenal and it's rare.

**Dell:** Yeah. The reason why it looks like that is because of the pen-ink on the surface that she's working on but also because she uses metallic markers underneath.

So that's the other way that she gets that.... The fact that it *looks* layered, is because it *is* layered and that's, I think, intentional in her process. It does feel like a kind of engraving because if you watch videos of her working, that's exactly what it looks like is happening: that she's literally pressing into the skin of the surface of the paper.

**Kimberly:** Yes...I know. That's the precision of it though, and it's also why it's damaged her hands so fully, because you might to do something so precisely it doesn't dull the skin.

It also takes on its own shimmer and shine. That is hard to do.

**Dell:** I think the other thing that I always think of when I look at her images is ritual scarring practices from around the world, and I imagine it's fairly painful: getting them initially, afterward, in terms of what the skin looked like. They're works of art on skin. It's drawing on skin, it's literally... so that's the other thing that always comes to mind when I look at her work.

It's part of a longer genealogy in body art.
Kimberly: I never thought about that.

Cheryl: With the resurgence of black people who are thinking about blackness in radical ways, which is what the work is really about. The people that she's capturing and bringing this underpinning to, these layers to their bodies, are like afro-punks, like what's going on now. Like people who are sort of edgy and on a cutting-edge of a variety of the different backgrounds and histories. Nose piercing. There's somebody with all these sort of subversive and marginalized identities in blackness, I think, that's talking about how expansive we are and can be. So that's what it really is. It seems almost sci-fi like that. We are moving in our own distant future, so it's calling me as somebody who lives on those margins and presents that way.

We're beautiful. We're beautiful, we're subjects, and just as affirming as sort of what's happening right now with the afro-futurist, afro-punk, the only way to use it because that's a popular word right now, because if it was weak, it was really happening. Like all military boots and snot, this is allowing us to inhabit many identities and spaces at the same time. Even the scars have different colors.

Kimberly: Yes. Maybe for me so many of these images start out as photographs. It's fascinating to me as well, what gets held, because she talked about how she then alters the stance... and she moves it to the left, she moves it to the right. She does something to alter that engagement. Then to have that engagement evolve into something else that is beyond photography, and also other genres of maybe representation. Because maybe photography wouldn't give enough of this. What we're discussing... My students were really... They saw the series of the images and most of them that I chose had the subject looking at the viewer, and they were really kind of mesmerized by that. The idea that they didn't quite know what they were looking at, who they were looking at, and then how to direct their gaze, what exactly they were supposed to be looking for.

Cheryl: That's interesting.
TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA
The Paradox of Education, 2013
charcoal and pastel on paper
40 x 30 inches
48 x 37 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches framed
©Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Kimberly: Yes. Maybe for me so many of these images start out as photographs. It's fascinating to me as well, what gets held, because she talked about how she then alters the stance... and she moves it to the left, she moves it to the right. She does something to alter that engagement. Then to have that engagement evolve into something else that is beyond photography, and also other genres of maybe representation. Because maybe photography wouldn't give enough of this. What we're discussing ... My students were really... They saw the series of the images and most of them that I chose had the subject looking at the viewer, and they were really kind of mesmerized by that. The idea that they didn't quite know what they were looking at, who they were looking at, and then how to direct their gaze, what exactly they were supposed to be looking for.

Cheryl: That's interesting.

Kimberly: It made for a really vibrant conversation about viewers' expectations and how to divert that in an image...

Cheryl: Yeah. The thing is there's not a lot of art that can be made without a camera. When you're in art school, you are encouraged to take anatomy classes in total art and so you use a live model. But in most cases, when you're working in your studio, you're not going to have a live model. You just cannot afford to. So, you work from images and you download things off the internet, or you get your camera, your camera-phone, or your Nikon, or Canon, or whatever. You ask your friends to sit for you, or your parents to sit for you. And whether you're a draftsman or painter or video artist, you're almost always working from some photographic image in terms of developing these conventions and sort of thinking about how the colors look on the page and how you might compose a frame. There's not a lot, there's no way to sort of get around photography, and it's ridiculous. Or ubiquity, rather.
TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA

*The Tourist*, 2016
charcoal, pastel and pencil on paper
56 1/2 x 42 inches (paper)
61 7/8 x 47 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches (framed)
©Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
Kimberly: I like it because I can see the past of photography here but it looks like how photography can go forward, because I don't know what to do about digital images because I'm still so—I would call it ambivalent but I just still don't like then. I detest a digital black and white image; it drives me crazy for no good reason except that I could tell and if I can tell, it's not good, so it's hard for me to look at a contemporary black and white image that has been so manipulated technologically with software, or whatever, however it's done. This looks like what I would want digital photography to be if it were good, like if it could get there. Could it get there, I don't know.

Cheryl: Yeah. It's a kind of super realism.

Kimberly: Right. That you could see a camera somewhere in here, but it's so much more than what you know a camera can do.

Cheryl: And again I'm always attracted to the stories of the space and the split. Where do these characters exist? Where are they living? What's their experience? What stopped them in this moment? They had to make another story on top of, through, the process, and now they exist in two different spaces. I'm trying to think of the object, the one that you chose... There was on with the dresser with other little smaller objects on it, I don't think it's one that you had, they're telling a story, there's like boots walking along the canal.

Kimberly: Oh yes.

Cheryl: What are these stories?—and that's where I get off. It's like, wow. So the storytelling is complete both on and off the camera. It is always so great to have somebody who you mentored for a hot minute, blow up. You're like, "Okay, it did work, it did work". I said something in there.

Kimberly: Yes. Definitely. She seems to have taken all of the layers of all of her dispersed and integrated identities and made it a part of the art practice. It does come through in these pieces.
**Dell:** Yeah, that's half the battle, trying to decide what to keep and what to get rid of. Then you can figure out a vocabulary that has personal meaning for you. If you get through that part, then it's going to be all right. It can be painful in that process. I'm sorry go ahead...

**Cheryl:** No, no, I'm sorry.

**Dell:** I was just going to say, I remember there's another interview that I watched of her and she's talking about the fact that as soon as she finished, she had gotten picked up by Jack Shainman and someone said to her, "Oh wow, you're getting picked up right out of grad school. Your career is going to die because you're going to have to make the same work for a very long time." I just remember thinking, (a) that's mean; for Toyin, there isn't—as conventional that the work looks—that there's a whole world that's conjured in these images.

I'm not sure if I necessarily see narrative, but it's a world that pulls her in, so she doesn't have any fear about making the same work look the same over and over and over again. It seems like she tries to do something different each time and she's probably trying to push the boundaries further with each drawing—and certainly with the range of size, and scale, and color, and texture, and so forth. I think she's obviously doing just fine, but I found that comment really strange, particularly I think when you get out of school there's no sure thing. It's so easy to stop making art and not have the support to keep your art practice flourishing.

**Kimberly:** People don't quite know what to say, I think. I feel like it's the same interaction with her work, don't quite know what to say and therefore...

**Dell:** Right.

**Kimberly:** Maybe that's just with artists in general and also what they do with the reproduction of lowered expectations that align with the genre.
Dell: Yeah. Artists kind of suck; we're kind of mean to each other.

Kimberly: I think that everybody has their own particular meanness, you know, already out.

Cheryl: I remember coming out grad school and I was the one out of my MFA program at Rutgers in New Brunswick—I was at the Mason Gross School of the Arts doing a studio practice—my early work. I was the only one out of my graduate program who got picked up at the beginning of “the culture wars” or whatever it was. There was a meanness around the other students and the art world and there was like, “We don't know what this is; we don't know how to deal with it.”

Dell: Yeah. Like, “why her?”.

Cheryl: Right. It was at the biennial. It's a weird space to be in... and thinking more about Toyin's comments in the interview that you're referencing, are ones that you have to comment about because they're so offsetting. You're like, “Hell, I just got picked up and it doesn't really matter, and you're already trying to man-speak for me.” And I think as a black artist in the kind of young, queer/not queer, whatever-of-color realm dealing with these contemporary settings of showing your work and just getting it in.... It's so great to see somebody...busting out with talent.

And ignoring what people are saying and just going about it.

Kimberly: Because it was the genre at first that was off-putting for people because it's not... like, who's drawing and moving into these gaps?

Dell: Exactly.

Kimberly: So when you say not listening to these people because you cannot have them interact before you even produce it. They will try to talk you out of your own vision.

Dell: The thing is, it happens a lot. I think Hank saw the work and understood it, and got it.
Kimberly: What I'm finding most—I was going to say “rewarding” but why would it be rewarding; I didn't make the art. I'm most interested in using her work, Toyin's work, to study blackness. When ordinarily it would not look like this, it would not go this way, it would not be this genre, it would not be this artist, it would not be... She's both young-ish and she has a large archive of work already, and it's a very particular style of visual representation, visual art and the kind that people want to say is not something that is a museum, and/or art gallery production. To have that be museum and gallery production and also to move it to these other spaces like television shows, and like Citizen. So without Claudia Rankine, I wouldn't probably wouldn't have known about her for a few more years, maybe.

But existing in Citizen, also puts it in another sphere of not just representation, being, but also study. So then people had to look at it for the way that it was presenting it and also for it standing alone. There are art pieces in Citizen I didn't give a second look at and this is the one that really stayed with me.

Dell: Have you seen some of her other work from 2014? Maybe about two years ago, some images on her website, it's some of her earlier work, that I saw at Jack Shainman a couple of summers ago. There's instances where the figure is up against this richly-patterned background and so I wonder what happens to the kind of singularity of the subject, and the individual and these images that we're looking at now, versus some of these earlier one's where the skin and the background pretty much become collapsed.

Kimberly: Oh yes, she showed a couple of them. The figure could be absorbed within the pattern. It could be a distraction, and I think that the white background for me, works much better... the contrast there. But I could see what she was attempting to do because it was again about color and not necessarily about race, but about color, like the richness of color and how to use it against skin I think. But I could see how the body could be absorbed in that at any second.
**Dell:** I remember seeing them and they were very, very overpowering. There's a kind of precarity that I felt in looking at them because you kind of get lost in the fact that the background and the foreground and the subject background are collapsed. They're, I think the size of them, they're like 42" by 60", something like that. I remember those images very much, and just remember being almost kind of shocked by them.

**Kimberly:** And I liked it because it's holding on to the themes or the motif of movement, of life, and also of her precarity, because it's not as if this skin exists where it wants to exist. His body's not going to exist where they want it to exist; all they can do is try or attempt. Also, some of that back and forth engagement, particularly with the viewers, says you will see me or you will... I'm pulling from my Toni Morrison upper-level seminar. I'm writing quotes from every novel and putting it on the syllabus.

**Cheryl:** That's awesome.

**Kimberly:** It's a line from *A Mercy*, and the line is: “From Now You Will Stand to Hear Me.” And it's something here that says *from now you will see me*. Even if that isn't what desire, what you want, what you think you're looking at or looking for. You will see me, on my own terms. “Invisible to whom”—Morrison. Baby Suggs in the clearing: “love your skin.” She doesn't say love your skin, she says love your flesh, right?

**Dell:** Yeah. “Love your flesh.” Yeah. But that's good enough.

**Kimberly:** Close enough. Then the precarity there, always there, always present but not something that you're going to make the central part of who you are in the world. It's the skincare.

**Cheryl:** I love the skincare. I love the skincare.

**Kimberly:** We made it very literary, I don't know if she would agree with it.

**Dell:** No, actually, it makes sense because that was the other thing I
wanted to talk about: how she *titles* her work. It's very much engaged in literature and language.

**Cheryl:** It also strikes an ending in a different way.

**Kimberly:** Yes.

**Cheryl:** It's *storytelling*.

**Kimberly:** She did say that. She said something about telling a story with the skin. I'm messing up her quote.

**Dell:** Yeah. I remember her talking about that because one of her shows at Jack Shainman was called “Like the Sea” and it's from that Zora Neale Hurston quote.

You know, like every shore is different. Visual vocabulary is interesting. When I read Morrison's work and certainly Zora Neale Hurston's work, I do make pictures in my head. I assume now that that's what Toyin does as well, that there's some picture-making that's happening.

**Kimberly:** Thought pictures.

**Dell:** Thought pictures. Exactly. There's some kind of thought picture process happening when she's reading language.

**Kimberly:** Maybe we should just send a piece to Morrison and see if she has anything to add….

**Dell:** What does she think. [laughter]

**Kimberly:** Thought pictures, yes. But I like that, I like that connection as well. Not just the skin at the study but also the link with literary traditions.

**Dell:** Well the other thing too to keep in mind, at least in the art world, we talk about, “How does someone read your work, or is your work legible or illegible.” So it still has to do with language and reading and
communication, so it's kind of a default way of talking about art, certainly within art school. But this link to language—I think is absolutely there and without even necessarily referencing whatever literal text we're thinking of. The thought picture thing—it's there, it's embedded in the way we talk about art.

**Kimberly:** Okay. We are almost at the end. I did want to think a little bit about how we might see her in time, like the temporality of the pieces, because I'm struck by how they cannot really be located. Part of that is because they can't really always locate clothing so... that's already off the table, but also that I'm not quite sure how I'm supposed to be reading, skimming the way, the way that it is drawn, because it is not a painting, and because it is not a photograph.

How I'm supposed to temporally locate myself to think about how you think that might be functioning?

**Cheryl:** Like everyday gesturing, there's sort of an authenticity of the... it's the now or the not-too-distant future. It's soothing in the space that I do get located, I feel like kinship, too, especially with dark skin. It's having darkness as the skin, so there's a kinship with that. I feel presence.

**Kimberly:** It's true because we didn't talk about the darkness of the skin being significant as well and also pulling in the viewer, pulling in the subject.

**Cheryl:** I think Toyin and I used to joke about, “Is she Black or is she Black-Black.” You know, even being able to have somebody to say that too and so she wrote a book that represents that. I don't know, I feel comforted. I feel like I have a place in the world.
Bios

Kimberly Juanita Brown is an assistant professor in the department of English and the program in Africana Studies at Mount Holyoke College. Her research engages the site of the visual as a way to negotiate the parameters of race, gender, and belonging. Her book, *The Repeating Body: Slavery’s Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Duke University Press) examines slavery’s profound ocular construction, the presence and absence of seeing in relation to the plantation space and the women represented there. She is currently at work on her second book, tentatively titled “Their Dead Among Us: Photography, Melancholy, and the Politics of the Visual.” This project examines images of the dead in *The New York Times* in 1994 from four overlapping geographies: South Africa, Rwanda, Sudan, and Haiti. Brown argues that a cartography of the ocular exists in documentary images in order to normalize global violence as inextricably connected to blackness via photographic proximity. Brown is the founder and convener of The Dark Room: Race and Visual Culture Studies Seminar. The Dark Room is a working group of scholars examining the intersection of critical race theory and visual culture studies.

Cheryl Dunye emerged as part of the 1990's "queer new wave" of young film and video makers. Dunye's work is defined by her distinctive narrative voice. Often set within a personal or domestic context, her stories foreground issues of race, sexuality and identity. Dunye's narratives are peppered with deconstructive elements with characters directly addressing the camera and making ironic references to the production itself. The effect of these devices, and of Dunye's appearance in her films and tapes "as herself," is to blur the distinctions between fiction and "real life." Dunye has made over 15 films including *Mommy is Coming, The Owls, My Baby’s Daddy*, and HBO's *Strangers Inside* which garnered her an Independent Spirit award nomination for best director. Her debut film, *The Watermelon Woman*, was awarded the Teddy at the Berlinale in 1996 and was recently restored by Outfest's UCLA Legacy Project for the films’ 20th anniversary. Dunye has received numerous awards and honors for her
work including a 2016 Guggenheim Fellowship. She is also a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Presently Dunye is a Professor in the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University and is at work on her next feature film *Black is Blue*.

**Dell M. Hamilton** is an artist, writer, and curator based in Boston. Born in Spanish Harlem and spending her formative years in the Bronx borough of New York, Hamilton was raised in a bilingual as well as a multi-racial Honduran family. Her studio practice is grounded in the interdisciplinary contexts of the African Diaspora and her tactics include text art, installation, video, photography and performance art. Her work has been shown to a wide variety of audiences in Boston including the Museum of Fine Arts, Spoke Gallery/Medicine Wheel Productions, NK Gallery, Mobius, OKW Gallery, the Fort Port Artist Building, Atlantic Works, the Joan Resnikoff Gallery/Roxbury Community College, and the Massachusetts State House. In 2010, she also participated in Perfolink: Maestros y Discipulos in earthquake-ravaged Concepción, Chile. She currently works at Harvard's Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. Her programmatic projects have included the 13th Triennial Conference of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA), "African Art: Roots and Routes" as well as the inaugural "Bridging the Gaps: African American Art Conference" both in 2004. During her stint as assistant director at the Du Bois Institute, she also curated exhibitions for Carrie Mae Weems, Suesan Stovall, and Lyle Ashton Harris. She is a contributor to *Transition* magazine, an international review published by Indiana University Press and has presented scholarly research papers at the Musee Quai Branly, The Howard Art Project, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and at Boston University.