

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

**looking in dimmed light**

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It is late summer. The last few days of August remain. On warm evenings like these I find my mother earnestly wandering through her garden. The sky, a lake at night, dark blue and moving, hangs as she observes her plants. She slowly follows the bed from one side of the fence to the other. Rumbling quietly in the distance we hear thunder and our skin catches the meager droplets of water raining from above. I watch my mother. I wonder when she'll come inside and hope she won't get caught in the rain. I wonder what is to be gained by looking at flowers in dimmed light.

Vibrant in my memory are the carefully tended gardens of my childhood home and the homes of my grandparents - as places to gather and share, as fruition of labour, as an embodiment of pure beauty and as a place of respite. Beyond the garden, life holds challenges making it feel like it is something that must be endured, being harsh or difficult. But within my recollections a garden becomes a place of celebration and inherent abundance. By dedicating myself to making work, I am able to wade through memories (the raspberries that grow through the fence that my grandmother picks, playful days running within expansive fields of corn, quiet afternoons under shade crushing leaves from the lemon tree) creating objects that turn fleeting recollections into permanent notations of experience. This plentitude is represented in what I make through voluminous forms that softly transition from pot to body to plant to hair, surfaces that are enveloped with colour, shapes, pattern and dense textures, or portraits of serenity, (in the form of) blissful women the colour of the richest soil, wearing their hair like crowns.

My relationship to the pot is fundamental to how I identify as an artist and how I inhabit forms. Objects begin as vessels with the potential to become abstracted representations of the human (female) figure, flowers, fruit or other elements of the natural world. As I build, the size of the object grows and becomes similar in scale to that of a torso. This similarity emphasizes the relationship between the object and the human body. If looking down from above, the mouth of the vessel is open and wide, and the interior of the volume is generous. Building vessels is an ode to my first personal encounter with ceramics, the material and to the historical traditions it carries,

using the surface of pots to create pattern and narrative that visually describes my vision - vision as something of great beauty - vision as envisioning contemporary life.

The different streams of my work are united by coil and line. A coil generates form, form creates edge and silhouette, edge and silhouette frame surface. A gesture as simple as making a line, when performed repeatedly, builds and transforms. I feel free when using coils to establish forms - there are no restrictions, the possibility of where the lines lead to is endless. Through this process I am able to engage my intuition and as concepts (my thoughts) progress throughout the rhythm of making, I develop families of shapes. Coil after coil I arrive at the juncture of planes and curves which articulate edge. The slowness of building one coil at a time invites the potential for the process to be disrupted and flexibility to wander from original ideas. I work into the unknown creating objects not yet imagined.

There is movement that occurs naturally in work built of layers. Similar to the measured qualities of music, the rhythm within my work is related to time. Melodies that respond to a particular progression of chords, that relate to a tempo with accents that fit perfectly into orchestrated moments, a cadence ensues through both the things you hear (or see) and the ones you don't (stylized figures, blank(ish) faces, made up flowers/leaves...lack of specificity). With the form before me, I begin to build the surface. It is broken up into sections using vertical and/or horizontal lines. Instead of finding exact measurements, I find balance using the span of my fingers or the width of my hand. Larger floral elements are used to divide the space, stylized figures make their way in between, behind or in front of the foliage. Using extruded colour, glaze is

applied to the surface slowly. The background is filled in last. This allows me to continually make additions until I feel the space is full.

Although I work with traditions, coiling as one of the basic ways to form clay and surface painting as one of the basic ways to communicate a narrative, I am not interested in replicating things as much as I am interested in referencing or abstracting what I see in the present world, or the images that exist in my memories. I am more curious about how my being in the world and the things I consume influence my desire to make objects, patterns and narratives. The forms and surfaces I create are the result of noticing and considering a variety of things. Lately I've been playing videos while I work - live performances of musicians I admire, music videos that used to captivate me as a younger person, and more specifically, a song/video by Beyonce that I've used as inspiration called 'Grown Woman'. The video is colorful and vibrant and mixes old home videos of a young Beyonce with afro-futuristic visions. Choreographed dances performed by a diverse group of women emphasizes the importance of female empowerment. The confident and uplifting message of the music and lyrics are aspirational and cause me to feel reassured with who I am.

In recent works, as both decorative ornamentation and a more representational motif, the braid represents portions of my identity as a woman of colour. Being very present within all streams of black hair culture, braids are beautiful, historically functional, protective, sculptural, decorative/ornamental, spiritual and fundamental to the many ways in which black people can style their hair. The braid as a line made up of lines, woven together through a repetitive process, hand plaiting becomes about the

labour and craftsmanship, the act of doing as a moment of meditative experience. I have always had an obsession with hair, particularly during my formative years, as the texture of mine differentiated me from many people and connected me to another group in which I could see myself. Although my preoccupation with hair has changed as I've grown older, I am still fascinated and proud of what it can do. The infinite ways in which textured hair can hold a style, the potential for scale, the array of ways it can be worn: these qualities remind me of working with clay, which is malleable and structural, requiring a knowledge and sensitivity of touch that is built up by doing.

When thinking about the representation of people of colour, more specifically black people within ceramics, and particularly the contemporary world of ceramics in which I find myself, making ceramic works, as a black/mixed person, and depicting this as image on what I make is important to me. When my work enters public spaces, people of colour will be able to see themselves in what I make, and can then be present in the spaces I think that specific representation is lacking

Beauty is important to me as a person in the world, and as an artist I want to make beautiful things. My understanding of beauty relates to harmony and serenity. To me, recognizing beauty becomes a spiritual experience - seeing something perform its function effortlessly (nature), believing it to be conceived by something more powerful than myself, which in turn, makes me more powerful too, as I am also a part of the natural world. As I envision contemporary life, or life in the future there is harmony among all things and peaceful cooperation is essential. Women lead, nature wraps

freely around us, brown bodies triumph, joy is plentiful and boundaries are blurred to the point where things thrive in the same space (anti-hierarchical).

Utilizing different streams of works to create composites of associated visual and thematic languages, I make objects that, when presented together, democratize the space in which they exist. The figure does not become more important than the vessel, rather the two accompany one another in balance, or are essentially the same thing. In the way that a garden is made up of different plants, grasses, sculptures, pots, rocks, soils, all belonging in the given area, as a woman of colour and mixed ethnicity I naturally perceive myself to also be a union of similar but different things, residing in between, belonging to diverse communities. The way I make a mix of objects relates to the way I live in the world - negotiating the relationships between place and people, architecture and nature - and how these categories exist in my day to day reality.

In the gardens of family and friends equality prevails. The ground is a neutralizer providing space for imagery. It is humbling - plants grow out of the ground, motifs become focal points inside the background, diversity/equality acts as ground that allows everything to live harmoniously. In the garden I create, plant life hovers up and around a figure, flowers ascend out of a vessel that appears to be floating. (My garden is a reflection of myself) The garden I create makes space for women to move joyfully or remain still in quiet contemplation, in nature and amongst each other. The garden I create makes space for my memories to live, through tumbling berries, woven hair and falling rain drops. The garden I create is watched over by my ancestors as I engage the past and make (or pose questions for) the future.

The sun is almost gone and it's even darker now. My mother does not follow in to the house behind me, she stays outside and continues to wander through the garden. Perhaps she is able to experience the space in a different way, maybe she likes the solitude or she's checking for new buds! As I walk back toward the door, I realize that the vines that crawl up the side of the house now blend into the bricks they hover upon and I can hardly distinguish one thing from the next. My memory tells me of what is there, but my eyes see differently. In the dimmed light my imagination takes over and I can create what I want to see. The fence made of braids is intertwined with lily of the valley, raspberries bloom like roses atop a slim stem, in the distance trees turn into stoic figures protecting the growth around them. I recognize the smell of flowers, but I don't necessarily see them. Instead they are veiled in twilight, fracturing my understanding of what I know, free from the specifics that are usually articulated by light. By not highlighting what is in front of us, there is opportunity for our attention to be directed differently. While diversity remains, in the dimmed light differences dissolve and we blend easily into our surroundings, which challenges us to acknowledge the ways in which we are indistinguishable. Though individual experiences may be disparate, we possess the capacity to empathize with the guarded realities of each other's lives. In dimmed light I can visualize a version of the world where space is made for people of colour to dwell in their own delight, where things can change form and are no longer restricted to one way of being, and nature is no longer threatened by the actions of society. In dimmed light I create my own garden.



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## Technical Statement

### Glaze Base 1

*Transparent ^6 - Semi-gloss, waxy texture*

G200	40
Silica	17
Zinc	6
Whiting	14
Strontium Carbonate	5
Ball Clay (OM4)	18

### Glaze Base 2

*VC Matte Base ^6 - Satin texture, very smooth*

Custer Feldspar	40
Frit 3124	9
Talc	9
Whiting	16
EPK	10
Flint	16

Can settle...add epsom salt.

These glazes can be applied quite thick and will not run. I apply them with a slip trailer line by line, or in a circular motion to cover more space. I use approximately 55-65 percent water with these glazes to ensure they don't flow too easily when I apply them (consistency of a milkshake) These bases work well with stains. I keep the percentage of colourant low between 2 and 5 percent. I apply a mixture of CMC gum and water after applying glaze (approximately 1 tbs of mixed CMC+water (consistency of thick syrup) and drop it in approximately 355ml of water and shake). This gets sprayed on top of the glaze to create a harder surface which allows me handle the glazed object without the glaze rubbing off.

### **Glaze Base 3**

*Sugary Matte ^6 - dry, sugary surface, "glows"*

Neph Sy	55
Strontium Carb	20
Lithium Carb	4.5
EPK	10.5
Silica	10

Original glaze uses barium. I substitute barium for strontium - you can also do 50/50. This glaze can run a lot if applied thick. Can develop a bubbly/holey texture where it pools if it's thick. Doesn't work well with many stains. Has a very dry and sugary texture that shimmers under light. Fumes around the edges.