

December 2021

The Interdisciplinary Work of Senga Nengudi: How Abjection in Art Can Lead to Greater Deai in Exhibition Spaces By Danielle Lynne Paswaters

Danielle Lynne Paswaters
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd>



Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Paswaters, Danielle Lynne, "The Interdisciplinary Work of Senga Nengudi: How Abjection in Art Can Lead to Greater Deai in Exhibition Spaces By Danielle Lynne Paswaters" (2021). *Theses and Dissertations*. 3057.

<https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/3057>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunicationteam-group@uwm.edu.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK OF SENGA NENGUDI:
HOW ABJECTION IN ART CAN LEAD TO DEAI IN EXHIBITION SPACES

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in Art History

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2021

ABSTRACT

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK OF SENGA NENGUDI: HOW ABJECTION IN ART CAN LEAD TO DEAI IN EXHIBITION SPACES

by

Danielle Lynne Paswaters

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021
Under the Supervision of Professor Jennifer Johung

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) have become popular topics in today's increasingly divisive and political climate. This thesis investigates how *the abject* in art challenges social structures and institutional norms through an analysis of the interdisciplinary work of Senga Nengudi. While this conversation has been started by Leticia Alvarado regarding the work of Ana Mendieta, there is no scholarship on the more specific ways that Nengudi's work employs the concept of *Blackness* itself as abject. This gap in literature is not only a disservice to the work of Nengudi, but also to scholars and institutions that aim to understand how incorporating non-traditional art into exhibition spaces can open up DEAI conversations.

This project will analyze Nengudi's work *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* as exhibited in both the 1980 exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation* and its 2018 retrospective exhibition *Dialectics of Entanglement*. The theory of abjection will then be analyzed through the scholarly work of Julia Kristeva, Leticia Alvarado, and Saidiya Hartman. Finally, a review of the 2020 virtual programming titled *(At Home) On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi* will explore how *the abject* has the power to create feelings of awkwardness, in turn challenging the viewer to self-reflect. In conclusion, it is through the use of *the abject* that the work of Senga Nengudi navigates the complexities of subject position to engage diverse

audiences and demand for increased acceptance in the face of heterogeneity – on not only an individual level, but also institutionally.

© Copyright by Danielle Lynne Paswaters, 2021
All Rights Reserved

To

My Son,

Never stop learning, challenging, and forgiving – others, but more importantly yourself.

And above all else, every day chose compassion and happiness.

I LOVE YOU.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
List of Figures.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	xiii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I Nengudi, Her Early <i>R.S.V.P. Series & Dialectics of Isolation</i> (1980).....	5
<i>Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street</i> (1980).....	7
A.I.R. Gallery and <i>Dialectics Of Isolation</i>	8
Carrie Rickey’s Review of <i>DOI</i> in Context.....	10
Chapter II Abjection and Identity.....	14
Kristeva’s Theory on Abjection.....	15
Abjection and Mendieta (Leticia Alvarado).....	17
Abjection and Senga Nengudi (Saidiya Hartman).....	19
Chapter III <i>Dialectics of Entanglement</i> (2018).....	23
<i>Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street</i> (2018).....	23
Exhibition Reviews of <i>DOE</i>	25
Fabius & Hernandez, Rakes, and D’Souza on <i>DOE</i>	26
Chapter IV The Awkward White Witness—AKA A Self Reflection (2020).....	30
Witnessing as White.....	32
What Can We Do?.....	34
Chapter V Nengudi & DEAI the Exhibition Setting.....	36
Figures.....	38
Bibliography.....	116

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 0.1 Senga Nengudi, <i>I</i> , 1977.....	37
Figure 0.2 Propecia Leigh aka Senga Nengudi, photograph from the series <i>Hands</i> , digital image, 2003–2012.	38
Figure 0.3 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P</i> , Fall 1976, Nylon mesh, sand. 4 X 3 feet.....	39
Figure 0.4 <i>R.S.V.P</i> sculptures activated by the artist and Maren Hassinger in <i>Performance Piece</i> . Perl C. Wood Gallery, Los Angeles, 1977, 1977/2014.....	40
Figure 0.5 Installation view, Senga Nengudi, <i>Répondez s'il vous plaît</i> , exhibition poster from Just Above Midtown Gallery, 1977.....	41
Figure 0.6 Senga Nengudi, Installation view, <i>Senega Nengudi. Topologies</i> exhibition.....	42
Figure 0.7 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P.</i> , 2004.....	43
Figure 0.8 <i>R.S.V.P</i> Revisited – <i>Underwire</i> , 1977.....	44
Figure 0.9 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P. I</i> , 1977.....	45
Figure 0.10 Photo from the opening, Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York, 1977.....	46
Figure 1.1 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P</i> , 1975-77.....	47
Figure 1.2 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P. Reverie “D”</i> , 2014.....	48
Figure 1.3 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P. Series</i> , 1976-present, performance by Maren Hassinger....	49
Figure 1.4 <i>R.S.V.P</i> sculptures activated by Senga Nengudi and Maren Hassinger in <i>Performance Piece</i> -Nylon Mesh at Pearl C. Wood Gallery, Los Angeles.....	50
Figure 1.5 Nengudi with <i>Water Composition II</i> , ca. 1970.....	51
Figure 1.6 Nengudi, <i>Water Composition I</i> , ca. 1972.....	52
Figure 1.7 Nengudi, <i>Water Compositions</i> , 1970.....	53
Figure 1.8 Nengudi, <i>Water Composition III</i> , 1970.....	54
Figure 1.9 Senga Nengudi, <i>Red Devil (soul 2)</i> , 1972.....	55

Figure 1.10 Senga Nengudi, <i>Drifting Leaves</i> , 1972.....	56
Figure 1.11 Senga Nengudi, <i>Down (Purple)</i> , 1972.....	57
Figure 1.12 Senga Nengudi with a fabric work, ca. 1972.....	58
Figure 1.13 Senga Nengudi, <i>Up (green, soul 3)</i> , 1973.....	59
Figure 1.14 Senga Nengudi, <i>Untitled</i> , ca. 1972.....	60
Figure 1.15 Senga Nengudi, <i>Down (Purple)</i> , 1972/2019, Chromogenic Color Print. Photo.....	61
Figure 1.16 Senga Nengudi installing “R.S.V.P. X,” 1976.....	62
Figure 1.17 Senga Nengudi, <i>Rubber Maid</i> , 2011.....	63
Figure 1.18 Image of an enslaved African American nursing two infants – One African American. One Caucasian.	64
Figure 1.19 Senga Nengudi, <i>R.S.V.P. Series</i> , 1976-present, performance at 2017 exhibition Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures at the DePaul Art Museum by Anna Martine Whitehead, Margaret Morris, and Alex Ellsworth on September 9, 2017.....	65
Figure 1.20 Senga Nengudi, <i>Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St</i> (1982/2014).....	66
Figure 1.21 Senga Nengudi performing with <i>Nuki-Nuki: Across 118th St</i> , an installation of Venetian blind slats and nylons, 1982.....	67
Figure 1.22 Senga Nengudi performing with <i>Nuki-Nuki: Across 118th St</i> , an installation of Venetian blind slats and nylons, 1982.....	67
Figure 1.23 Ana Mendieta with other members of the board of the A.I.R. Gallery 1977-1982...	68
Figure 1.24 Cover image and catalogue introduction for “Dialectics of Isolation” by Ana Mendieta, 1980. Ana Mendieta, Introduction, “Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United”.....	69
Figure 1.25 Judith Baca’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. <i>Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States</i>).....	69
Figure 1.26 Beverly Buchanan’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. <i>Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States</i>).....	70
Figure 1.27 Janet Olivia Henry’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. <i>Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States</i>).....	74

Figure 1.28 Senga Nengudi’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*).71

Figure 1.29 Lydia Okummura’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*).71

Figure 1.30 Judith Baca’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*).72

Figure 1.31 Selena Whitefeather’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*).72

Figure 1.32 Zarina’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*).73

Figure 1.33 Carrie Rickey’s 1980 exhibition review “The Passion of Ana” from *The Village Voice*.74

Figure 2.1 Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Facial Cosmetic Variations)*, January-February 1972.75

Figure 2.2 Installation of *Newcomers* showing the work of Senga Nengudi, Barnsdall Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 1976.76

Figure 2.3 Screenshot of *Dance and Violin Performance: Activation of Senga Nengudi’s R.S.V.P. Performance Piece* at the Denver Art Museum in association with their 2020/2021 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*.77

Figure 2.4 Screenshot of *Dance and Violin Performance: Activation of Senga Nengudi’s R.S.V.P. Performance Piece* at the Denver Art Museum in association with their 2020/2021 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*.77

Figure 2.5 Screenshot of *Dance and Violin Performance: Activation of Senga Nengudi’s R.S.V.P. Performance Piece* at the Denver Art Museum in association with their 2020/2021 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*.78

Figure 2.6 Senga Nengudi, *Swing Low*, 1977, reconstructed 2014.79

Figure 2.7 Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, 197880

Figure 2.8 Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, 1978.81

Figure 2.9 Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, 1978.82

Figure 2.10 Senga Nengudi, *Study for ‘Mesh Mirage’ 2*, 1977.83

Figure 2.11 Detail of Michelangelo’s *The Last Judgment* showing *St. Bartholomew*.84

Figure 3.1 2018 installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn showing Senga Nengudi’s *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street*.....85

Figure 3.2 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....86

Figure 3.3 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....87

Figure 3.4 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....88

Figure 3.5 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....89

Figure 3.6 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....90

Figure 3.7 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....91

Figure 3.8 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....92

Figure 3.9 Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn.....93

Figure 4.1 Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020.....94

Figure 4.2 Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020.....95

Figure 4.3 Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020.....95

Figure 4.4 Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 202096

Figure 4.5 Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020.....97

Figure 4.6 Cheryl Banks-Smith, and Senga Nengudi performing *Air Propo* at Just Above Midtown, New York, 1981.....98

Figure 4.7 *Flying*, performed by Houston Conwill, Maren Hassinger, Ulysses Jenkins, Franklin Parker, and Senga Nengudi at Barnsdall Park, Los Angeles, July 6, 1982, on the occasion of the opening of *Afro-American Abstractions* at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.....99

Figure 4.8 Left to right: Franklin Parker, Maren Hassinger, Houston Conwill, and Senga Nengudi performing *Art Activity*, Los Feliz neighborhood, Los Angeles, 1981.....99

Figure 5.1 Michelangelo's design for Capitoline Hill, now home to the Capitoline Museums. Engraved by Étienne Dupérac, 1568.....100

Figure 5.2 Louvre Museum, The Colonnade, the eastern facade of the Louvre Museum, Paris, 19th-century print. *Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*.....101

Figure 5.3 Ole Worm’s cabinet of curiosity is an example of the type of private “museums” that displayed an individual’s collection of natural history objects.....102

Figure 5.4 The International Exhibition of 1862 – Japanese Court, from *The Illustrated London News*, 20 September 1862.....103

Figure 5.5 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Art Museum Employees, by Gender.....104

Figure 5.6 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity.....105

Figure 5.7 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity.....106

Figure 5.8 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity.....107

Figure 5.9 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, New Hiring Since 2014, by Race/Ethnicity.....108

Figure 5.10 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Museum Hiring Over Last Four Years, by Race/Ethnicity.....109

Figure 5.11 Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Art Museum Employees, by Race/Ethnicity.....110

Figure 5.12 Diversity Best Practices Model, Diversity Primer-Weaver.....111

Figure 5.13 Inclusive Workplaces: A Review and Model, Shore, L., Cleveland, J., & Sanchez, D (2018) Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*..... 112

Figure 5.14 Museum visitors contemplating Senga Nengudi’s A.C.Q. I, 2016–17.....113

Figure 5.15 Senga Nengudi ca. 1978 (detail from contact sheet).....114

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my thesis advisor Professor Jennifer Johung for being silly, fun, real, and creative – for welcoming ideas outside of box of traditional academic standards and for opening the door for students to stand brave in their differences. Also, thank you Professor K. Wells, my second reader, for consistently keeping me balanced and grounded in the necessities of those same academic standards; and for pushing and challenging me to work creatively within those necessary parameters.

Thank you to Professor Josie Osborne and to the whole Art History Department at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee for your time, your wisdom, your patience, and your support – in not only my classes, but in the challenges we faced together outside of class. Your support and confirmation on my stance for equity and justice was everything at a time when it felt like my educational journey and career path was all for nothing. Thank you for being my support system and for providing the validation I needed during that difficult time.

I'd like to offer a special thank you to Professor Tanya Tiffany who pushed me in my undergraduate career (which I began over twenty years ago!) to travel internationally and to expand my experiences. And thank you also for encouraging me to specifically apply to UWM for my master's degree. I will forever be grateful for the influence you had on the trajectory of my life.

Thank you to both Joseph D. Ketner II and John McKinnon for your time, your leadership, your guidance, and all of your recommendation letters during my application process for graduate school. My three year curatorial internship under Joe and John at the Milwaukee Art Museum in the department of Modern and Contemporary art pivoted my career in more ways than I could begin to detail. I credit Joe specifically who encouraged this first generation single

mom to go back to school, to fight stereotypes, to challenge institutional norms, and to stand strong and plow my own path. Words cannot express the gratitude and sorrow that I have in my heart for Joe who had the largest impact on my career as my mentor and whom passed away from cancer in 2018 shortly after I began this journey. It is in honor of you that I walk in my career with my head held high.

I am forever indebted and in awe of my Mom and Grandma who, in raising me as two single mothers themselves, taught me to believe in myself from day one. Thank you for raising me to stand in my own confidence of right and wrong, to actively attempt to break unhealthy generational patterns, and to pursue all of my dreams – even when life’s curveballs (i.e. The Patriarchy) demanded unmeasurable sacrifices of you both and denied you the ability to do the same. We may not always (or rarely ever) see eye to eye anymore, but know that all that I am and all that I do is in honor of the two of you – even when it seems I am in direct contradiction of your own ideals. I love you both unconditionally and forever.

Thank you to my Dad, for whom over the last ten years has walked side-by-side with me in this continuum of time, and because of which we’ve developed an unexpected silent bond. Thank you for simply just being there for me and Manny. Sometimes we all just need someone to stand next to. You are this consistent for us.

There is absolutely no way that this journey would have been possible without the other Moms in my circle. Without their help with babysitting, carpooling, and absorbing the stress of being my daily sounding board, I most certainly would have drowned along the way. Thank you for all of the late nights, the sleepovers, the tears, the food, the conversation, the coffee, and the sisterhood. Through you I feel seen. You are my community. You are my chosen family.

And last, but most importantly, thank you to my son who, for the past four years, has been far more patient, kind, forgiving and mature than I could have ever asked of him. When I was first accepted into graduate school you were seven. You were attached to my hip at all times, you wore spiderman every day, and I often carried your sweet sleeping body into the house after long car rides from grandma's . . . Now you are eleven. You have crushes on girls, you know what the real Santa is all about, you're weighing in on big decisions like choosing a middle school, and you're literally wearing my shoes! Without you, I would not be who I am, I would not have the ambition I have, and I would not walk with the sense of purpose that I do. I am just so excited to be done with school, to have only one job, and to spend all my free time for the next seven years on just being your mom and enjoying what is left of your childhood.

INTRODUCTION:

Nengudi's *R.S.V.P. Series*, which she began in 1976 and continues to produce today, utilizes the elasticity of nylon stockings to question boundaries and interrogate identity categories. Filled with sand and other found objects, her sculptures resemble shimmering spider webs, twisting tree vines and stretched and used bodies (Figures 0.1 – 0.2). Suspended and exposed for viewers to consume, these truly interdisciplinary works can be experienced as passive sculptures, as collaborative live performances, and as edifying photographic and video documentation (Figures 0.3 – 0.6). *R.S.V.P. – Répondez s'il vous plait* – translates to “reply if it pleases you” and is an invitation for active participation on the part of the viewer. Looking beyond their initial elegant appearance, and with an intentional critical analysis, Nengudi's use of brown nylon stockings can be analyzed as reflecting the violent United States' history of Black bodies pulled limb to limb, chained and outstretched in anticipation for the end of a whip (Figure 0.7). Her works echo the tragedies of the toxic male gaze, an oversexualization of the naked black and brown female body, and the fragile edges of our decrepit society.(Figure 0.8 – 0.10).

While graceful and majestic, Nengudi's *R.S.V.P* series is simultaneously shocking and disturbing, harnessing a unique ability to capture the imagination through brutal representations of distorted and disembodied human forms (Figure 0.8). It is through these absorbing displays of horror that Nengudi's work mirrors Kristeva's theory of abjection and confronts the viewer — particularly the sheltered and naïve viewer. It is in fact *the abject* experiences of this Black woman, which are in turn reflected in *the abject* materiality of her artwork. Nengudi's work unapologetically triggers an abject relationship with privileged spectators and calls for an embrace of non-comprehension.¹ My thesis analyzes Nengudi's work through the lens of *the*

¹ While I repeatedly discuss how embracing *the abject* can allow space for these artists to be “included” in the traditional art historical cannon, I acknowledge that this may directly contradict the wants and/or needs of these

abject in an effort to explore the ways in which her interdisciplinary work navigates the complexities of subject position to engage diverse audiences and demand for increased acceptance in the face of heterogeneity – on not only an individual level, but also institutionally. I aim to investigate the powerful, yet often discounted, connection between the work that is chosen to exist in exhibition spaces and the impact that it can have on not only the visitor, but also the hosting organization.

While my research adheres to the work of Senga Nengudi, the exploration for this paper will build upon a two-fold association with the artist Ana Mendieta. I will first give a brief breakdown of the early work of Nengudi, followed by an overview of the 1980 exhibition hosted at the Artist in Residence (A.I.R.) Gallery in New York titled *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States (DOI)*. This group exhibition was curated by Mendieta and incorporated the nylon work of Nengudi.² I will then approach the theory of abjection utilizing the scholarly work of Julia Kristeva, Leticia Alvarado, and Saidiya Hartman. While Alvarado employs an understanding of *the abject* to Mendieta's work, there is no scholarship on the abject's role in the work of Senga Nengudi. I will build upon Alvarado's examination through an understanding of scholar Saidiya Hartman's work on *Blackness* as abjection. Pairing their research to form an understanding of Nengudi's work gives insight into how the specific adverse lived experiences of Nengudi are reflected in her art, in turn triggering an abject relationship between it and the unassuming viewer. This understanding of *the abject* will be followed by an overview of A.I.R. Gallery's 2018 retrospective exhibition *Dialectics of*

artists. As stated above, I acknowledge that this may conflict with the efforts of intersectional feminism, which adheres to a decentering of white mainstream feminism and instead encourages an embrace of all differences; and efforts rooted in decolonization.

² While Ana Mendieta wrote the exhibition's introductory essay and is referred to as the curator in this paper, it must be noted that *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* was organized in 1980 by A.I.R. Gallery members Ana Mendieta and Kazuko Miyamoto together with the artist Zarina (Zarina Hashmi).

Entanglement: Do We Exist Together? (DOE). The arguments presented here will be extended through a review of the 2020 virtual programming titled *(At Home) On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, hosted by the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in D.C. with scholar and curator Evelyn Hankins. Through a critical analysis of this authentic dialogue I aim to expose the power that *the object* has to generate feelings of awkwardness, which when not censored, can lead to self-reflection and ultimately institutional critique of exhibition spaces. It is during this examination that I will step outside of the traditional academic armor of thesis writing and delve into a more personal and vulnerable self-reflection, engaging with this analysis through a transparent acknowledgement of my own subject position as a white art historian and single mother to a biracial son.

I'd like to take a moment here to clarify my specific interpretation of some terms that will be used moving forward and which may not otherwise be intuitively understood. I utilize the word *society* in this paper to define the population and mainstream societal norms and trends existing in the United States from the mid 1950's to present. *Essentialism* or *essentialist* is used to understand a way of thinking that claims that gender, or the experience of that gender, is in some way inherent and biologically determined. This is to say that before birth, one's gender, sexual preference and levels of masculinity and femininity are all predetermined. This view also maintains that all groups of a gender have a similar universal experience despite varying identity factors like race, class and ethnicity. *Intersectional Feminism* adheres to a feminist approach that decenters white mainstream feminism and separates itself from second-wave feminism by encouraging an embrace of difference. Additionally, it's efforts are rooted in decolonization. *Transnational Feminism* is unique in that it concerns itself and its aims more closely with

understanding how globalization and capitalism negatively affect people across nations, races, genders, classes and sexualities.

CHAPTER I

NENGUDI, HER EARLY *R.S.V.P. SERIES & DIALECTICS OF ISOLATION* (1980)

In 1967, Nengudi graduated from California State University – Los Angeles (CSULA) with a major in art and a minor in dance. After spending a year at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan, where she studied under the Avant-garde artist-collective Gutai, Nengudi returned to CSULA to attend graduate level courses in sculpture. Despite living, working, and exhibiting in both Los Angeles and New York, it wasn't until 1974, when she gave birth to her first son, that Nengudi found a media for her work that attracted the attention it deserved. The experiences of pregnancy and the delivery of her son provided inspiration for Nengudi's new series by narrowing in on an examination of the human body. As Nengudi's belly physically swelled and her body gave itself over to the creation of new life, so too did her identity categories expand and her burdens multiply. For Nengudi, becoming a mother opened up a world of possibilities while simultaneously weighing her down with another oppressive layer of categorization – now a “single Black mother”. She began to explore the organic ways in which the body holds the capacity to stretch and return to form, but more pointedly she highlighted the specific resilience of the Black female body and psyche. Nengudi found that by filling nylon stockings with sand and other found objects, they replicated the form, stretch and durability of used and discarded flesh, speaking to identity politics and perpetual social imbalances (Figure 1.1). Nengudi's sculptures resemble interlocked webs, tortured bodies, and extended human flesh; crucified between pristine gallery walls (Figure 1.2). Additionally, through choreographed and improvisational dance routines, performers activate her sculptures and fuse with them by entangling their body within the netlike structures, allowing the nylon to become an extension of their own abject appendages (Figures 1.3 – 1.4).

Nengudi's participation in the 1978 group exhibition *The Concept as Art* at Just Above Midtown Gallery placed her at the forefront of a conversation on American abstract art, which centered the work of African-American artists dating back to the 1940s. This exhibition considered Nengudi's water-filled vinyl forms from the 1960s and early 1970s, her rope and flag series from the 1970s, and her nylon works from 1975 (Figures 1.5 – 1.16).³ In the exhibition catalogue, Nengudi states:

“I am working with nylon mesh because it relates to the elasticity of the human body. From tender, tight beginnings to sagging . . . The body can only stand so much push and pull until it gives way, never to resume its original shape. After giving birth to my own son, I thought of black wet nurses suckling child after child—their own as well as those of others—until their breasts rested upon their knees, their energies drained . . . My works are abstracted reflections of used bodies, visual images that serve my aesthetic decisions as well as my ideas.”⁴

Unfortunately this powerful and disturbing inspiration is often overlooked, permitting her work to be digested simply as an elegant sculpture, easy on the eyes (Figure 1.17-1.19). While it is understandable that each viewer will approach artworks through their own subject position and individual interpretations, it is when these audiences fail to push further and question their understanding that the true tragedy occurs. Because passive viewing has become a standard tendency in our society, naïve and oversimplified interpretations continue to minimize the work

³ In 1971, Nengudi moved to Spanish Harlem, New York, and began working with flag fabric to create silhouettes reflecting bodies or “souls”. She installed these pieces outside in the city streets, alleys, and alongside buildings stating that they reflected her “experiences seeing people on heroin who stood like forest trees on the street corners, graceful in their highs, swaying in the wind—never falling.”

“Senga Nengudi: Experimenting from the Start.” Denver Art Museum, <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibition-guide-senga-nengudi-experimenting>.

⁴ Statement by the artist on the occasion of her exhibition at Just Above Midtown, March, 1977.

Linda Goode-Bryant, Marcy S. Philips, *Contextures*, (New York, Just Above Midtown Gallery, 1978), 46.

and efforts of many artists of color, leaving their intentions unseen, their work underappreciated, and their voices appropriated.

Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street (1980):

Constructed of taut nylon stockings and perilously balanced venetian blinds, *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* echoes the fragile balance of the Black and Latinx existence in Harlem in the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 1.20 – 1.22). This anxiety-filled construction presents fickle blinds in a hammocked snare of nylon stockings, echoing an unsteady and rickety rope bridge – daring you to cross it’s perilous mile-high ravine. In a 2018 interview, Nengudi discussed this specific piece stating:

“*Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* originated from my time in Spanish Harlem. I lived in Spanish Harlem in the early part of the seventies, and when I was in Spanish Harlem I just observed that there was this kind of hand-to-mouth existence like a house of cards. So I wanted to have something that had that kind of energy. When I first made it, I was so nervous I could not sleep the night of the opening because I had structured it in such a way that actually, someone could come along and it would collapse. And in that case, my thought was, if it collapses, then that person would have to rebuild it. So it has this potential of performance consistently with it.”⁵

Following the First World War, Harlem saw a large influx of Puerto Rican and Latin American migrants. This trend led to the western portion of East Harlem to be nicknamed “Spanish Harlem”. By the 1950s the term Spanish Harlem came to define the entire East Harlem neighborhood, which embodied 63,000 Puerto Ricans who came to call the neighborhood home.⁶

⁵ “Senga Nengudi.” Henry Moore Institute, 2018, https://www.henry-moore.org/whats-on/2018/09/21/senga-nengudi?fbclid=IwAR08pPsR0HBbsT-.O6jYG3ihs7RtVmlXZsmhN37IV5j1oIKo9ZLL_VTpb1f8#.

⁶ Kenneth T Jackson, Lisa Keller, and Nancy Flood. *The Encyclopedia of New York City: Second Edition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 573.

Unfortunately, the urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s leveled much of the neighborhood, causing financial deficits, white flight, and increased poverty; in turn leading to race riots, gang wars, drug abuse, and increased crime rates.⁷

The unstable and insecure existence of *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* reflects these harsh realities that people of color living in Spanish Harlem in the 1970s and 1980s endured. Grappling with the struggles of survival, this piece speaks to the very real and harmful consequences of *othering*. It highlights the systemic injustices lain upon the shoulders of society's exiles. *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* is a social critique, meant to provide its viewers a taste of the anxiety, uncertainties, and poverty that was a daily reality for many – the stockings as substitutes for literal arms stretched thin in their attempts to “keep it all together”. It represents a section of humanity that has been cast out and continues to remain largely unseen, misunderstood, and neglected by its privileged white counterparts. Indeed, because *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* deliberately addressed inequitable social constructions and systemic injustices, its inclusion in the 1980 exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States (DOI)* at the Artist in Residence (A.I.R.) Gallery in New York was consistent with the specific social conversation that this show aimed to raise.

A.I.R. Gallery and *Dialectics Of Isolation*:

As the first all-female artist's cooperative gallery in the United States, the Artist in Residence (A.I.R.) Gallery was founded in 1972 with an aim to highlight female artists and provide

⁷ Urban renewal (also known as gentrification) is the act of clearing out of low income and “unsightly” areas in inner cities, utilizing slum clearance to create opportunities for higher class housing, businesses, etc. Proponents of urban renewal argue that it is meant to restore economic viability to an area by attracting external investments and that it encourages business start-ups and survival. Consequences however are great, as the process of slum removal ignores the social problems that caused the inequities to begin with. Many lower income families actually continue to fall below the income threshold to afford even the new low income housing. This forces them out of their neighborhoods in which they relied on for their income and sense of community-further perpetuating the problem. Roger Caves, *Encyclopedia of the City* (Abingdon, Oxon, OX, Routledge, 2005), 107.

opportunities for them to challenge the historically male-dominated commercial gallery scene (Figure 1.23). However, despite these efforts, many women of color artists felt appropriated by the A.I.R. Gallery, who welcomed them in to participate in their feminist objectives, yet didn't acknowledge their more complex and layered needs as women of color.⁸ Feminist aims in the 1970s and 1980s (also known as second-wave feminism), while groundbreaking in their attempts to challenge patriarchal norms and systematic oppression, unfortunately encompassed a widespread ignorance to varied and layered identities.

In an attempt to highlight these shortcomings, *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists (DOI)* was an institutional critique by the participating artists and curators.⁹ In the catalogue's introduction essay, Ana Mendieta adhered that the concerns of the show supported those of the Unaligned Nations and detailed that the diverse experiences of each of the participating artists were unified through their shared endurance of colonized oppression.¹⁰ She furthered to say "This exhibition points not necessarily to the injustice or incapacity of a

⁸ Art Historian and Scholar Jane Blocker expresses this dilemma in her book *Where is Ana Mendieta?*. She states: "As a female artist of the mid-1970s and early 1980s whose work was most prominently exhibited at feminist galleries like A.I.R. and the Women's Building or in group shows whose focus was on Latin America, Mendieta is usually categorized either as a *feminist* or as ethnically *other*." Jane Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1999), 21.

⁹ The Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) was a socialist organization founded by women of color. It was active from 1968 to 1980 and aimed at ending capitalism, racism, imperialism, and sexism. Members adhered that women of color faced a "triple jeopardy" of race, gender, and class oppression – embracing an intersectional approach to feminism. The organization's roots lay in the black civil rights movement, but it expanded to include women of color around the world.

Stephen Ward, "Third World Women's Alliance," in *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 141.

¹⁰ The Unaligned Nation, also known as the Non-Aligned Movement, defines countries that remained non-aligned with the conflicts between the pro-Soviet communist countries and the pro-American capitalist countries during the Cold War. The Non-Aligned Movement was formalized in 1956. In 1979 Fidel Castro released his Havana Declaration in support of national independence and security for all non-aligned countries in an effort to stand up against imperialism, colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, and domination. Britannica, "Non-Alignment Movement", Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Non-Alignment-Movement>.

society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being ‘other’” (Figures 1.24 – 1.32).¹¹

Despite Mendieta’s explicit words, audiences interpreted this exhibition as an angry reaction to Western feminism’s lack of racial inclusion, failing to appreciate the more personalized intentions behind the show. Reviews of the exhibition contextualized the show within the framework of white mainstream feminism, claiming that the artwork included in the exhibition did not in fact support Mendieta’s declarations.¹² In their inability to consider the exhibition with a more intersectional, or even transnational understanding, these reviews perpetuated the very appropriation that the show was so desperately attempting to thwart.

Carrie Rickey’s Review of *DOI* in Context:

In a September 1980 exhibition review on *DOI*, Carrie Rickey, a well-respected white feminist art critic of the time, stated: “Despite Mendieta’s avowal of otherness, most of the work here extols the phenomenological, the lyrical. Which makes for good art, but work that doesn’t

¹¹ Full statement of the *DOI* catalogue statement by Ana Mendieta:

“There is a certain time in history when people take consciousness of themselves and ask questions about who they are. After World War II, the label Third World came into being in reference to the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The movement of Unaligned Nations was founded in 1961 with a meeting which took place in Belgrade. Their aims are to end colonialism, racism and exploitation.

We of the Third World in the United States have the same concerns as the people of the Unaligned Nations. The white population of the United States, diverse, but of basic European stock, exterminated the indigenous civilization and put aside the Black as well as the other non-white cultures to create a homogenous male-dominated culture above the internal divergency.

Do we exist?...To question our cultures is to question our own existence our human reality. To confront this fact means to acquire an awareness of ourselves. This in turn becomes a search, a questioning of who we are and how we will realize ourselves.

During the mid to late sixties as women in the United States politicized themselves and came together in the Feminist Movement with the purpose to end the domination and exploitation by the white male culture, they failed to remember us. American Feminism as it stands is basically a white middle class movement.

As non-white women our struggles are two-fold.

This exhibition points not necessarily to the injustice or incapacity of a society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being “other””

Ana Mendieta, “Introduction” in *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, September 2–20, 1980, (New York: A.I.R.Gallery, 1980), Exhibition Catalogue, 1.

¹² Carrie Rickey, “The Passion of Ana”, *The Village Voice* (September 10-16, 1980), 75, as reproduced in Stephanie Rosenthal, *Ana Mendieta: Traces*, (London, Hayward Publishing, 2013) *op. cit.*, 206.

illustrate the passion of the affinity group’s spokeswoman” (Figure 1.33).¹³ As a critic responding to the contemporary moment she was living in, Rickey’s review was undeniably, and understandably, influenced by the contemporary efforts of the Black Power movement and second-wave feminism. Unfortunately, because she couldn’t see beyond her own subject position, this innovative exhibition fell victim to the art historical canon and mainstream cultural context of its time.

In 1971 the infamous essay “Why have there been no Great Women Artists?” by Linda Nochlin was released, which laudably aimed to raise awareness to the fact that women and their accomplishments had been systematically written out of art history.¹⁴ We understand today however that this early writing overlooked equally addressing the inclusion of minority women artists. Additionally, just five years prior to *DOI*, Arlene Raven, the notable feminist art historian and co-founder of the California feminist art movement, defined feminism with an assumption that all women artists were feminist artists. She further declared that anatomically male artists could not be feminists because it is the “universal female experience” that defines a feminist.¹⁵ Indeed, the majority of past critics failed to understand, consider, or make room for the work of these artists. Instead, many labeled their work as essentialist or simply overlooked them completely.¹⁶

¹³ Rickey, “The Passion of Ana”, *The Village Voice*, 75.

¹⁴ Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1998).

¹⁵ Arlene Raven, “Feminist Content in Current Female Art,” *Sister* Vol. 6, No. 5 (Oct/Nov 1975): 10.

¹⁶ Leticia Alvarado, “Towards a Personal Will to Continue Being Other: Ana Mendieta’s Abject Performances,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2015): 65-85.

While many reviews have been published on Ana Mendieta’s work throughout the years, it isn’t until the 2000s that reviews finally embrace a direct refusal of essentialism. It is during this era (1970s and 1980s) that Mendieta’s *Siluetas Series* gains positive recognition for their direct application of the female form and “earth goddess” qualities. Nengudi’s work however remained largely overlooked by this white-led feminist movement.

For example, in one review in 1998, Jane Blocker states, “Mendieta’s earthwork (in which the earth is carved into a female body) becomes an embarrassing essentializing gesture that reinscribes patriarchal conceptions of the female while pretending to liberate woman through some vague conception of universal power.”

Jane Blocker, “Ana Mendieta and the Politics of the *Venus Negra*,” *Cultural Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1998): 45.

While Western feminism had yet to incorporate a more intersectional understanding, simultaneously the Black Power movement similarly overlooked more subtle approaches to efforts that aligned with their own. And because these movements were directly responding to patriarchal oppression, they both advocated for artwork that embraced blatantly political content over what they considered as the less effective subtleties of abstract art. Taking these movements and their expectations into a timely consideration, one can see how Nengudi's work was minimally acknowledged. In a time when the Black Power movement, as well as the feminist arts movement, were both known for being fierce and uncompromising, Nengudi's nylon sculptures were often discounted for being too soft, too subtle and ironically too feminine.¹⁷

Carrie Ricky proclaimed that the work in *DOI* was incohesive and too individualized to adhere to one overall claim for the exhibition. However this was indeed the intention of this revolutionary show, which embraced being *othered* and in fact considered it a unifying descriptor. Regarding Nengudi's work specifically, Rickey states:

In another review of Mendieta's work in 1996, Miwon Kwon states, "Mendieta's work, especially the well-known projects from the 1970s, such as the *Siluetas*, *Fetish*, and *Rupestrian Sculptures* series, veer strongly toward the essentialist pole in both intention and reception."

Miwon Kwon, "Bloody Valentines: Afterimages by Ana Mendieta," *Inside the Visible*, ed. M Catherine de Segher (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 167.

However, in 2007 Jennifer Douglas argues that Mendieta never essentializes gender. She states "The body becomes an image of itself and a sign of other bodies. Rather than referring directly to her, these pieces make 'her' an ephemeral, unstable idea", suggesting that Mendieta uses her body as a site of discipline to subvert various categories that have been violently imposed on women, including gender."

Jennifer Darlene Douglas, *Like a Natural Woman: Constructing Gender from Performance to Performativity* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 88.

¹⁷ I have yet to find reference to Nengudi's work being directly labeled as essentialist, yet I suspect one reason for the overlooking of her work is because of such interpretations. While acknowledging that Mendieta's and Nengudi's work have broader application to an intersectional human existence, I accept that a certain level of essentialization may have been an interest in their expressions. I believe that artists have a right to explore essentialism while simultaneously addressing a wider experience with their body of work as a whole. The act of essentializing speaks to our thought process of identification and gives a comfortable categorization to works of art and their meanings.

However, it should be noted that as we point the finger at other feminists for essentializing we are ourselves by definition categorizing and excluding. Because of the disregard of Nengudi's work, little to no scholarship exists on her before the 2000s. The first and only major writing on Nengudi before 2015 is from the 1978 exhibition catalogue *Contextures* which analyses Afro-American artists of the 1970s, working in the American Abstract tradition. It will take another twenty years before Nengudi begins to receive recognition again by critics and scholars.

“Senga Nengudi . . . constructs a visual paradigm for an emotional state precisely by stretching the point. She interweaves wooden slats with panty hose, creating an improbable hammock which reflects a hang-loose flexibility. Cotton lisle, nylon, and silk panty hose hold the works together in Nengudi’s haphazard monument to tensile elasticity, perhaps a comment on the conditioned flexibility she must maintain as a non-white.”¹⁸

Senga Nengudi specifically aimed to reflect the stress and anxiety of living in a society that was built to crumble around her. Considering the social messaging of this specific piece, combined with her maternal inspirations, the inclusion of Nengudi’s work in *DOI* indeed reinforced the specific aims of the show through an expression of her distinctive experiences. As we continue to consider subject position to interpretations of her work, it becomes interesting to contrast these more essentialist views to ones that engages an understanding of *the abject*.

¹⁸ Rickey, “The Passion of Ana”, *The Village Voice*, 75.

CHAPTER II ABJECTION AND IDENTITY

In 1989 critical race theory was introduced to feminist study after the publication of legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". This theory explains how overlapping identity factors relate to discrimination and systems of oppression. This understanding acknowledges that a person's reality is dependent on the conditions of their own unique experiences, which are profoundly determined by varying social categorizations such as race, class, gender, privilege and discrimination. It was indeed the work of Crenshaw, among others, that catapulted the innovation of both intersectional feminism and ultimately critical race theory. Critical race theory adheres that racism is systemic in nature and is sustained through our laws and public policies, which in turn fuels racial hierarchies and perpetuates social inequalities.

In order to combat these hierarches and inequalities we each must first attempt to gain understandings outside of our own limited experiences. Engaging in critical visual analysis when approaching depictions of horror can encourage understanding and self-reflection through standing in the awkwardness that the abject can produce. By intentionally questioning what we see and interrogating our feelings about it, we challenge ourselves to engage in empathetic thinking. We may ask ourselves questions such as: "What does this mean and what would possess someone to create this?". Exercises such as these can open up difficult conversations regarding discriminatory behavior such as misogyny, homophobia, racism, and ableism. Nengudi's lived experiences as a Black mother in a dominant white society are visually harnessed in her *R.S.V.P* series through the use of *the abject*. It is in the act of standing in uneasiness that the horrific abject materials and formal representations in her artwork have the

ability to break down boundaries between the viewer and their sheltered identities. Experiences of reality are as diverse as the people involved. They are layered and complicated. Because of this, often times attempting to educate and expose these different realities can create divisive and outright ugly responses in people towards one another. It is this repulsive response by conventional society to the “outcasts” of their own culture, which is likened to Kristeva’s theory of abjection. Instead of choosing to turn away and forget, I ask what is it to keep your eyes open and intentionally engage with the hidden horrors of Nengudi’s work?

Kristeva’s Theory on Abjection:

As described by Julia Kristeva in her 1982 book *Powers of Horror*, abjection is a subjective horror that is felt both physically and mentally when the distinction between what is self and what is *other* is blurred. This experience is often compared to that of looking at a corpse and identifying with the body while simultaneously feeling revolted and separated from that which is not you; often to protect one’s sanity.¹⁹ Kristeva states:

“The corpse is a cesspool and death . . . A wound with blood or pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death . . . The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”²⁰

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*; Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982), 3-4.

²⁰ Ibid.

This experience is not unlike that which may encompass and engage the viewer in the work of Nengudi. Abjection is an *othering* or pushing back on something that you do not want to, or that you simply cannot, accept as part of you – the flaws that one does not want to acknowledge. However, with this *othering*, a haunting lingers that cannot successfully be kept separated or forever marginalized.

The artists associated with *DOI* were attempting to reappropriate social exile. History continues to create these boundaries of “us versus them”, but we know from the theory of abjection that *othering* and pushing away is never stable. Similarly, contemporary culture in the United States continues to attempt to push aside uncomfortable truths such as slavery, systemic racism and genocide.²¹ However, the horrors and repercussions of these truths don’t just simply dissipate with a sweeping under the rug. They continue to haunt society, seeping into and hindering communal social progress which would ultimately benefit everyone. The true horror for many is in the realization that once you “see it”, you can never truly separate yourself from what you know or deny that it exists again. Nengudi employed her artwork in a direct effort to place these uncomfortable truths in the face of the viewer, confronting them and challenging preconceived notions of identity.²²

²¹ In September of 2020 the 45th president of the United States of America issued an executive order excluding from federal contracts any diversity and inclusion training interpreted as containing “divisive concepts,” “Race or Sex Stereotyping,” and “Race or Sex Scapegoating”. This has been interpreted to include what has been called the “divisive content” known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). Following this order, the African American Policy Forum, led by Kimberlé Crenshaw, initiated the #TruthBeTold campaign to expose the harm that the order is causing. Janel George, “A Lesson on Critical Race Theory”, American Bar Association, January 11, 2021, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/.

²² It should be noted that I acknowledge that under its traditional definition, to view something abject dissolves boundaries between the internal self and the external world-between subjects and object-and that these artists wanted a boundary between us as a whole and them. With the *DOI* exhibition, they were not looking to be embraced by white art history and exhibition conventions. Rather, they wanted to distinguish themselves as ‘other’.

Abjection and Mendieta (Leticia Alvarado):

Scholar Leticia Alvarado acknowledged this expanded social application of *the abject*. Indeed, it is Alvarado's specific analysis of Ana Mendieta's *Untitled (Facial Cosmetic Variations)* from 1972, which highlights the undeniable similarities between the work of Mendieta and Nengudi (Figure 2.1). In this work, Mendieta documented a solo performance with eight self-portrait photographs in which she altered her look with wigs and makeup. In addition, Mendieta pulled ripped stockings over her head to distort her facial features, creating a certain level of racial ambiguity and aggressive deformations. Her use of ripped pantyhose calls for correlations to bank robbers and hair nets, as well as violent suffocation and ultimate death. With a breathy open mouth and the upturning of her nose we can literally see inside of Mendieta's body. This brutal distortion of her features relays a history of abuse, disfigurement and victimhood, bringing with it deeply rooted and horrific references to minority experiences. Parallels can be seen in the ways in which both Mendieta and Nengudi utilize performance, photography and nylon stockings to confront the viewer and highlight the mutability of identity categories. Framing the works of these two women through Kristeva's theory on *the abject* allows the viewer to upend conventional art history and apply a more intersectional lens to their work.

Through her analysis of *Untitled (Facial Cosmetic Variations)*, Alvarado asserts that by altering her appearances to such a degree, Mendieta is forcing the familiar to become unfamiliar. She claims that the resulting deformations utilizes *the abject* to break down identity categories. This forceful act distorts the body and implicates the viewer in this brutality. Alvarado states:

“The runs in the stocking make one think not only of a working-class femininity aspiring to sartorial dignity and failing, but also of the violence of beauty standards which most women will fail to meet, especially women of color. . . Considered together, all eight

portraits present women who are familiar yet unidentifiable. Sightlines are approached but never aligned with or matched. The spectator is indeed ‘hurled,’ in Kristeva’s sense, no longer just taunted, to imagine ‘beyond the scope of the possible’ knowable racialized subjects. Ambiguous in their identitarian performance, Mendieta’s vignettes represent women who are only recognizable as Other.”²³

By utilizing *the abject*, Mendieta challenges oversimplified identity categories and demonstrates how class, race, and gender are merely social constructs that do not inherently define us, yet exist among the traditional outline of society. Mendieta’s abject work, as well as that of Nengudi, aims to blur identity categories and support a more expansive representation. One more reflective of Crenshaw’s imminent theoretical standings, and which third-wave feminism of the 1990s comes to be built upon.²⁴ Alvarado specifically clarifies that Mendieta’s cultural context and societal displacement as a Cuban refugee in a predominantly white “American” Midwest, equally places Mendieta’s existence into the context of *the abject*.²⁵ Alvarado’s research provides a solid foundation for applying the concept of *the abject* to the artwork of woman of color, however her specific research maintains a focus on the work of “Latin@” artists. Building upon Alvarado’s foundation, it is important to distinguish Nengudi from Mendieta through the notion of *Blackness* itself as abjection.

²³ Leticia Alvarado, “Towards a Personal Will to Continue Being Other”, 74-75.

²⁴ Third Wave Feminism emerged in the mid 1990s and critiqued second-wave feminism’s lack of intersectionality and acknowledgement of sexism, racism and classism in the struggles of women. They adhered that sexual liberation could not truly be acquired without first understanding how gender identity and sexuality have been influenced by social construction.

Britannica, “The Third Wave of Feminism,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>.

²⁵ Born in Cuba during Fidel Castro’s socialist takeover to a wealthy and politically active family, at the age of twelve Ana Mendieta and her sister were forced to move to the United States for their protection. Bouncing between foster homes and boarding schools in central Iowa, the freezing temperatures and isolated landscape left the Mendieta sisters feeling cut off and abandoned. In an area predominantly white and culturally underexposed, Ana found herself a minority for the first time.

Olga M. Viso, *Ana Mendieta Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Washington D.C.: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004), 181.

Abjection and Senga Nengudi (Saidiya Hartman):

Blackness specifically as abjection has more profound historical *material* effects such as slavery, death, and enduring servitude, which denotes and deepens what Alvarado argues regarding identity. The slow gravitational pull of Nengudi's stockings over time provides a gruesome reference to historically violent acts stitched into the fabric of the United States. Nengudi's works echoes bloody wrists tied to walls, painfully disjointed arms, vulnerably exposed buttocks, and pried open legs; telling tragic stories of victimhood and forceful conquer (Figure 2.2 – 2.5). These distortions and deformations employ *the abject*, blur identity categories, and engage with a violent *othering* – an *othering* that began with the physical violence of slavery, colonization, and patriarchy and which endure through detrimental societal dissections.

In her book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, cultural historian and expert on slavery, Saidiya Hartman addresses everyday acts of anti-Black violence to formulate an understanding of the overwhelming legacy of slavery. Hartman illuminates how the Emancipation Proclamation's mere declaration of freedom in 1863 did not dramatically end racism, bigotry, or acts of violence toward the Black population in the U.S..²⁶ To elucidate her point, Hartman utilizes an understanding of the momentous 1896 U.S. Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which ultimately agreed that "separate but equal" was

²⁶ The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by United States President Abraham Lincoln on September 22, 1862, during the Civil War. The Proclamation read: "That on the first day of January in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom." This Proclamation ensured the freedom and legal status of any enslaved person who was able to escape and cross the Union lines or whom resided in a state that the federal troops were able to conquer. Prior to the Proclamation, enslaved people who escaped were often returned to their masters under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Abraham Lincoln, *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, n.d.

indeed a constitutional ruling that did not violate the fourteenth amendment.²⁷ Hartman states “The intransigence of racism and the antipathy and abjection naturalized in *Plessy v. Ferguson* recast Blackness in terms that refigured relations of mastery and servitude.”²⁸ In other words, the end of slavery did not translate into an end of servitude to whites for Black people. The ways in which their servitude was and is expressed has simply evolved to play out within new social parameters²⁹ Separate schools, separate housing districts, separate transportation, separate facilities, etc. While ‘separate’ was most certainly embraced, there has never truly been equality. No equal funding, no equal opportunities, no equal services and no equal liberties. From sundown towns, to backyard lynchings, to district redlining, the traumas and damages cast upon the Black community are absolutely unfathomable. Hartman directly likens the social status of Black life to abjection stating:

“Despite assertions that blacks were no longer a subjugated race because of the triumph of liberty, equality, and contract, the shifting register of race from a *status* ascription to a

²⁷ *Plessy V. Ferguson* was a significant U.S. Supreme Court ruling that governed that racial segregation was indeed constitutional “as long as facilities for each race were equal in quality.” This became to be known as “separate but equal”. The case began in 1892 when Homer Plessy, a mixed-race resident of New Orleans, deliberately violated Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890, which required "equal, but separate" railroad accommodations for white and “non-white” passengers. Plessy was charged with boarding a "whites-only" car, and his lawyers defended him at trial by arguing that the law was unconstitutional. Plessy lost at trial, and the conviction was sustained by the Louisiana Supreme Court. He then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. In May 1896, the Supreme Court issued a 7–1 decision against Plessy, ruling that the Louisiana law did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It additionally stated that although the Fourteenth Amendment established the legal equality of whites and Blacks it did not and could not require the elimination of all "distinctions based upon color". Harry E. Groves, “Separate but Equal--The Doctrine of Plessy V. Ferguson.” *Phylon* (1940) 12, No. 1 (1951): 66–72.

²⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection : Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth- Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

²⁹ Hartman furthers: “*Plessy* did not insist that blacks be excluded from the body politic but upheld the idea of proper associations between the races instead of an enforced equality that imposed unwanted proximity and endorsed the spatial arrangements of the separate-but-equal doctrine and the partition erected between public and private domains. This decidedly post emancipation solution entailed both the casting out and the incorporation of . . . This casting out and incorporation of the defiled and denigrated objects defines abjection.” *Ibid.*, 192 (and related note #105 on page 250).

formal and purportedly neutral category ineluctably refigured blackness as an abject category.³⁰

She continues:

“Basically, the wholeness of the social body was made possible by the banishment and abjection of blacks, the isolation of dangerous elements from the rest of the population, and the containment of contagion.”³¹

Through an analysis of structural and institutionalized forms of white supremacy, Hartman addresses the precariousness of contemporary Black life to “illuminate the terror of the mundane” and highlight the future that slavery has generated.³²

Embodying the use of *the abject*, Nengudi’s *R.S.V.P.* series echoes sagging breasts, flattened butts, stretched scrotums and splayed vaginal openings (Figure 2.6). Additional parallels can also be applied to extended arms and legs, disembowelment, and thinly flayed skin (Figures 2.7 – 2.11). It is this ambiguous horror of the distorted human figure which allows the viewer to be drawn in while simultaneously shuddering with disgust and unfamiliarity. While Nengudi’s 1980 piece *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* retreated from blatantly depicting *the abject* Black body, which the series has come to be known for, it relatedly addressed this same abjected precariousness of Black life and the incessant and lethal legacy of slavery.

By analyzing Nengudi’s *R.S.V.P. Series* through the lens of the abject, we can realize a broader understanding and empathy for diverse lived experiences outside of our own. More importantly however, we must acknowledge that there is an overwhelming weight, with devastating outcomes, that go beyond just understanding and empathizing with diverse

³⁰ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 173.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

experiences. For Black people living in the United States today, harmful bodily injury, life-long incarceration sentences, and untimely deaths are ongoing *material* remains of continued prejudice and systemic injustice.

CHAPTER III *Dialectics of Entanglement (2018)*

In celebration of its 45th anniversary, A.I.R. Gallery presented “The Unforgettables Program” in 2018, which aimed to reconsider three past exhibitions which have proven to maintain their relevance to the feminist conversation. As the final highlight, the exhibition *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together: (DOE)* intended to revisit the efforts of the original 1980 show *DOI*. Incorporating new artists alongside the original, this exhibition presented contemporary works speaking to the unrelenting themes of inclusivity, oppression, and appropriation (Figures 3.1 – 3.8). In this revisit, Nengudi’s work was once again embraced for its ability to give a voice to those who continue to be silenced.

Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street (2018):

Unlike some of the other works in the show, the *DOE* curators chose to reinstall Nengudi’s exact same piece – *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* (Figure 3.9). Because of this, Nengudi’s deeper contribution to this show’s reexamination resides in her expanded artist statement. Her updated reflection addresses the unfortunate continued timelessness of her work, while also digging deeper to display a more mature self-reflective understanding of her practice. Nengudi’s 1980 catalogue statement was simple and to the point. She states:

“I am concerned with the way life experiences pull and tug on the human body and psyche. And the body’s ability to cope with it. Nylon mesh serves my needs in reflecting this elasticity.”³³

³³ *Dialectics of Isolation*, 8.

Nengudi's 2018 catalogue statement on this same work is as follows:

“My approach to art has changed and expanded over the years, but my concern with the way life experiences pull and tug on the human body and psyche has remained steady, now with more of a focus on cultural and universal human ways of coping.

In my work I often use humble, discarded, castaway materials — tape, plastics, pantyhose, etc. — as well as nature's own sand and water as part of performances and thought actions as a means to express the belief, which is the same one I hold regarding disenfranchised humans, that materials that are often dismissed may be transformed into poetic entities.

With an improvisational impulse, I gather and work my materials. The elements of my pieces are like individuals: fragmented, confused, straightforward, full, empty, misunderstood, frayed, titillating, bland, slick — radiating infinite possibilities, when combined with one another, this way and that. Like Alice going through the w(hole), being on the other side of real, my pieces give voice to those with no tongue to speak about their fragile selves. My work says yes to all those who have been told no by the majority.”³⁴

In 1980, at age thirty-seven, Nengudi worked with other women of color artists towards an exhibition to express themselves and their frustrations with the unjust world around them.

Her accompanying statement was simple and elusive, leaving room for muddled interpretation and flawed application. In 2018, thirty-eight years later and at the established age of seventy-five, Nengudi had the years, the language, and the insight to again revisit

³⁴ *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?*. (New York. A.I.R. Gallery, 2018), Exhibition Catalogue, 18, <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.

Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street, this time sharing a deeper and more personal appreciation for what she was expressing so many years prior.

These two exhibitions did more than just execute a multicultural coming-together however. While it is true that this heterogeneous group of women collaborated in solidarity, they did so while simultaneously embracing their own individual isolation from one another. In her 2018 statement, Nengudi referenced the ways in which the “humble, discarded, castaway materials” of her work can be compared to “disenfranchised humans”.³⁵ She likens these materials (i.e. Individuals) to “Alice going through the w(hole)” and “being on the other side of real”.³⁶ In the book “Alice in Wonderland”, once Alice tumbles through the rabbit-hole into Wonderland, she finds herself in an alternate reality surrounded by wild creatures, twisted logic, and violated boundaries. In this parallel universe, Alice soon realizes that she is the only one with any self-control. These experiences destroy her sense of reality and Alice struggles to adjust to a life without laws.³⁷ Similarly, *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street* utilizes the remnants of a recognizable world to provide a glimpse into an alternate reality. A reality in which she and other disenfranchised humans navigate on a daily basis, reflecting the simple fact that we don’t all live in the same world or by the same rules.

Exhibition Reviews of *DOE*:

Fortunately, the contemporary exhibition reviews motivated by the 2018 show left room for the individual voices of the participating artists and authors of the catalogue essays.³⁸ For example, art critic Jillian Steinhauer from “The New York Times” specifically states:

³⁵ *Dialectics of Entanglement*, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ W. H. Auden, "Today's 'Wonder-World' Needs Alice" in *Aspects of Alice*. Edited by Robert Phillips, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1971), 3-12.

³⁸ Three examples of reviews of A.I.R. Gallery’s 2018 exhibition can be found in the following sources:

“*Dialectics of Isolation* was purposefully heterogeneous, a celebration of difference Surveying a group that at first looks disparate, a theme emerges: the politics of how humans interact with their environments But simply re-presenting and reframing don’t feel like enough in our current moment. *Dialectics of Isolation* was a challenge to an institution to examine itself critically. That’s something the art world still sorely needs.”³⁹

However, while the exhibition reviews of the 2018 show do reflect progression in an approach to critiquing artists of color, the mere fact that this show and its themes have maintained their relevance almost forty years later devastatingly speaks to the incessant prejudice and abject societal division of our society.

Fabius & Hernandez, Rakes, and D’Souza on *DOE*:

Three essays comprise the accompanying publication for the 2018 show. While they present significant arguments that justify meaningful review, they too overlook the role that *the abject* has played in articulating the very subjects that they tackle. The first essay, written by Roxana Fabius (A.I.R.’s current Director) and Patricia Hernandez, adopts the show’s title “Dialectics of Entanglement”. In this essay, Fabius and Hernandez interrogate the concept of time in an effort to liken “the types of knowledges that were being produced” in the original exhibition to “the

Jillian Steinhauer, “Review: A.I.R. Gallery Catches Up on Some Unfinished Business,” *New York Times* (October 24, 2018).

Ana Tauzon. “Revisiting a Seminal Exhibition on “Third World” Feminist Art at A.I.R. Gallery,” *Hyperallergic* (August 30, 2018), <https://hyperallergic.com/457960/revisiting-a-seminal-exhibition-on-third-world-feminist-art-at-a-i-r-gallery/>.

Maribelle Bierens, “Looking Back in Moving Forward”, *Questions and Art*, August 24, 2018, <https://questionsandart.com/2018/08/24/looking-back-to-move-forward/>.

³⁹ Steinhauer, “Review: A.I.R. Gallery”.

particles and struggles that exist in multiple times and locations.”⁴⁰ Through an interrogation of time, these two authors question what real change have been secured between 1980 and 2018.

The second essay, “Agitation, Isolation, Abstraction” by Rachel Rakes, approaches the aims of the two exhibitions in relation to institutional critique by acknowledging the continued lack of representation of female artists of color. She states: “this reassembly as *Dialectics of Entanglement* offers distinctive possibilities to contend with institutional history, feminist history, and the sexist and racist rules on aesthetics still in play in the American art world, and on a similarly modest scale.”⁴¹ She continues by providing specific examples of other modern and contemporary institutions that have adopted similar trends of self-reflection and critical analysis in relation to feminism and antiracism.⁴² Rakes adheres that the efforts of these recent retrospectives align with those of *DOE* “ideally to make historical artistic and curatorial endeavors useful to our present ones, and at the same time to respect previous movements — recalling them as a way of pressing against current preconceptions.”⁴³

The final essay, “Curating Difference” by Aruna D’Souza, interrogates the idea of “mainstream feminism opening up to intersectional concerns”.⁴⁴ D’Souza adheres that true intersectional feminism insists on “an explosion of the center” of mainstream feminism to

⁴⁰ Full quote: “The types of knowledges that were and are being produced demand recognition, respect, and consideration for differences. These knowledges are as entangled as the particles and struggles that exist in multiple times and locations.”

Dialectics of Entanglement, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴² Rachel Rakes’ examples of other institutions engaging in critical analysis and institutional critique through their exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art and Redline’s dual retrospectives dedicated to Senga Nengudi (2014), the Brooklyn Museum’s *Beverly Buchanan – Ruins and Rituals* (2016), the Brooklyn Museum’s *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85* (2017), the Hammer Museum’s *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* (2017), the Museum of Contemporary Art-Chicago’s *What Remains to Be Seen* (2018), and the ongoing tour of Ana Mendieta’s films *Covered in Time and History* (2015-).

Ibid, 6-7.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

rebuild efforts founded on “coalition building and collaboration across difference, in a way that leaves difference intact, that abandons the hope for a unified voice because it sees strength in many, sometimes conflicting and contradictory...”⁴⁵ She clarifies that “*Dialectics of Isolation* was not predicated on the idea of inclusion...rather, it was predicated on ... the productive value of difference, the power of speaking from a position of isolation.”⁴⁶ To further contextualize the aims of the 1980 exhibition, D’Souza elaborates on the term “Third World”. She clarifies how the strategic use of the term in the original title supported efforts that adhered to decolonization and to breaking down capitalism, racism, sexism, and patriarchy through coalition building grounded in the shared experiences of oppression and violence.⁴⁷

While Nengudi’s work has indeed been acknowledged by A.I.R. Gallery, a direct and complex understanding of *the abject*’s role in the successful delivery of its messaging has yet to be offered. It is through the use of *the abject* that Nengudi’s work refutes inaccurate reviews,

⁴⁵ D’Souza’s full statement is as follows: “The problem with this mind-set of opening mainstream feminism to intersectional concerns, of course, is that it is conceived as an act of generosity — a making welcome of difference, a function of empathy and goodwill — in which the center makes room for those at the margins. It is a “big tent” approach, which dreams of consensus, of common purpose, of indivisibility. But intersectionality as a political strategy isn’t an act of generosity, a product of empathy, or an understanding across the chasms of difference — it is a survival strategy, a necessary response to a political and social landscape in which every act of resistance is too easily co-opted, rendered powerless, made illegal, marketed to death, or otherwise subverted. It is a way of thinking about feminism as a matter of coalition building and collaboration across difference, in a way that leaves difference intact, that abandons the hope for a unified voice because it sees strength in many, sometimes conflicting and contradictory, positions as the most effective way to undermine the maddening single-mindedness of white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. It is rooted, most crucially, in an explosion of the center, of rendering untenable the notion of margins.”

Dialectics of Entanglement, 9.

⁴⁶ Full quote: “*Dialectics of Isolation* was not predicated on the idea of inclusion — that is, its goal seems not to have been to merely make space for artists of color in a hitherto white space, though it certainly achieved that. Rather, it was predicated on a much more radical idea: the productive value of difference, the power of speaking from a position of isolation.

Ibid, 10.

⁴⁷ D’Souza defines Third World as follows: “The use of the term “Third World” to denote US-based women of color emerged over the course of the 1970s; it drew upon a Cold War term that referred to mostly developing nations in the Global South that resisted alignment with the global superpowers of the NATO alliance (the First World) and the Communist bloc (the Second World). The embrace of the idea of a Third World feminism came as Black, Chicana, Indigenous, and other feminists of color in the United States recognized the importance of seeing their own liberation as part of larger, global processes of decolonization, linked to anti-imperialist struggles such as the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement, independence movements in former colonies, and antipoverty activism.”

Ibid. 10.

rightfully establishes itself in art historical scholarship, and reframes contemporary exhibition norms. However, considering the complexities of intersectionality, we must also leave room for her work to embrace its *otherness* and rewrite these conventions. Nengudi's work challenges idle subject positions and passive interpretations by continuing to speak for silenced populations that lie outside the guarded borders of conventional society.

CHAPTER IV THE AWKWARD WHITE WITNESS – AKA A SELF REFLECTOIN (2020)

While *the abject* can be something hard to look at and which makes us feel uncomfortable or awkward, standing in this discomfort empowers *the abject* to allow it the opportunity to transform and improve. *The awkward* however should not be confused with *the abject*. One is the result of the existence of the other. Fighting awkward feelings denies *the abject* its power and silences opportunities for growth. Unfortunately, many audiences find challenging their subject position difficult and instead embrace the safety, comfort, and security of the familiar. I'd like to take this moment to offer an awkward self-reflection of my own. In transparently challenging my own subject position as a white witness, I aim to remain as vulnerable as I am asking you the reader to be.

As someone who is silly, sporadic and has a tendency to talk too much, I have always identified with the word "awkward". For me, the word is as difficult to say and spell as the definition itself entails. Is there an E in there? Is it Awe-kward? Aw-kword? Or Aw-kward? My relationship with this word might just perfectly portray the reasoning for my love and appreciation of Art History, the humanities, and the contemplated written word. The week I sat down to write this section, awkward was one of my son's spelling words, which we practiced each night with six other words that encompassed the aw/au sound. As we went through them all I was grateful that I was the one with the list in hand. "Think of the word like this Manny, 'Aw' you're so cute. I'm really glad you aren't a 'ward' of the state". We always do this with his words – break them up and make ridiculous associations in order to remember them. This one was particularly uncomfortable for me however as my son is half Black. Why did I say "ward of the state"? He may not have understood the underlying irony of *the awkwardness* here yet, but I

certainly did. As a single white woman, raising a Black son, I am often hyper aware and self-critical of the things that come out of my well-intentioned, but impulsive mouth.

Shortly after this encounter I re-watched a virtual programming event that I “attended” titled *(At Home) On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, hosted by the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in D.C. with curator Evelyn Hankins. I was similarly reminded of the multiple moments of awkwardness I witnessed and experienced during its original airing five months prior (Figure 4.1). The levels of awkwardness, insecurity and self-criticism brought on by a virtual event were intriguing to me. With this specific exploration, I aim to investigate *the awkward* as experienced by white viewers in relation to abject Black performance art. I ask why is performance in general so awkward? What kind of power does *the awkward* afford performance art over other media? How does *the abject*, and *the awkward* between racial lines, challenge and distinguish Black performance from others? And ultimately how can we embrace and harness *the awkward* to make room for constructive conversation? While I do not attempt to answer all of these questions per se, I do hope to spark some connections, inspire some conversations and maybe even resonate with the little bits of awkwardness present in us all; albeit some more than others.

As a white viewer, to simply observe Nengudi’s abject and layered works is to engage in *the awkwardness* of the feminist gaze and the unnerving acknowledgment of racialized subjectivity. To then go on to participate in the performance or to even host a live interview with these artists engages in an even deeper level of vulnerability. When re-watching the Hirshhorn talk, I particularly resonated with the uncomfortable awkward stumbling of the white female curator trying to navigate a conversation with these two remarkable Black women. At times she talked over them and talked for them, which was only further perpetuated with internet time lags

and connectivity issues. I recognized her desperate attempts to get it all right in her awkward facial expressions pushing through her big white smile (Figure 4.2). Then, in the middle of the interview, they played back a recording of Maren Hassinger's 2014 activation of Nengudi's work *R.S.V.P. X* as performed at the White Cube Gallery. Here I cringed as I witnessed a rather intense awkward moment between the white female instrumentalist and Nengudi immediately prior to the start of the performance. Nengudi turned towards the musician, who was sitting adjacent to her, and smiled. The young woman smiled back, but tightly held her eyes closed as she turned away to completely avoid engaging with Nengudi altogether (Figure 4.3). The musician was again entangled in another moment of awkwardness at the conclusion of the performance when she was attempting to synchronize with Maren's improvisational ending. The dance and rhythm didn't quite line up as Maren abruptly ended, bowed and exited with a big smile of her own (Figure 4.4). Finally, as the program was wrapping up, I remembered *the awkwardness* and panic that I myself felt when the curator asked for questions from the audience. I recalled desperately scrambling for some intelligent question to put in the comment section in an effort to just simply connect with Nengudi in real time and get my name out there, like some fangirl. Which I never ended up doing because I panicked and couldn't think fast enough. I recalled being grateful that my camera wasn't on and that no one had the opportunity to see my own flustered face.

Witnessing as White

Spruth Magers' website lists a quote by Senga stating "We're all part of the same tapestry. It's important that we know as much as we can know, and be exposed to as much as possible, and be motivated, inspired, and show interest in something that's beyond our own personal history."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "Senga Nengudi," Spruth Magers, <https://spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/senga-nengudi-senga-nengudi-los-angeles-2/>.

Performance art has its own unique way of utilizing *the abject* to jar people into awkward scenarios and situations that require us to question what we think we know, and rip at our emotions. We are thrown into a position of decision making and engagement, whether we like it or not.

As a white person, this dissonance is felt the instant our eyes open and we are aware of Black bodies performing in space. You may ask yourself: “What are they doing?”, “Why are they doing that?”, “What is my role?” “Am I performing my role appropriately?” “How do they feel about me watching them?” “Should I even be here?” “Should I react?” “How should I react?” “Why does this awkwardness even exist?” “Am I the only one that is feeling this way?” Saidiya Hartman would argue that racial subjugation during slavery has directly shaped contemporary Black identity. Hartman provides an understanding of how the histories of domination and power perpetually operate within contemporary culture, humanity, privileges, protections and consent.⁴⁹ The simple act of standing in a gallery space as a white person witnessing Black bodies performing in the United States, innately conjures up the history of unequal racial power dynamics, which force the white viewer to address their insecurities and levels of bravery. This strange feeling of what it is to be a white witness, and the uncomfortable oddness that accompanies it, is precisely what I am attempting to explore. Herein lies the power of *the abject* to engage the viewer, require attention, and demand participation. Even the act of walking away is a choice and in itself is a level of partaking, which reflects that the viewer has acknowledged that they have witnessed something, questioned their feelings about it, and on some level contextualized it; which may or may not continue to develop over time (Figure 4.5).

⁴⁹ Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection*, 7.

What Can We Do?

So what are we, as white witnesses, supposed to do with all of this awkwardness? How do we approach it? How do we research it? How do we form an understanding? And how do we move forward to write about it and talk about it? We just do. It is simply better to contemplate, engage, and act rather than ignore it and put our energies into something safer. That is what has customarily been done and therein lies the foundation of perpetual systemic racism. Mistakes will most certainly be made, but it is in vulnerability and transparent conversation where we as human beings (of all backgrounds) have the opportunity to become better. Abject performance art places us in uncomfortable scenarios where we are forced to choose – choose to watch, choose to participate, choose to walk away. Because of this, many predominantly white institutions (PWI) find performance art unpredictable and uncomfortable and therefore avoid it when possible.⁵⁰

During the Hirshhorn talk, Senga mentioned that because they had a hard time finding public support of their nonconventional performances in the 1980s, she and her friends, other members of Studio Z, would often host their performances at the openings of one of their gallery shows. This allowed them to get together and participate in what she called “glorious exploring”

⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this trend of censorship continues to be seen today in exhibitions containing work by artists of color who create in the realm of what some may deem “difficult art” and complex topics-not just performance. Examples of such can be read about through the following sources:

Anonymous author “Here to Stay: Braving Barriers through Performance: Censorship at the UWM Union Art Gallery,” *Thinking C21: Century for 21st Studies*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.c21uwm.com/2020/10/01/here-to-stay-braving-barriers-through-performance-censorship-at-the-uwm-union-art-gallery/>.

Julia Jacobs, “Philip Guston Blockbuster Show Postponed by Four Museums.” *New York Times* (September 24, 2020). <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/24/arts/design/philip-guston-postponed-museums-klan.html> (Retrieved December 15, 2021).

National Coalition Against Censorship, Art and Culture, “Censorship Timeline: A Selective Timeline of Art Censorship from 1989 to the Present”, *National Coalition Against Censorship*, (2019). <https://ncac.org/resource/art-and-culture-censorship-timeline> (Retrieved December 15, 2021).

Dorian Batycka, “Art and Creative Acts that Were Censored in 2019”, *Hyperallergic* (January 7, 2020). <https://hyperallergic.com/534808/art-and-creative-acts-that-were-censored-in-2019/> (Retrieved December 15, 2021).

with a built-in and unsuspecting audience (Figures 4.6 – 4.8).⁵¹ In her words, “It is through collaboration and in the doing together, that we become united and it becomes a political statement.”⁵² This power that institutions hold over artists and the viewing public navigates complicated lines of privilege and exposure. The threatened feelings and insecurities that performance art, or any abject art for that matter, reveals of galleries and museums is only heightened when the complexities of race are introduced, highlighting systemic oppression and censorship. As scholars, curators, or even just as witnesses, we must acknowledge institutional biases and aim for allyship. White people specifically maintain positions of privilege and power. We must embrace *the awkwardness* that accompanies viewing abject art and push back against desires for complacency and comfort. Not understanding something, not resonating with something, or just simply not liking *the awkward* feeling something gives you is not reason enough to turn away or to censor viewership. Indeed, I argue it demands quite the opposite reaction.⁵³ By continually challenging ourselves, we may hope to find greater understanding. We must make room for one another. It is in the collective doing that vital change can happen, in ourselves, in our legal systems and in our institutions.

⁵¹ (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, hosted by the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in D.C. with Curator Evelyn Hankins on July 29, 2020,

⁵² (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration*.

⁵³ Ibram X. Kendi, American author, professor, anti-racist activist, and historian of race and discriminatory policy in America, explains that racism is a thing in which people can go in and out of routinely based on their individual daily choices. He states: “The opposite of “racist” isn’t “not racist.: It is “antiracist...One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in between safe space of “not racist.” The claim of “not racist” neutrality is a mask for racism...It is descriptive, and the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it..” Ibram X. Kendi. *How to Be an Antiracist*, (New York: One World, 2019), 9.

CHAPTER V NENGUDI & DEAI IN THE EXHIBITION SETTING

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion (DEAI) have become popular topics in today's increasingly divisive and political climate. In the chaos of "Make America Great Again", Coronavirus, and "Cancel Culture", our need for cultural institutions to publicly stand up as ethical models of representation has never been greater. Although art museums have roots in colonization and elitism, they are also inherently filled with the spirit of culture, curiosity, empathy and creation.⁵⁴ There is no genre of institution that is more deserving of our time and commitment to change. I would also argue that there is no genre of institution that has a greater

⁵⁴ The history of museums is complex and intertwines with colonization, politics, and problematic social structures. Wealthy white Europeans, including royalty and aristocrats, in the late 16th and early 17th century traveled the world and built collections out of the "exotic" objects that they "found", which they then displayed in personal "cabinets of wonders" in their homes. According to Paula Findleri's book *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Context*, these rooms came to be known as "rooms of the Muses" and were meant to be places which were "consecrated to the Muses (locus musis sacer), a mythological setting inhabited by the nine goddesses of poetry, music, and the liberal arts." With the rise of enlightenment (alongside colonization) in the early 18th century, elite Europeans were looking for more public ways to display their treasures, tout their knowledge, and declare social status. In exchange for prestige, these Renaissance collectors looked to provide the public with visual tools to understand the world beyond their means, which ultimately led to the creation and to the rise of museums around the world.

Paula Findlen, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy" in *Museum Studies*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 24.

Two of the first ever art museums were the Capitoline in Rome (1734) and the Louvre in Paris (1793) which applied a chronological narrative to understanding the advancements in the arts (Ancient Arts, Renaissance, French Neoclassicism, Egyptian, Greek) (Figures 5.1-5.2). This model was taken from the medieval system of knowledge consumption called "encyclopedism". Utilizing this linear approach stood in as "scientific proof of natural hierarchies" in cultures, which unfortunately persist to this day (Figures 5.3 – 5.4). By the 20th century every capital and major city in the advanced world (and their colonies) had an art museum to tout, which indeed spread biased and prejudiced ways of thinking around the world.

Andrew McClellan, "Ideals and Mission" in *The Art Museum From Boullée to Bilbao*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2008), 20.

The U.S. in particular has led many influential trends in the modern art museum including the more recent move towards ethically revamping collections and adopting missions that more closely reflect the needs and demographics of their audience bases. However, the majority of these changes remain surface level and leave foundations of colonization embedded in their organizational structures.

In the 2021 article "Exhibiting Inclusion: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Museum Participation", Alexandra Olivares and Jaclyn Piatak state that despite recent attention to the diversity of museum staff, the actions of the staff and curatorial choices continue to negatively affect the diversity of their audiences. She adheres that despite some progress, museums need to take further actions to diversify their staff and more importantly they need to write into their actions plans a commitment to fostering strategic networks and community advisory committees (Figures 5.5 – 5.13).

Alexandra Olivares, & Jaclyn Piatak, Jaclyn. *Exhibiting Inclusion: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Museum Participation*. (Manchester, England, 2021), 10.

opportunity to reflect this similar societal transformation. Through an adherence to best practices in organizational diversity, our cultural institutions can ignite the change we seek. Through an embrace of *the abject*, Nengudi's work has the power to spark these difficult conversations among art enthusiasts, community activists and artistic institutions.

In the 1970s Nengudi began exploring themes of Black bodies and systemic injustice through her abject representations. Now fifty years later, during this time of BLM, #MeToo and the contemporary racial divides of the United States, there is an understandable rise of interest in her *R.S.V.P. Series*. Nengudi's work maintains relevancy and applicability. Her work calls for the formation of a more just and equitable society through a clever push for participation, contemplation, critique, and critical self-reflection. Through her own subtle yet grotesque approach, Nengudi's abject work ingeniously highlights the history of slavery and the contemporary impact of perpetual structural inequalities. Her work asks for not a carving out of space, but for an embrace of difference, a decentering of white voices, and an acceptance that there may be no resolution. We must ask ourselves what does it mean to remain a conflict. By embracing *the abject*, and *the awkwardness* that it triggers, we challenge our subject position and make room for constructive conversation that honors our differences. It is in these small acts of vulnerability and persistence where true allyship lies and positive change can happen. Nengudi's work demands that comprehension not be a prerequisite to presentation. Instead of being repelled by that which we do not understand, I ask you the reader, what does it mean to move closer towards this thing that makes us uncomfortable— to stand in the state of distress and allow it to challenge us (Figures 5.14 – 5.15)?

FIGURES
Introduction



[Figure 0.1]
Senga Nengudi. *I*, 1977, nylon mesh, sand, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery. Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.thomaserben.com/exhibitions/senga-nengudi-repondez-sil-vous-plait/>.



[Figure 0.2]

Propecia Leigh aka Senga Nengudi. Photograph from the series *Hands*, digital image, 2003–2012. Photo courtesy the artist. Accessed November 20, 2021.

<https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/side-by-side/individual-collective-a-conversation-with-senga-nengudi>.



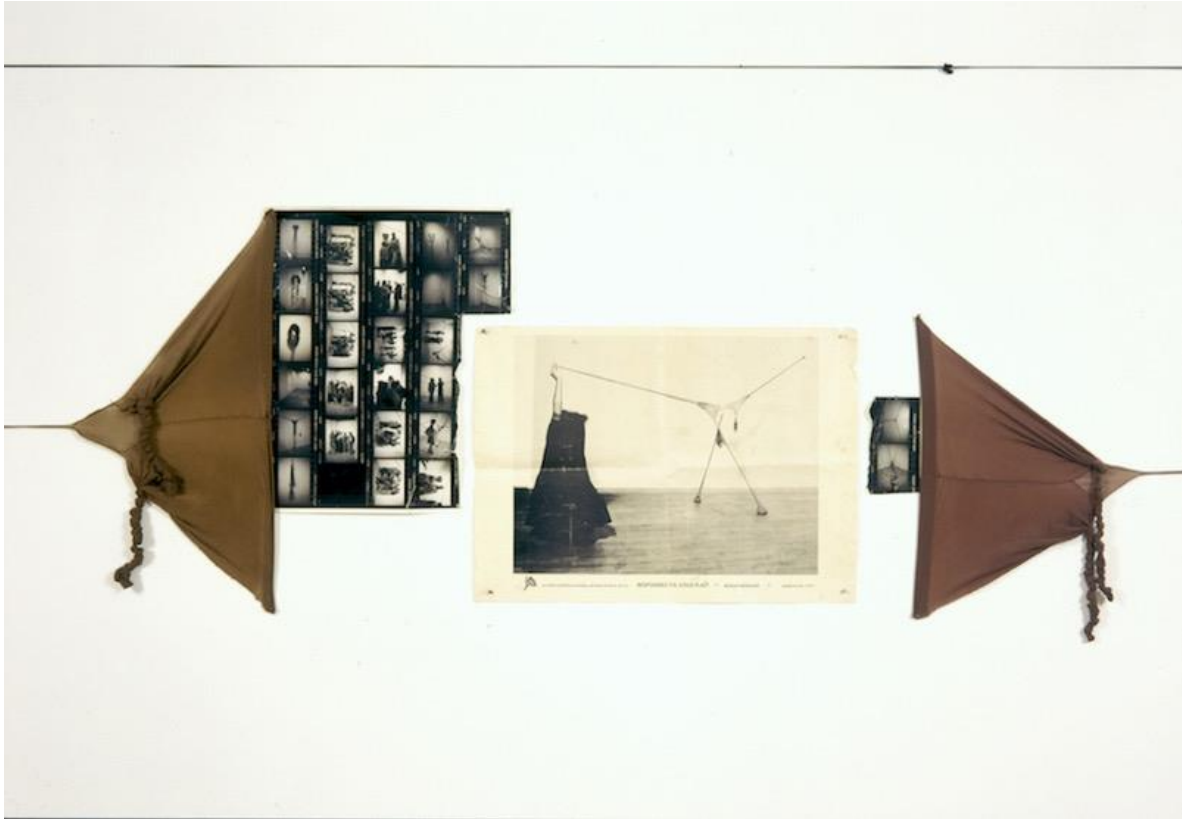
[Figure 0.3]

Senga Nengudi. *R.S.V.P.*, Fall 1976, nylon mesh, sand. 4 X 3 feet. Image courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery. Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.thomaserben.com/exhibitions/senga-nengudi-repondez-sil-vous-plait/>



[Figure 0.4]

Senga Nengudi. *R.S.V.P* 1977, 1977/2014, sculpture activated by the artist and Maren Hassinger in *Performance Piece*. Image courtesy of Perl C. Wood Gallery, Los Angeles. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://thirdcoastreview.com/2017/09/25/senga-nengudi-improvisational-gestures-integrates-art-with-dance/>.



[Figure 0.5]

Senga Nengudi, *Répondez s'il vous plait*, 1977, installation view, exhibition poster from Just Above Midtown Gallery. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

<https://www.thomaserben.com/exhibitions/senga-nengudi-repondez-sil-vous-plait/>.



[Figure 0.6]

Senega Nengudi, Installation view, *Senega Nengudi. Topologies* exhibition. Photo courtesy of Lenbachhaus, Ernst Jank. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

<https://www.lenbachhaus.de/en/visit/exhibitions/details/senega-nengudi>.



[Figure 0.7]
Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P.*, 2004, nylon, sand. Courtesy the artist, Thomas Erben Gallery, and Lévy Gorvy, New York. Image accessed November 20, 2021.
<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/articles/senga-nengudi-lenbachhaus>.



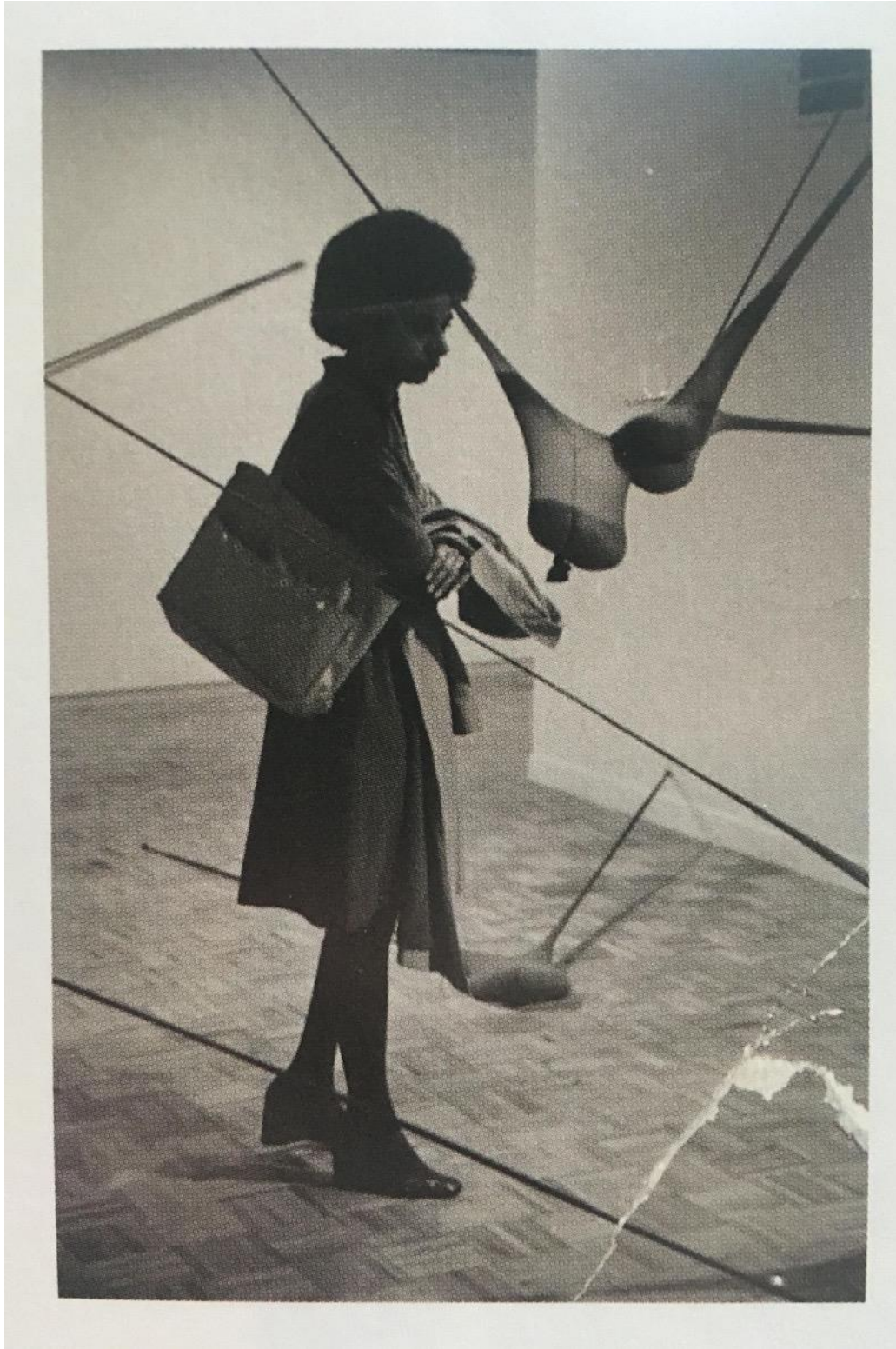
[Figure 0.8]

Senga Nengudi. R.S.V.P Revisited – *Underwire*, 1977, nylon mesh, metal coil. Private Collection on loan to the Philadelphia Art Museum in 2021. Image Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://vindevie.me/2021/05/16/senga-nengudi-impermanence-experience-and-a-salutation/>.



[Figure 0.9]

Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P. I*, 1977, nylon mesh and sand, dimensions variable. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://africanah.org/collection-senga-nengudi/>.



[Figure 0.10]

Photo from the opening, Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York, 1977. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's *Senga Nengudi: Topologies* 2020 exhibition catalogue, pg. 185.

FIGURES
Chapter I



[Figure 1.1]

Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P.*, 1975-77, nylon mesh, sand, 8' x 1', 243.84 x 30.48 cm
Courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://ocula.com/art-galleries/thomas-erben-gallery/exhibitions/repondez-sil-vous-plait-nylon-mesh-pieces-1975-77/>.



[Figure 1.2]

Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P. Reverie "D"*, 2014. Image courtesy: Lenbachhaus, Munich and KiCo Collection. Photo: Timo Ohler. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

<https://www.mousse magazine.it/magazine/senga-nengudi-topologies-at-lenbachhaus-munich-2019-2020/>



[Figure 1.3]
Maren Hassinger with *Performance Piece*, Perl C. Wood Gallery, 1977. Photo Harmon Outlaw.



[Figure 1.4]

Senga Nengudi's *R.S.V.P* sculptures activated by Senga Nengudi and Maren Hassinger in *Performance Piece-Nylon Mesh* at Pearl C. Wood Gallery, Los Angeles, Image courtesy RedLine Gallery, 1977. Photo Harmon Outlaw. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://magazine.artland.com/artistic-collaborations-senga-nengudi-maren-hassinger/>.



[Figure 1.5]
Senga Nengudi with *Water Composition II*, ca. 1970. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 144.

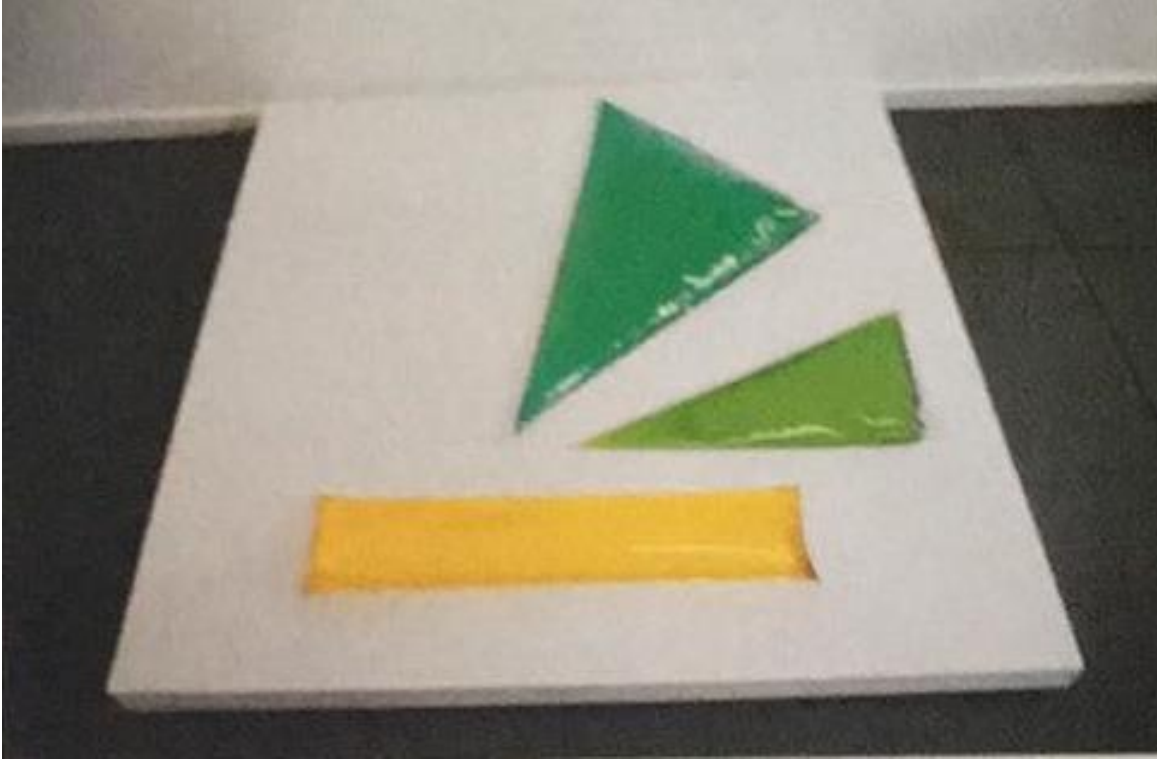


[Figure 1.6]

Senga Nengudi, *Water Composition I*, ca. 1972. Image from Matthias Mühlhng, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 145.



[Figure 1.7]
Senga Nengudi, *Water Compositions*, 1970. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 145.



[Figure 1.8]

Senga Nengudi, *Water Composition III*, 1970. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 145.



[Figure 1.9]
Senga Nengudi, *Red Devil (soul 2)*, 1972. Photo: Doug Harris. Image from Matthias Mühlhling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 153.



[Figure 1.10]
Senga Nengudi, *Drifting Leaves*, 1972. Photo: Doug Harris. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 153.



[Figure 1.11]

Senga Nengudi, *Down (Purple)*, 1972. Photo: Doug Harris. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 153.



[Figure 1.12]

Senga Nengudi with a fabric work, ca. 1972. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 155.



[Figure 1.13]

Senga Nengudi, *Up (green, soul 3)*, 1973. Image from Matthias Mühlring, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 154.

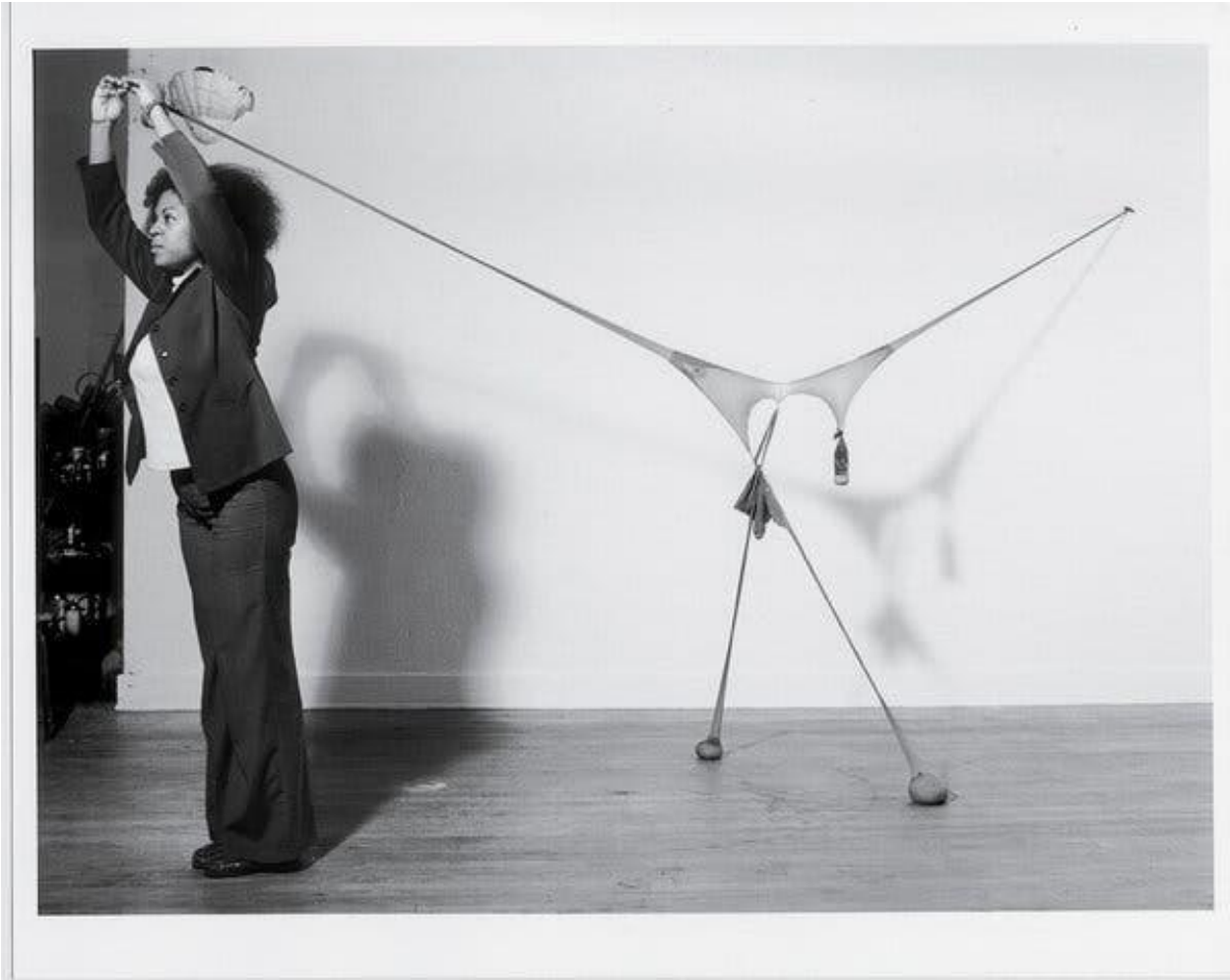


[Figure 1.14]
Senga Nengudi, *Untitled*, ca. 1972. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, pg. 154.



[Figure 1.15]

Senga Nengudi, *Down (Purple)*, 1972/2019, chromogenic color print. Photo by Doug Harris made from a negative at the Amistad Research Center. Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München. © Senga Nengudi. Image courtesy Senga Nengudi Papers, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Image accessed November 2021. <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibition-guide-senga-nengudi-experimenting>.

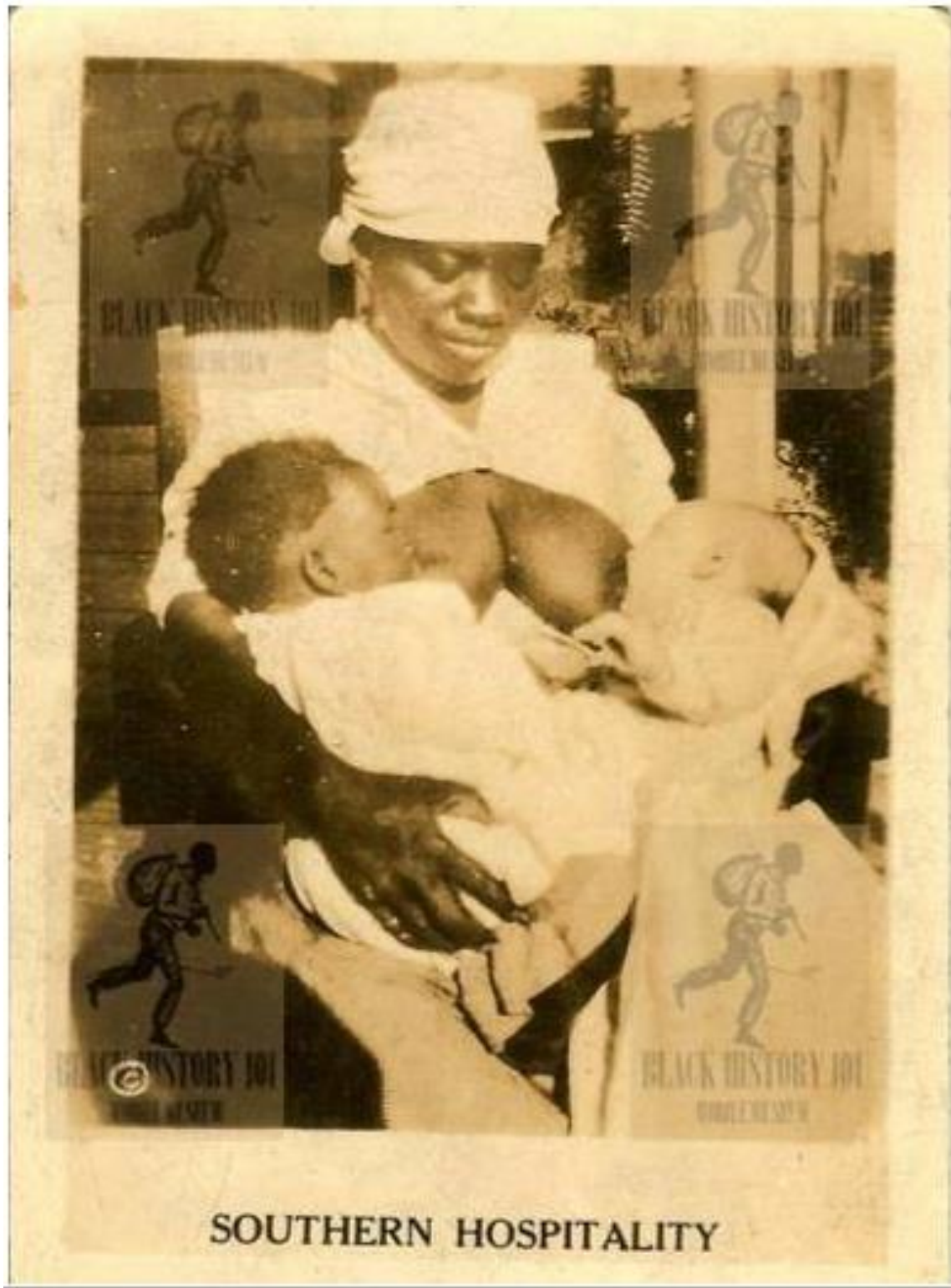


[Figure 1.16]
Senga Nengudi installing *R.S.V.P. X*, 1976, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, La.
Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/09/t-magazine/senga-nengudi-art.html>.



[Figure 1.17]

Senga Nengudi, *Rubber Maid*, 2011, nylon mesh, rubber, and sand, 14" X 22" X 3", at Lenbachhaus. Image accessed November 20, 2021. https://www.artnews.com/gallery/art-in-america/aia-photos/senga-nengudi-topologies-lenbachhaus-photos-1202678783/2011_rubber_maid/



[Figure 1.18]

Image of an enslaved African American woman nursing two infants – One African American, one Caucasian. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

<http://popdropandlockit.blogspot.com/2015/01/the-wet-nurse-african-american-slaves.html>

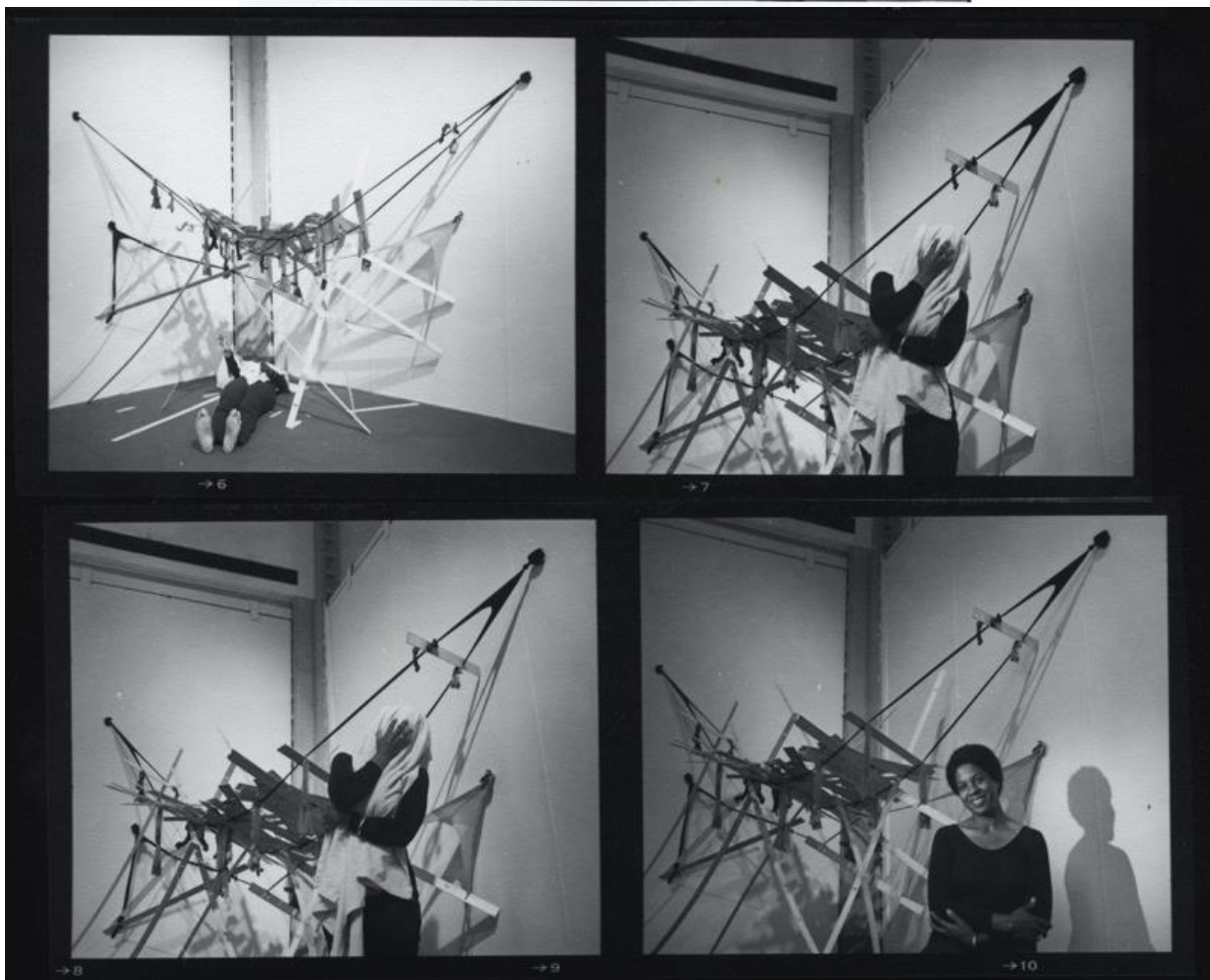


[Figure 1.19] Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P. Series*, 1976-present, performance at 2017 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures* at the DePaul Art Museum by Anna Martine Whitehead, Margaret Morris, and Alex Ellsworth on September 9, 2017. Photograph by Lizabeth Applewhite. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://resources.depaul.edu/art-museum/exhibitions/Pages/senga-nengudi-gestures.aspx>.



[Figure 1. 20]

Senga Nengudi, *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St* (1982/2014) (photo by Ana Tuazon for Hyperallergic). Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://hyperallergic.com/457960/revisiting-a-seminal-exhibition-on-third-world-feminist-art-at-a-i-r-gallery/>



[Figures 1.21 & 1.22]

Senga Nengudi performing with *Nuki-Nuki: Across 118th St*, an installation of Venetian blind slats and nylons, 1982. Courtesy the artist and the African American Performance Art Archive, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

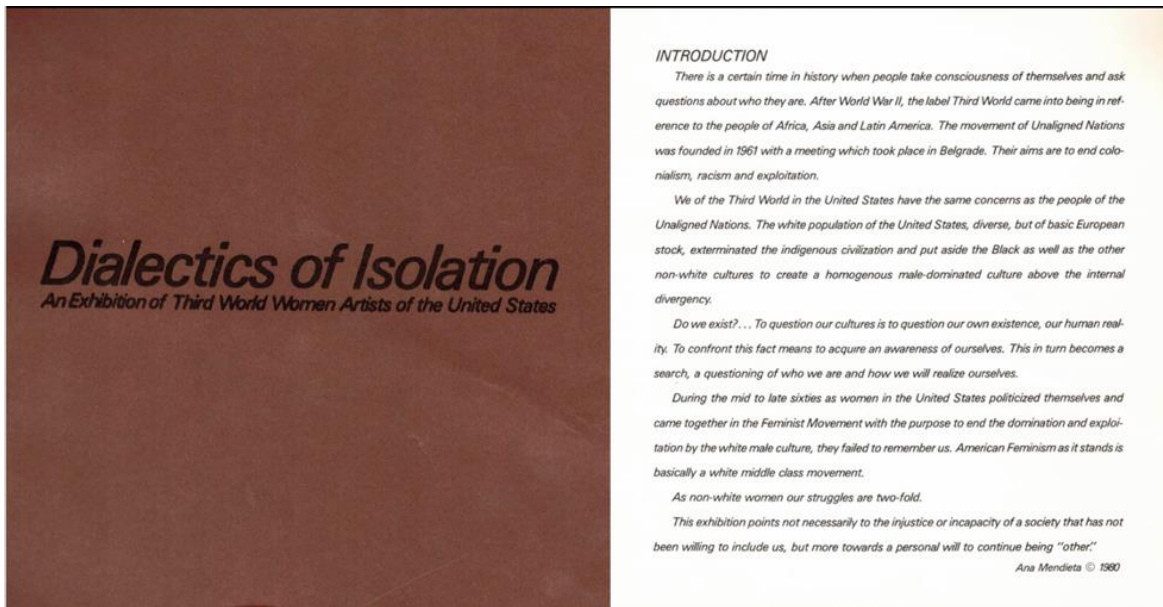
<https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/side-by-side/individual-collective-a-conversation-with-senga-nengudi>.



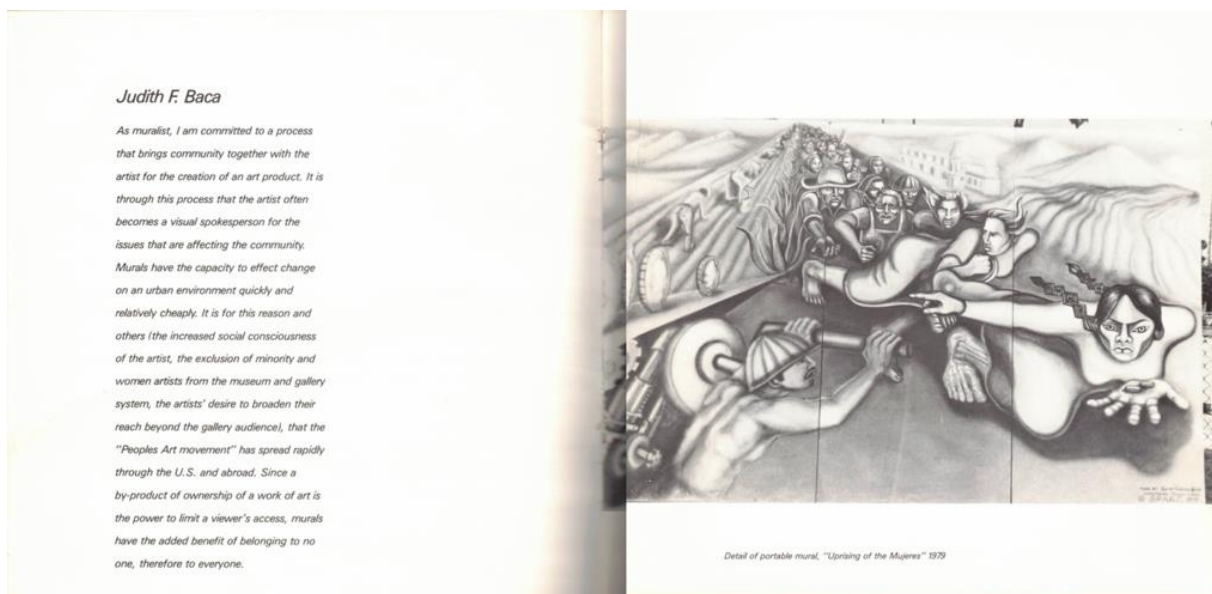
[Figure 1.23]

Ana Mendieta with other members of the board of the A.I.R. Gallery 1977-1982. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

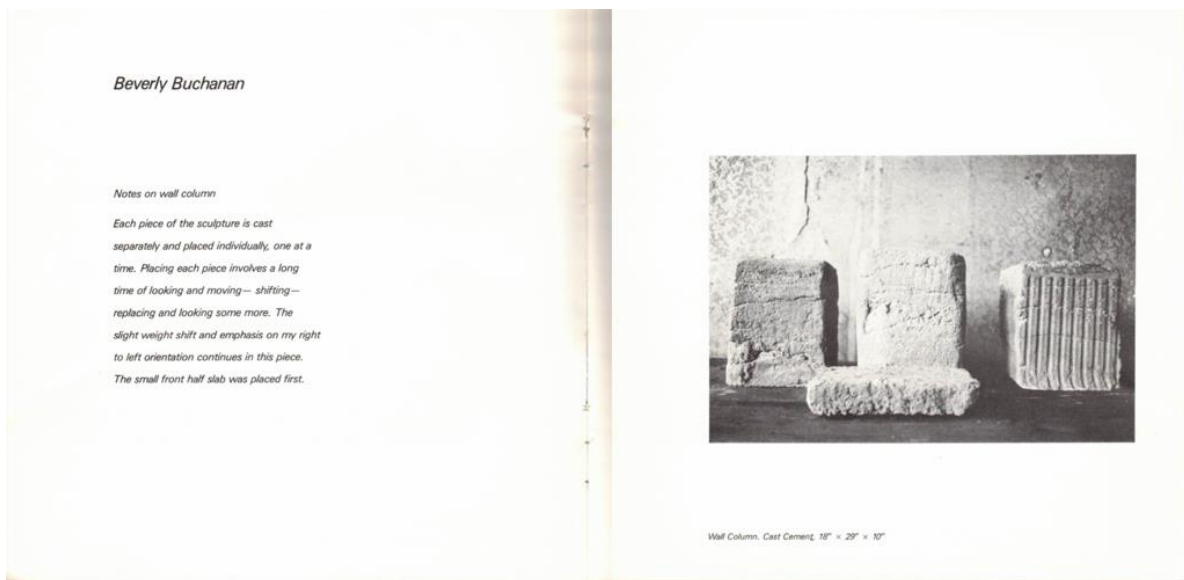
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0740770X.2011.607595?journalCode=rwap20>.



[Figure 1.24] Cover image and catalogue introduction for “Dialectics of Isolation” by Ana Mendieta, 1980. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), cover and 1.

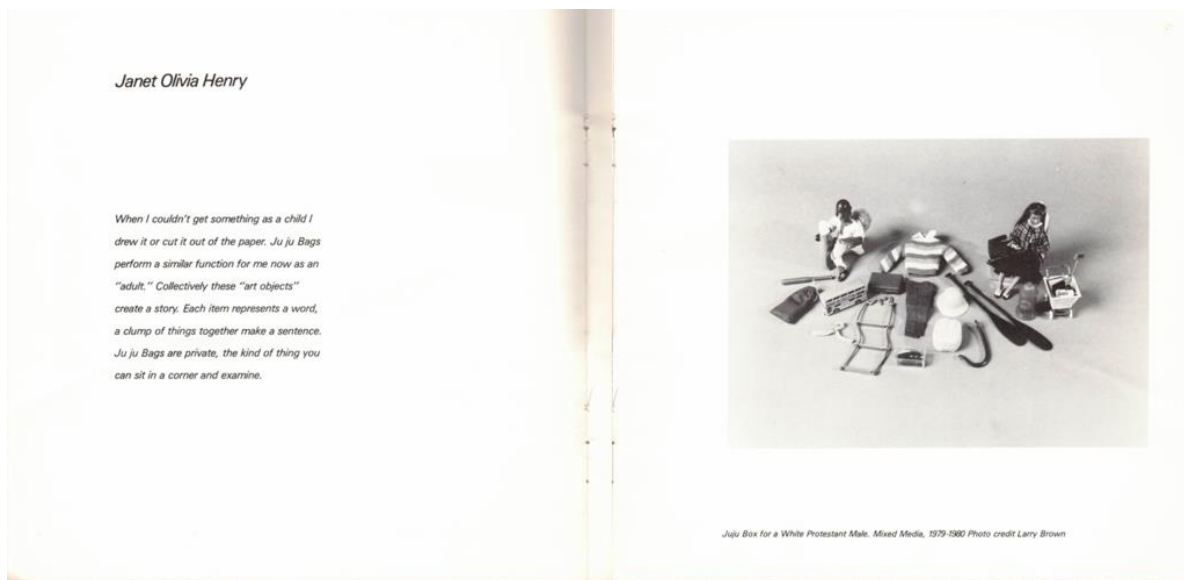


[Figure 1.25] Judith Baca’s statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 2 - 3.



[Figure 1.26]

Beverly Buchanan's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 4 - 5.



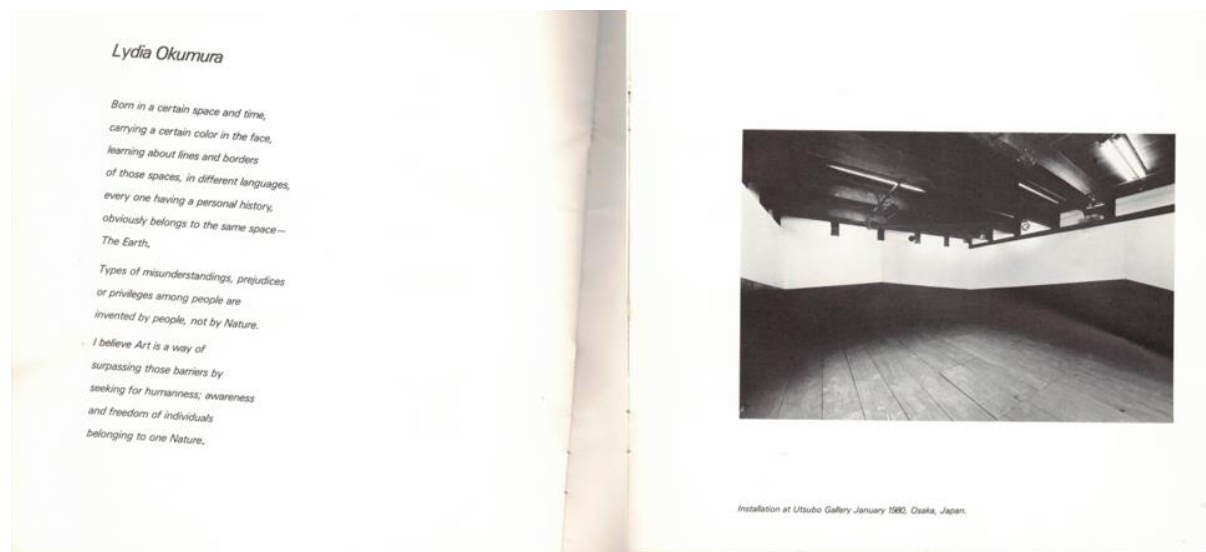
[Figure 1.27]

Janet Olivia Henry's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 6 - 7.



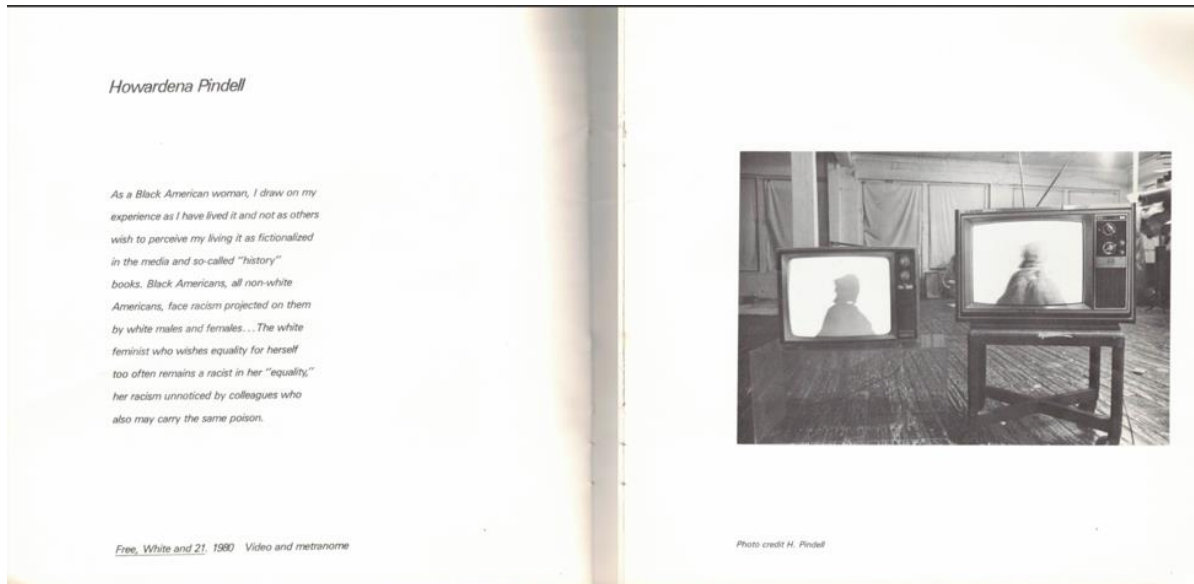
[Figure 1.28]

Senga Nengudi's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 8 - 9.

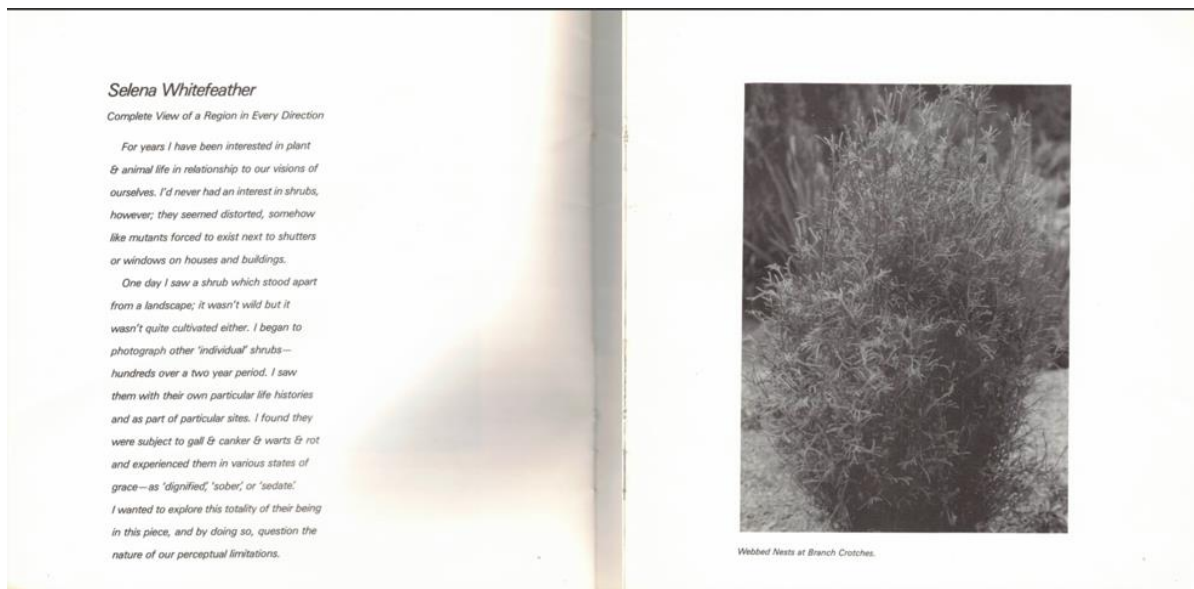


[Figure 1.29]

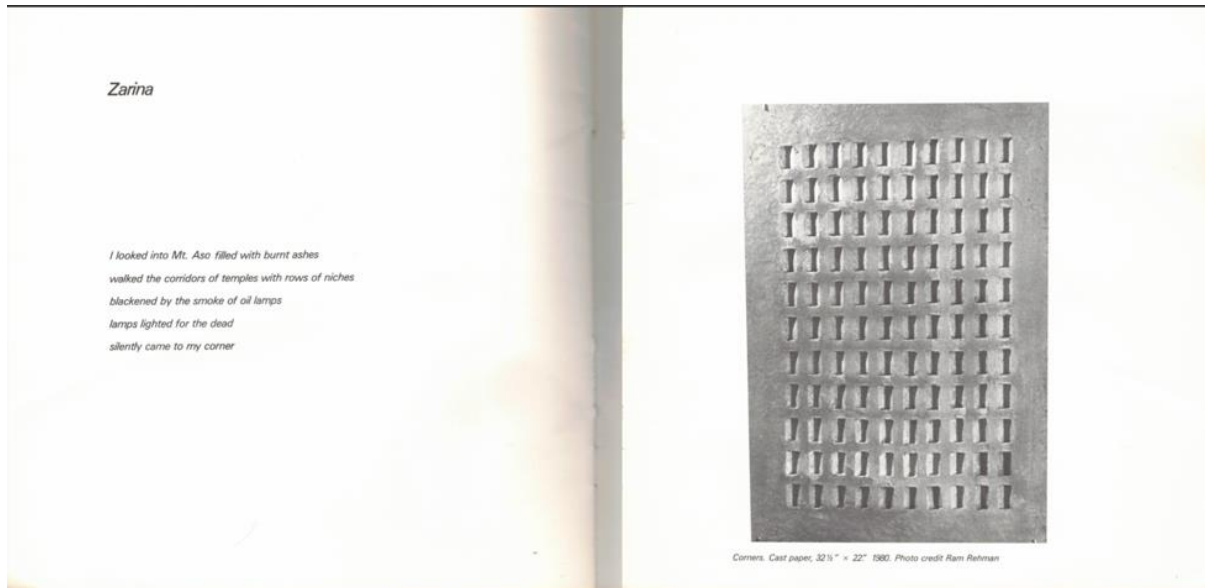
Lydia Okumura's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 10 - 11.



[Figure 1.30] Judith Baca's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 12 - 13.



[Figure 1.31] Selena Whitefeather's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 14 - 15.



[Figure 1.32]

Zarina's statement and work as included in the 1980 DOI catalogue. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, (A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY), 16 - 17.

Article
Carrie Rickey, 'The Passion of Ana',
in *The Village Voice*,
[10-16 September 1980], p. 75

ART

By Carrie Rickey

REPRODUCTION OF ONE OF THE ARTISTS' WORKS BY CARRIE RICKEY. COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS' GALLERY, 100 WEST 11TH STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y.

Artists' shows are usually exploring their own interests in a logical way or being together a group of artists. In this instance political and social issues are more pressing than aesthetic considerations. The reason, given the historical placement of today's art, is that it is the only medium available. Lines are drawn politically as in "Artists for Kennedy", usually in "Third World, Latin America", and are automatically in "American of Latin America" (curated by Kasper, Ann Merfeld, and Lerner, which focuses eight black artists around artists who live in the U.S.A.).

In her introduction to the show's catalogue, Mendietta uses a double strategy for the curatorial mission in Ana. She uses the word "art" to refer to the artists' statements, observations of judgments and non-abstract positions while demanding that the artists be "honest" from whom she has selected. Mendietta concludes: "The exhibition is not a survey of the history of contemporary art, but a survey of a personal will to continue being artist."

Despite Mendietta's protest of self-interest, most of the work here evokes the phenomenological, the "total" which makes for good art, but which does not obscure the passion of the artists' group's expression. Wilson Harvey Mendietta's own interest in what she has done with an exhibition of one artist and another artist, creating the total work of Mendietta's entire thought. This is a very sophisticated procedure for looking what seems to be personal art, but Mendietta having the unexpected look of which she is not aware, like the work in Mendietta.

There is a sense of the artist's love for the artist in her own work. Carrie Rickey's work, which is a total work of art, is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art.

More involved in the artist's work is the artist. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art.

There is a sense of the artist's love for the artist in her own work. Carrie Rickey's work, which is a total work of art, is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art.

The last of the artists' work is the artist's work. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art. The artist's work is a total work of art.

The Passion of Ana

Despite Mendietta's protest that the show celebrates political and social "otherness," most of the art here evokes the phenomenological, the lyrical.



Ana Mendietta and "In the Night" seeing a gift, embracing a culture

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

... but long and 15 feet high, the model is a classic of Los Angeles during the '60s and '70s which promises to reveal the political consciousness of the artist and her work.

[Figure 1.33]

Carrie Rickey's 1980 exhibition review "The Passion of Ana" from *The Village Voice* as produced in Stephanie Rosenthal's book "Ana Mendietta: Traces".

FIGURES
Chapter II



[Figure 2.1]
Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Facial Cosmetic Variations)*, January-February 1972, Performance Image. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://wsimag.com/art/6185-ana-mendieta-traces>.



[Figure 2.2]:
Installation of *Newcomers* showing the work of Senga Nengudi, Barnsdall Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 1976. Image from Matthias Mühling, Matthias and Stephanie Weber's 2020 exhibition catalogue *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*, 159.



[Figure 2.3]
Screenshot of *Dance and Violin Performance: Activation of Senga Nengudi's R.S.V.P. Performance Piece* at the Denver Art Museum in association with their 2020/2021 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*. Video accessed November 20, 2021.
<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/senga-nengudi>.

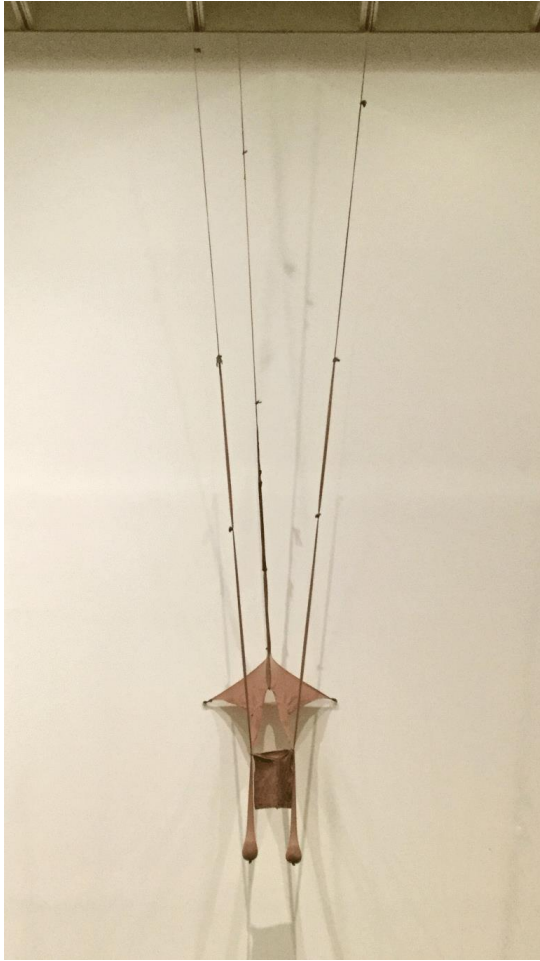


[Figure 2.4]
Screenshot of *Dance and Violin Performance: Activation of Senga Nengudi's R.S.V.P. Performance Piece*. At the Denver Art Museum in association with their 2020/2021 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*. Video accessed November 20, 2021.
<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 2.5]

Screenshot of *Dance and Violin Performance: Activation of Senga Nengudi's R.S.V.P. Performance Piece*. At the Denver Art Museum in association with their 2020/2021 exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*. Video accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 2.6]

Senga Nengudi, *Swing Low*, 1977, reconstructed 2014, nylon mesh, sand. Private collection on loan to the Philadelphia Art Museum in 2021. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://vindevie.me/2021/05/16/senga-nengudi-impermanence-experience-and-a-salutation/>.



[Figure 2.7]

Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, 1978, performance documentation. Courtesy: the artist and Städtische galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich. Photograph: Timo Ohler. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.frieze.com/article/i-believe-deeply-best-kind-art-public-interview-senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 2.8]

Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, 1978, performance documentation. Chromogenic development print; series of 11, each: 12' x 18'. Edition of 5, aside from 1 artist's proof. © Senga Nengudi. Courtesy of Levy Gorvy Gallery, New York, and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York. Photo: Roderick 'Quaku' Young. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://wsimag.com/art/41879-senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 2.9]

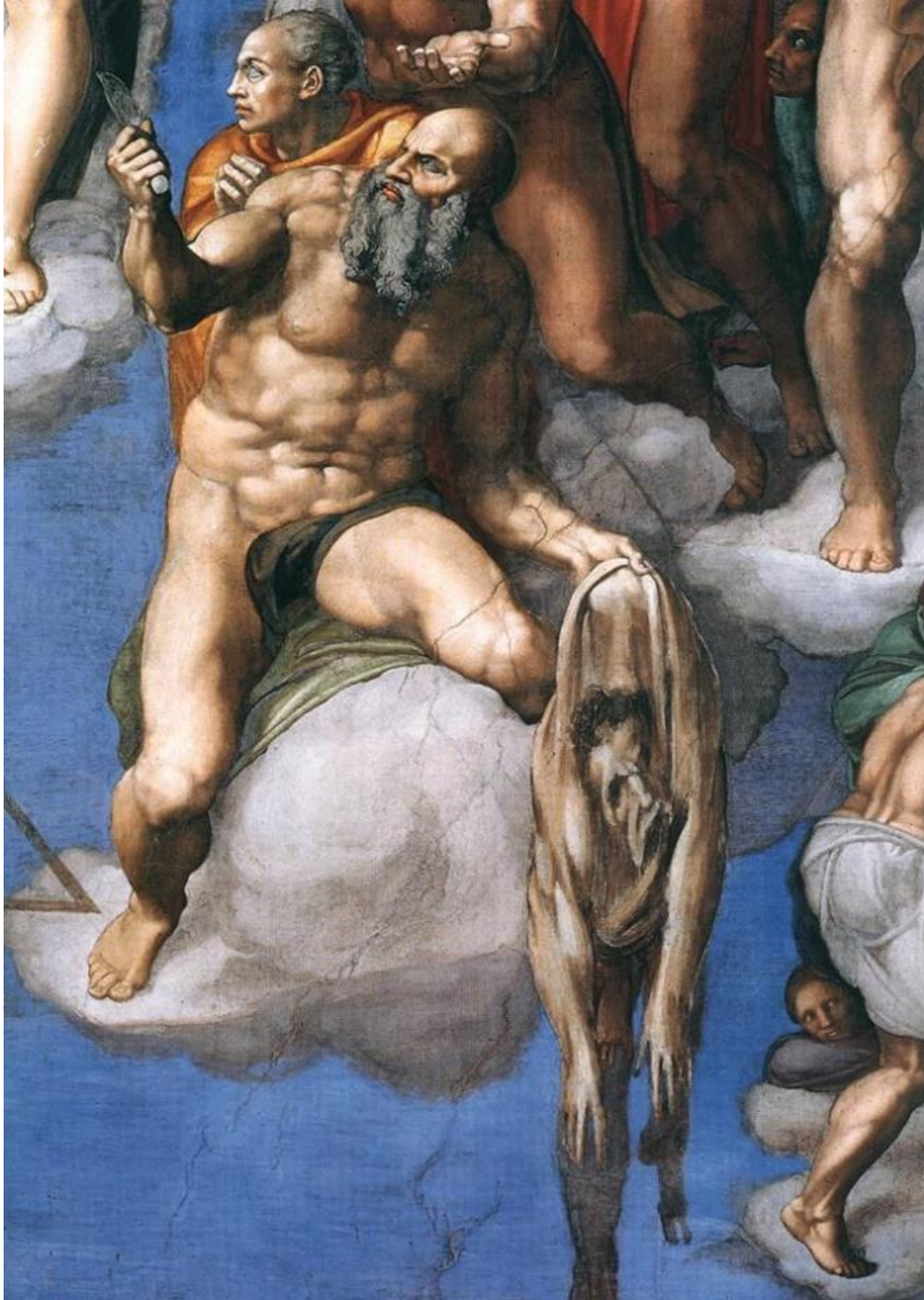
Senga Nengudi, *Ceremony for Freeway Fets*, 1978, performance documentation. Chromogenic development print; series of 11, each: 12' x 18'. Edition of 5, aside from 1 artist's proof. © Senga Nengudi. Courtesy of Levy Gorvy Gallery, New York, and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York. Photo: Roderick 'Quaku' Young. Image accessed December 18, 2020.

<https://mcachicago.org/Publications/Websites/West-By-Midwest/Research/Artists/Senga-Nengudi>.



Figure [2.10]

Senga Nengudi, *Study for 'Mesh Mirage' 2*, 1977, silver gelatin print, 40' x 30'. Photograph by Adam Avila. Courtesy the artist, Thomas Erben Gallery, Lévy Gorvy, and Sprüth Magers. Image accessed December 18, 2020. <https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/side-by-side/individual-collective-a-conversation-with-senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 2.11]
Detail of Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* showing St. Bartholomew, Fresco, 1536-1541.
Public domain via Wikipedia. Image accessed November 20, 2021.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo,_Giudizio_Universale_31.jpg.

FIGURES
Chapter III



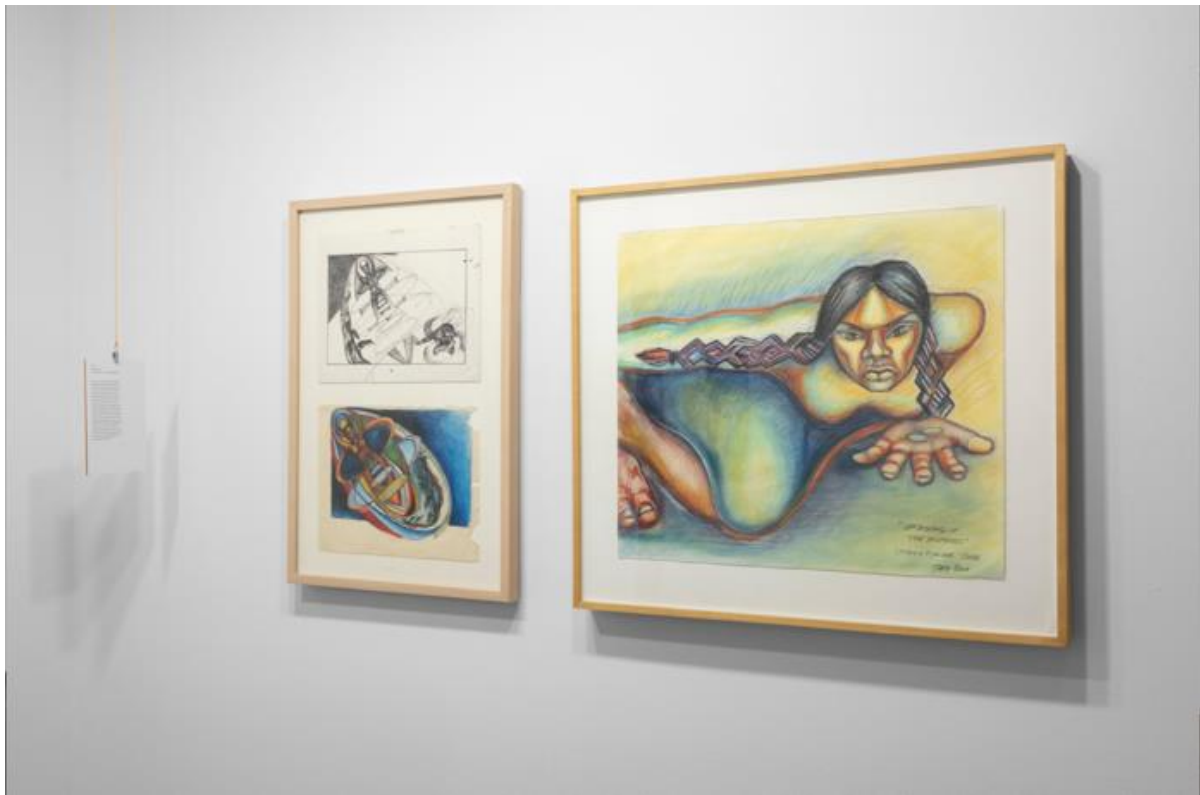
[Figure 3.1]
Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.2]
Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



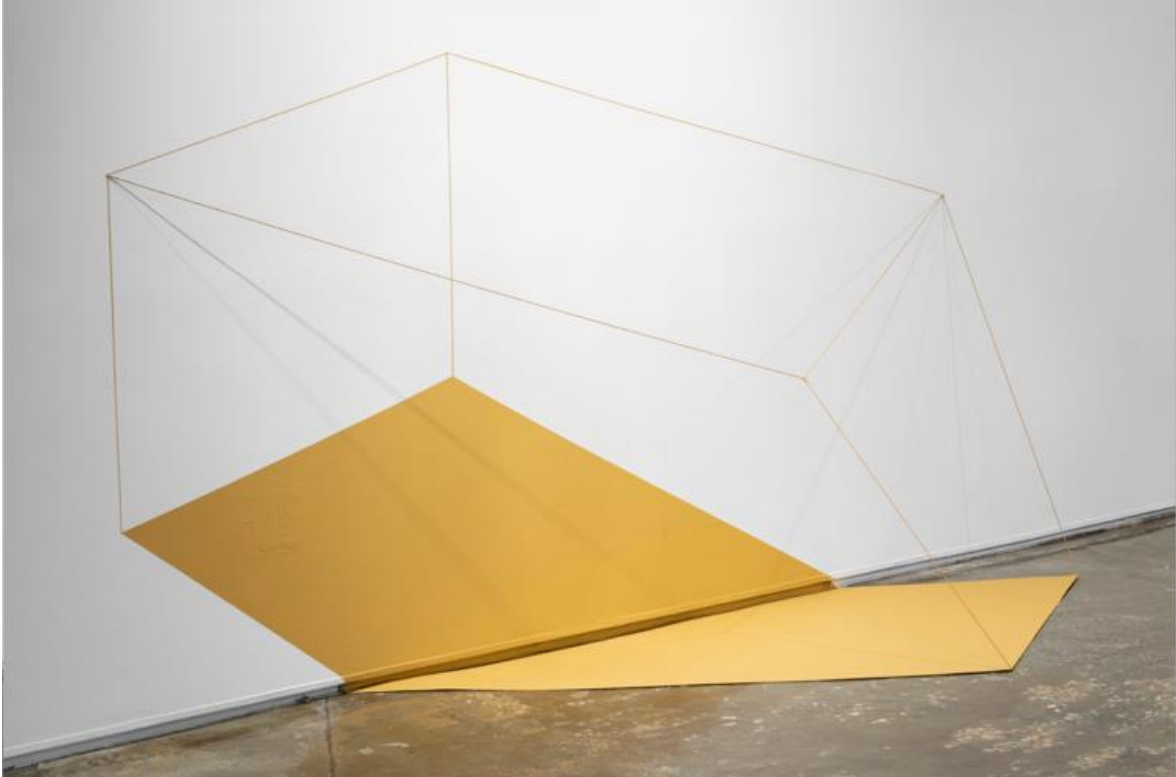
[Figure 3.3]
Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.4]
Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.5]
Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.6]

Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.7]
Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.8]

Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.



[Figure 3.9]

Installation view of *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* at A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn showing Senga Nengudi's *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th Street*. Image courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/dialecticsofentanglement>.

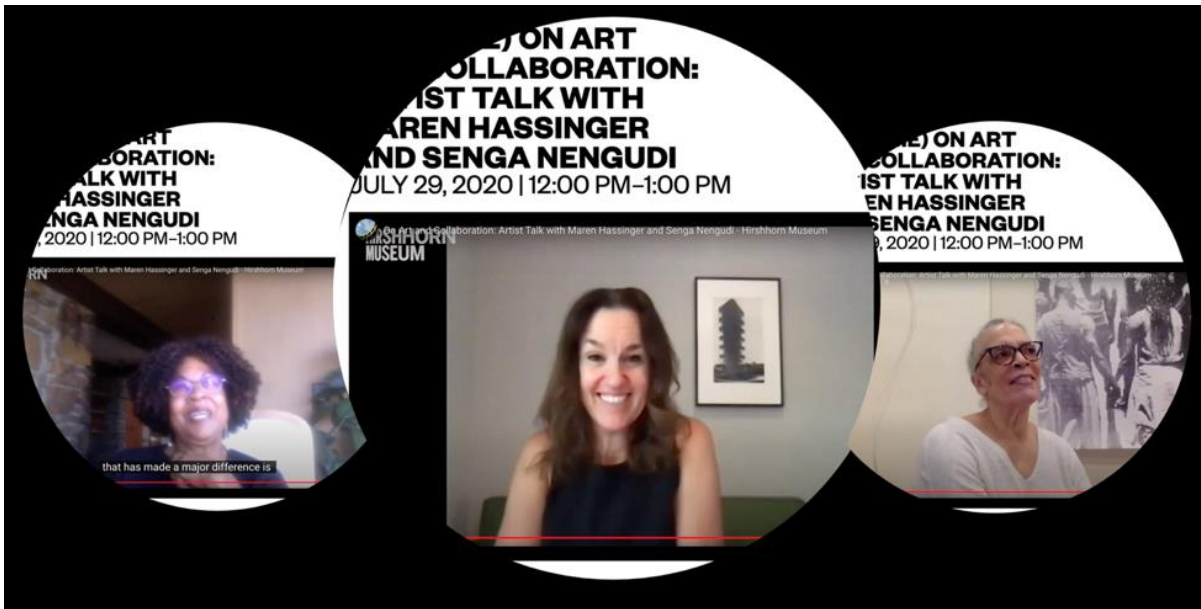
FIGURES
Chapter IV

**(AT HOME) ON ART
AND COLLABORATION:
ARTIST TALK WITH
MAREN HASSINGER
AND SENGA NENGUDI**
JULY 29, 2020 | 12:00 PM–1:00 PM



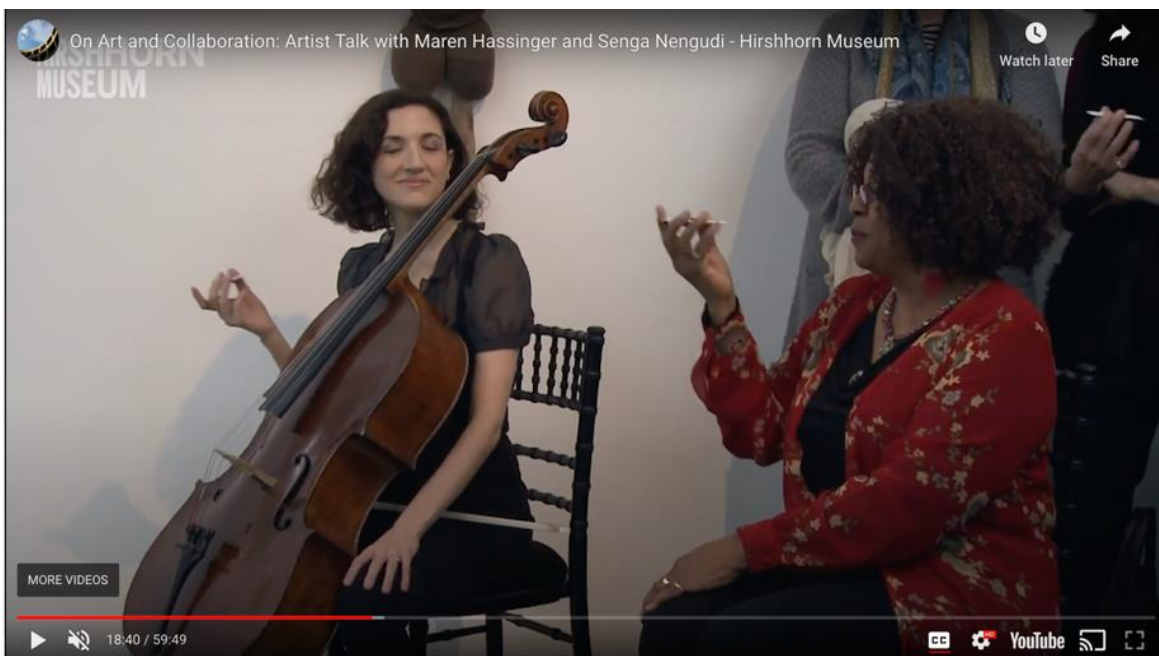
[Figure 4.1]

Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020 12:00pm-1:00pm. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/at-home-on-art-and-collaboration-artist-talk-with-maren-hassinger-and-senga-nengudi/>.



[Figure 4.2]

Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020 12:00pm-1:00pm. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/at-home-on-art-and-collaboration-artist-talk-with-maren-hassinger-and-senga-nengudi/>.

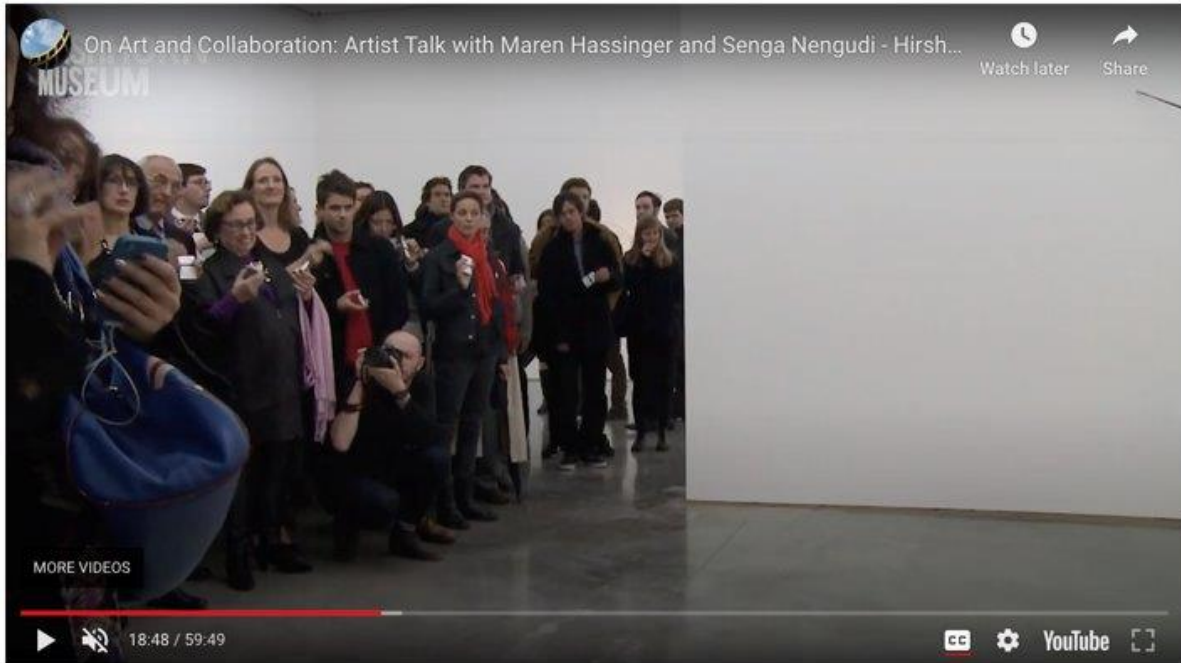


[Figure 4.3]

Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020 12:00pm-1:00pm. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/at-home-on-art-and-collaboration-artist-talk-with-maren-hassinger-and-senga-nengudi/>.



[Figure 4.4]
Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020 12:00pm-1:00pm. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/at-home-on-art-and-collaboration-artist-talk-with-maren-hassinger-and-senga-nengudi/>.



[Figure 4.5]
Screenshot of recorded footage of the virtual event (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, July 29, 2020 12:00pm-1:00pm. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/at-home-on-art-and-collaboration-artist-talk-with-maren-hassinger-and-senga-nengudi/>



[Figure 4.6]

Cheryl Banks-Smith, and Senga Nengudi performing *Air Propo* at Just Above Midtown, New York, 1981. Courtesy Senga Nengudi and the African American Performance Art Archive, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Image accessed December 18, 2020.

<https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/side-by-side/individual-collective-a-conversation-with-senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 4.7]

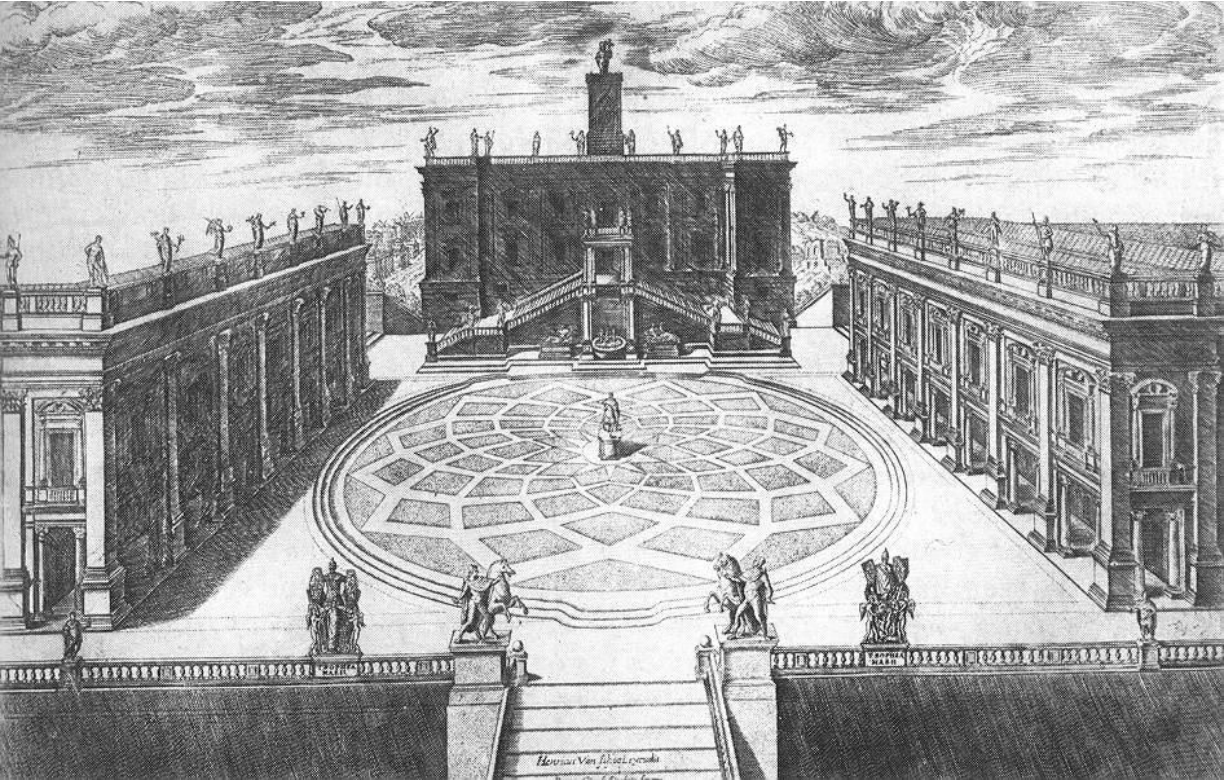
Flying, performed by Houston Conwill, Maren Hassinger, Ulysses Jenkins, Franklin Parker, and Senga Nengudi at Barnsdall Park, Los Angeles, July 6, 1982, on the occasion of the opening of *Afro-American Abstractions* at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Photographs by Adam Avila. Courtesy Senga Nengudi, Thomas Erben Gallery, Lévy Gorvy, Sprüth Magers, and the African American Performance Art Archive, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Image accessed December 18, 2020. <https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/side-by-side/individual-collective-a-conversation-with-senga-nengudi>.



[Figure 4.8]

Left and right: Franklin Parker, Maren Hassinger, Houston Conwill, and Senga Nengudi performing *Art Activity*, Los Feliz neighborhood, Los Angeles, 1981. Photographs by Adam Avila. Courtesy Senga Nengudi, Thomas Erben Gallery, Lévy Gorvy, and Sprüth Magers. Image accessed December 18, 2020. <https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/side-by-side/individual-collective-a-conversation-with-senga-nengudi>.

Figures
Chapter V

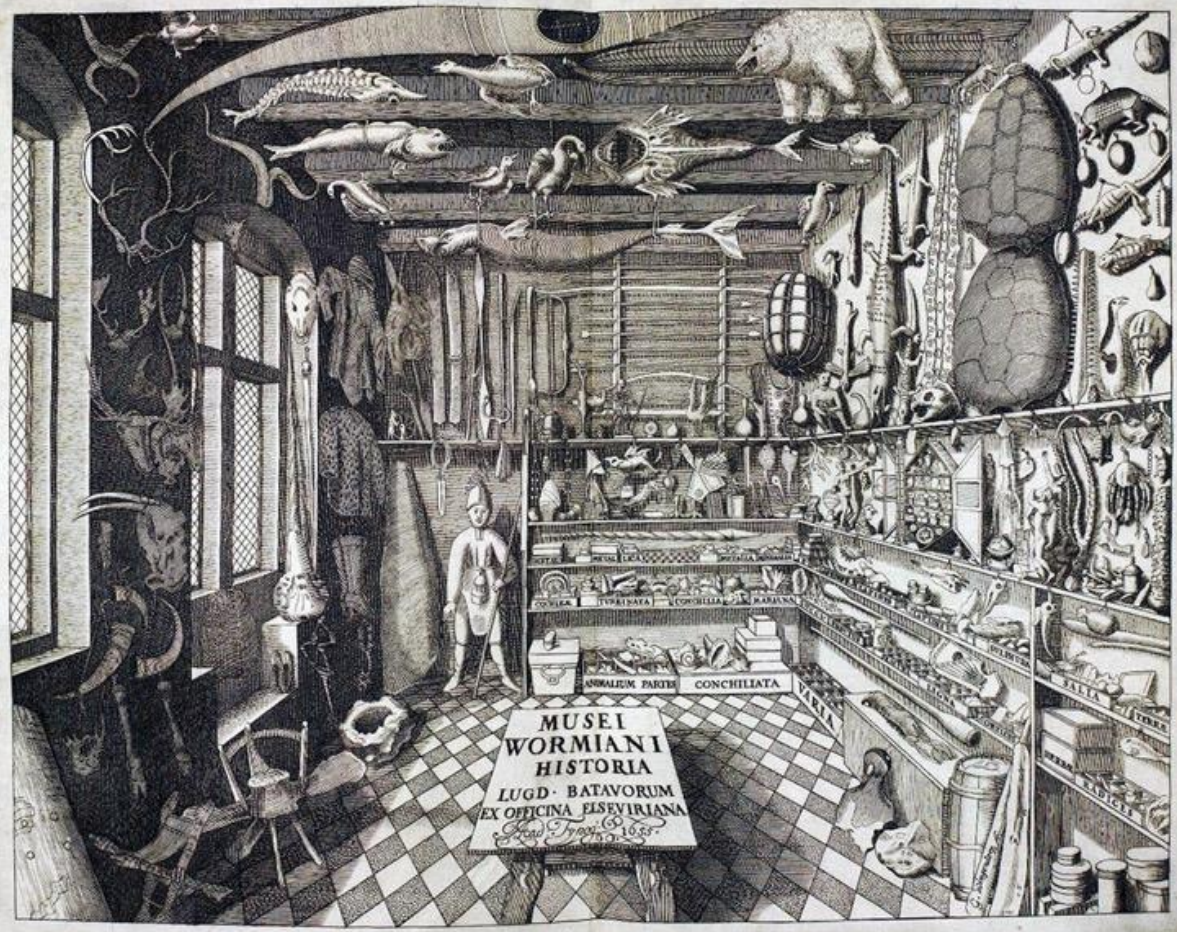


[Figure 5.1]: Michelangelo's design for Capitoline Hill, now home to the Capitoline Museums. Engraved by Étienne Dupérac, 1568. Image accessed November 20, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitoline_Museums.



[Figure 5.2]

Louvre Museum, The Colonnade, the eastern facade of the Louvre Museum, Paris, 19th-century print. *Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (LC-DIG-pga-13069)*. Image accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Louvre-Museum>.



[Figure 5.3]

Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosity is an example of the type of private "museums" that displayed an individual's collection of natural history objects. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/british-museum-was-wonder-its-time-also-product-slavery-180966997/>.



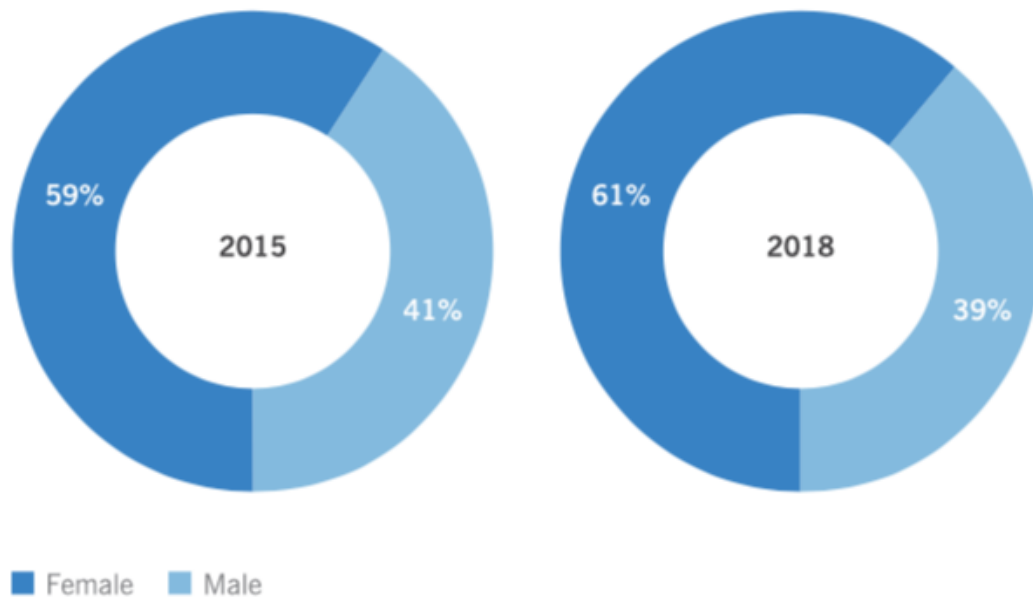
[Figure 5.4]

The International Exhibition of 1862 – Japanese Court, from *The Illustrated London News*, 20 September 1862. Museum no. NAL. PP10, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image accessed November 20, 2021.

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/japanese-cloisonne-in-19th-century-literary-sources/>.

Art Museum Employees, by Gender

Repeat AAMD Participants Only

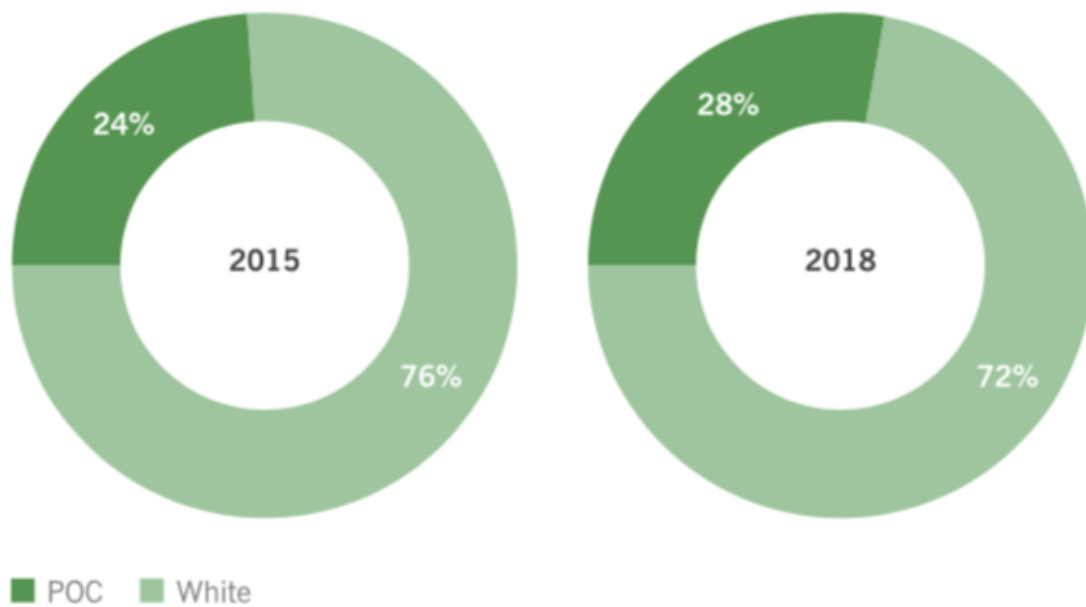


[Figure 5.5]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Art Museum Employees, by Gender (2018), 7.

Art Museum Employees, by Race/Ethnicity

Repeat AAMD Participants Only

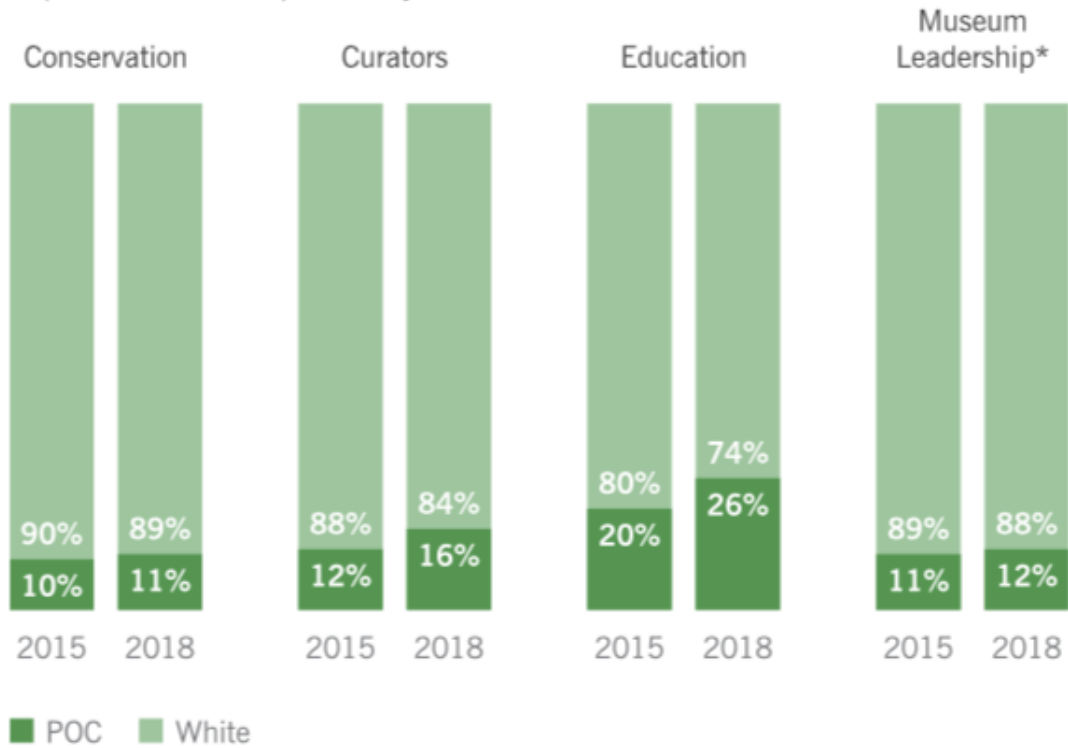


[Figure 5.6]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity, 9.

Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity

Repeat AAMD Participants Only



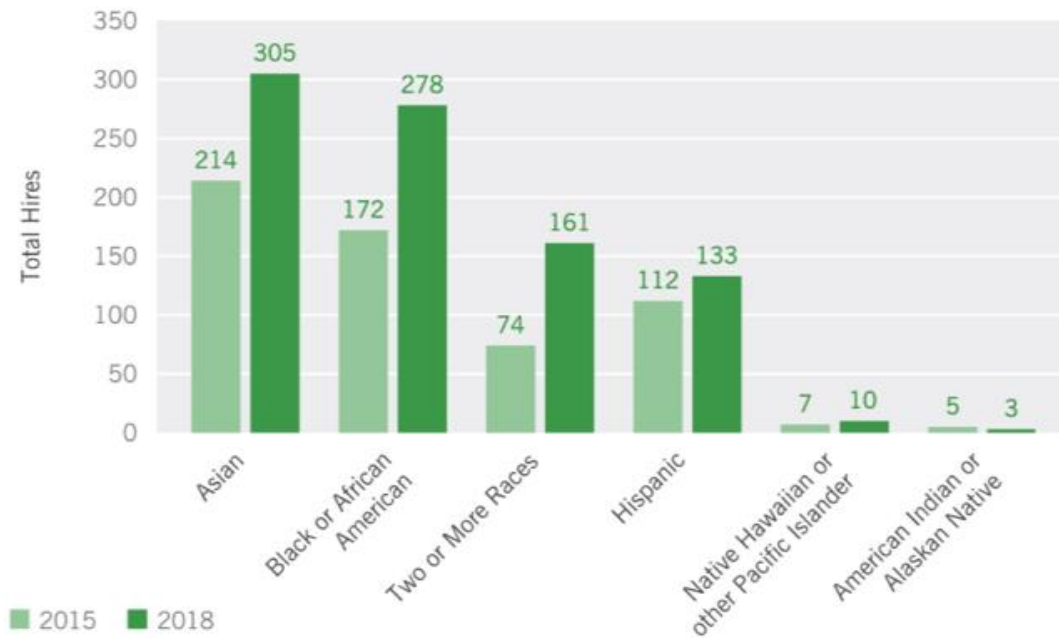
* Includes executive positions

[Figure 5.7]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity, 11.

Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity

Repeat AAMD Participants Only

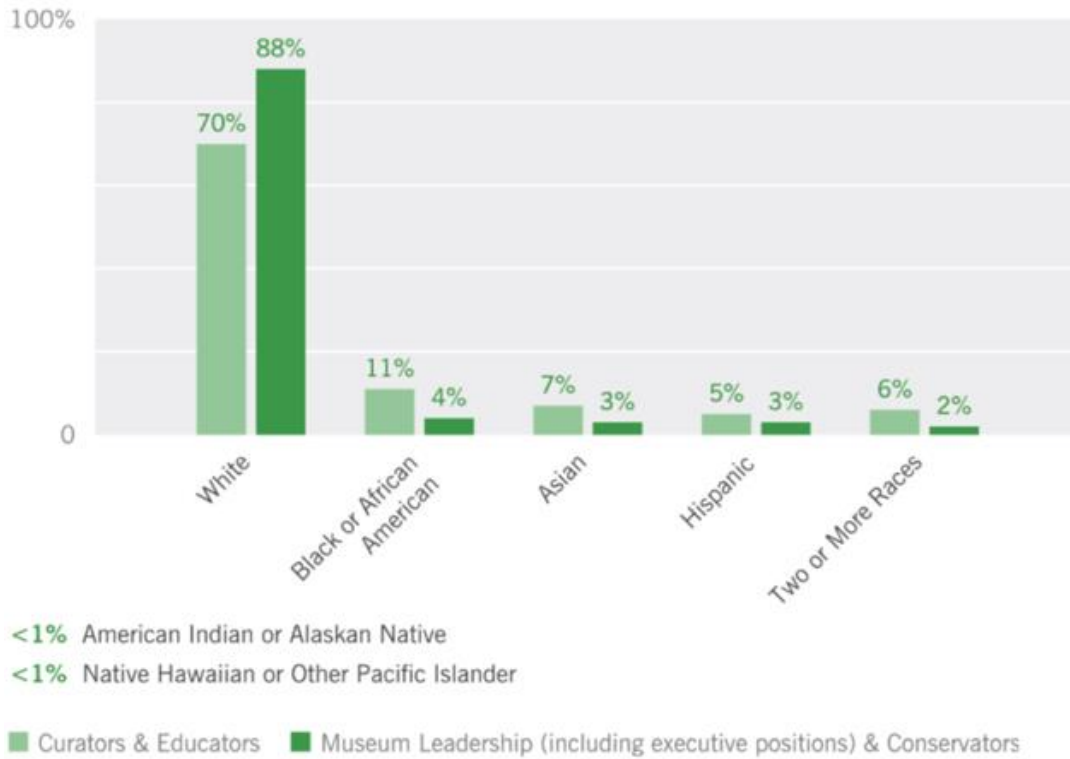


[Figure 5.8]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, by Race/Ethnicity, 13.

Intellectual Leadership Positions, New Hiring Since 2014, by Race/Ethnicity

All 2018 Participants

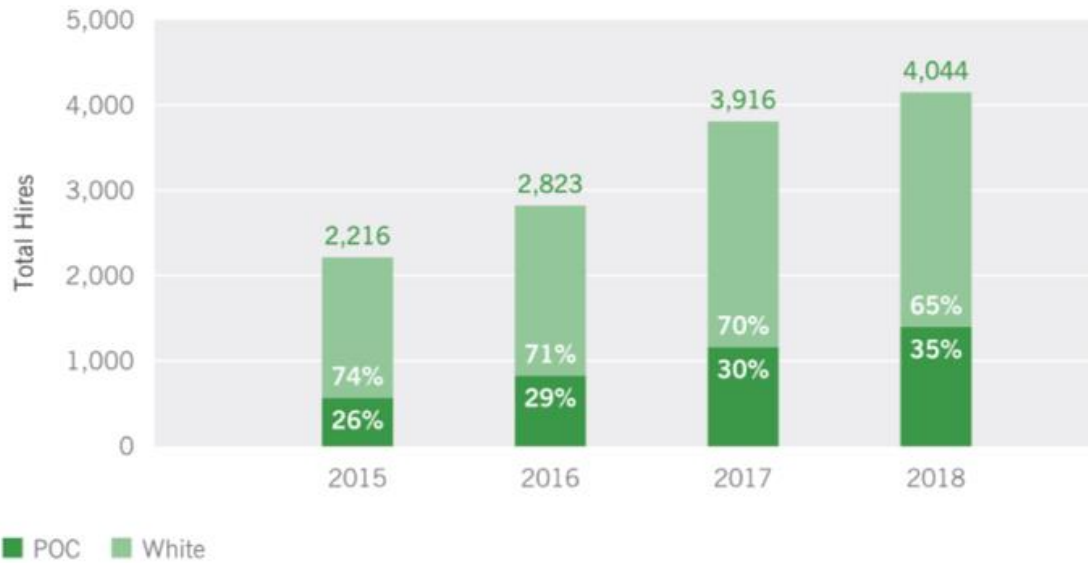


[Figure 5.9]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Intellectual Leadership Positions, New Hiring Since 2014, by Race/Ethnicity, 12.

Museum Hiring Over Last Four Years, by Race/Ethnicity

All 2018 Participants

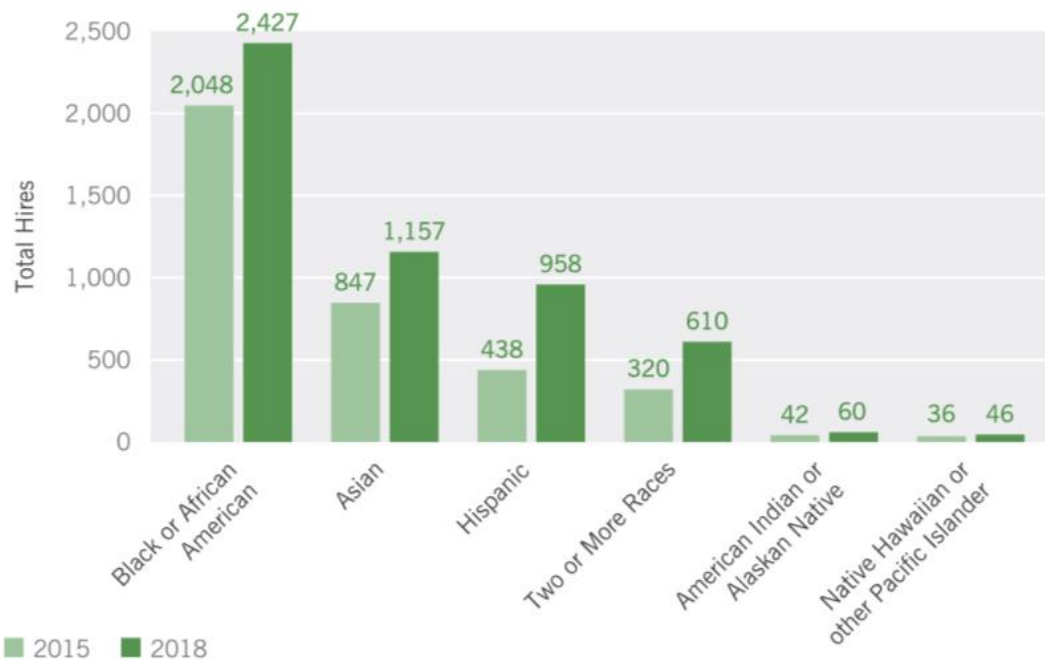


[Figure 5.10]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellow Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Museum Hiring Over Last Four Years, by Race/Ethnicity, 10.

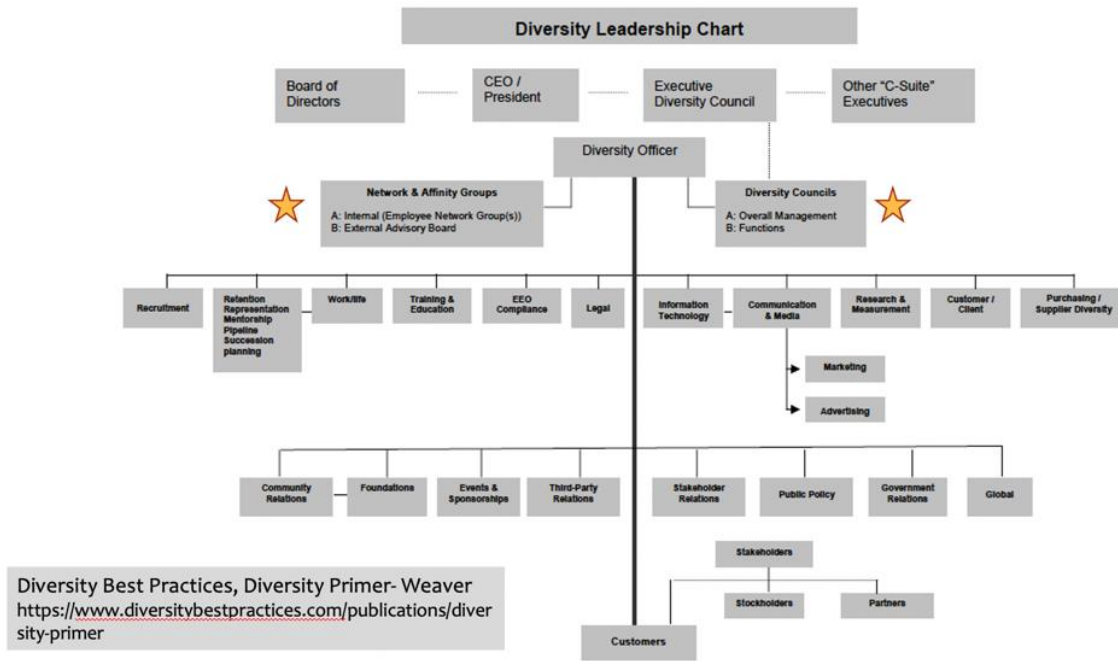
Art Museum Employees, by Race/Ethnicity

Repeat AAMD Participants Only

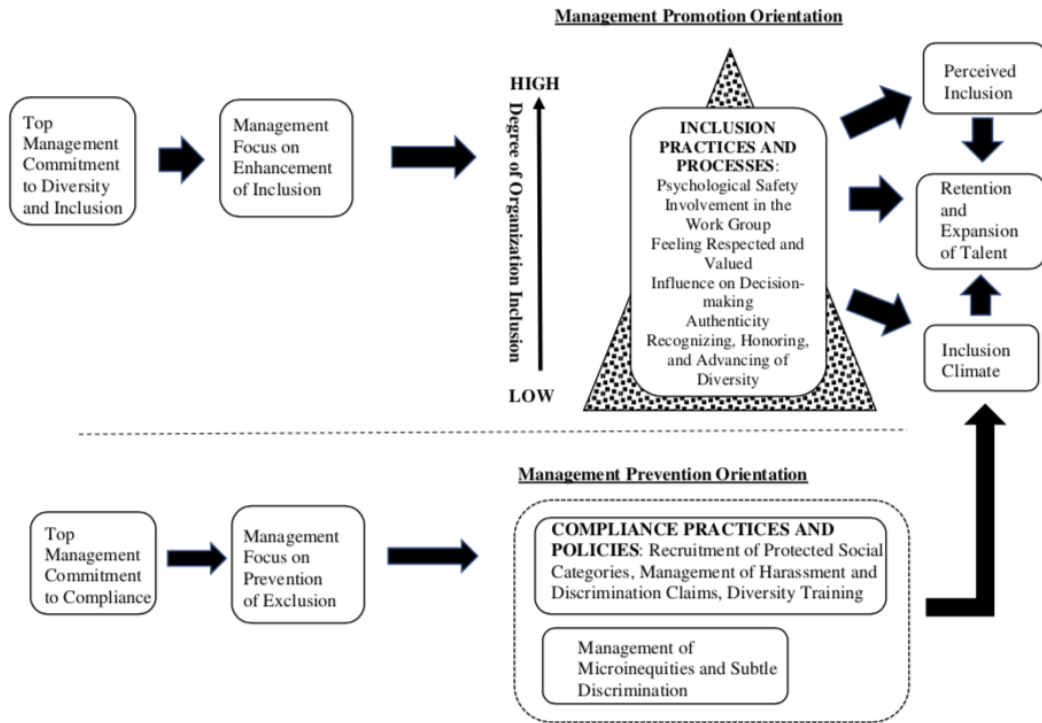


[Figure 5.11]

Westermann M. Schonfel, & L. Sweeney L. (2019). *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: Art museum staff demographic survey*. Art Museum Employees, by Race/Ethnicity, 10.



[Figure 5.12]
 Diversity Best Practices Model, Diversity Primer- Weaver in source
<https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/publications/diversity-primer>



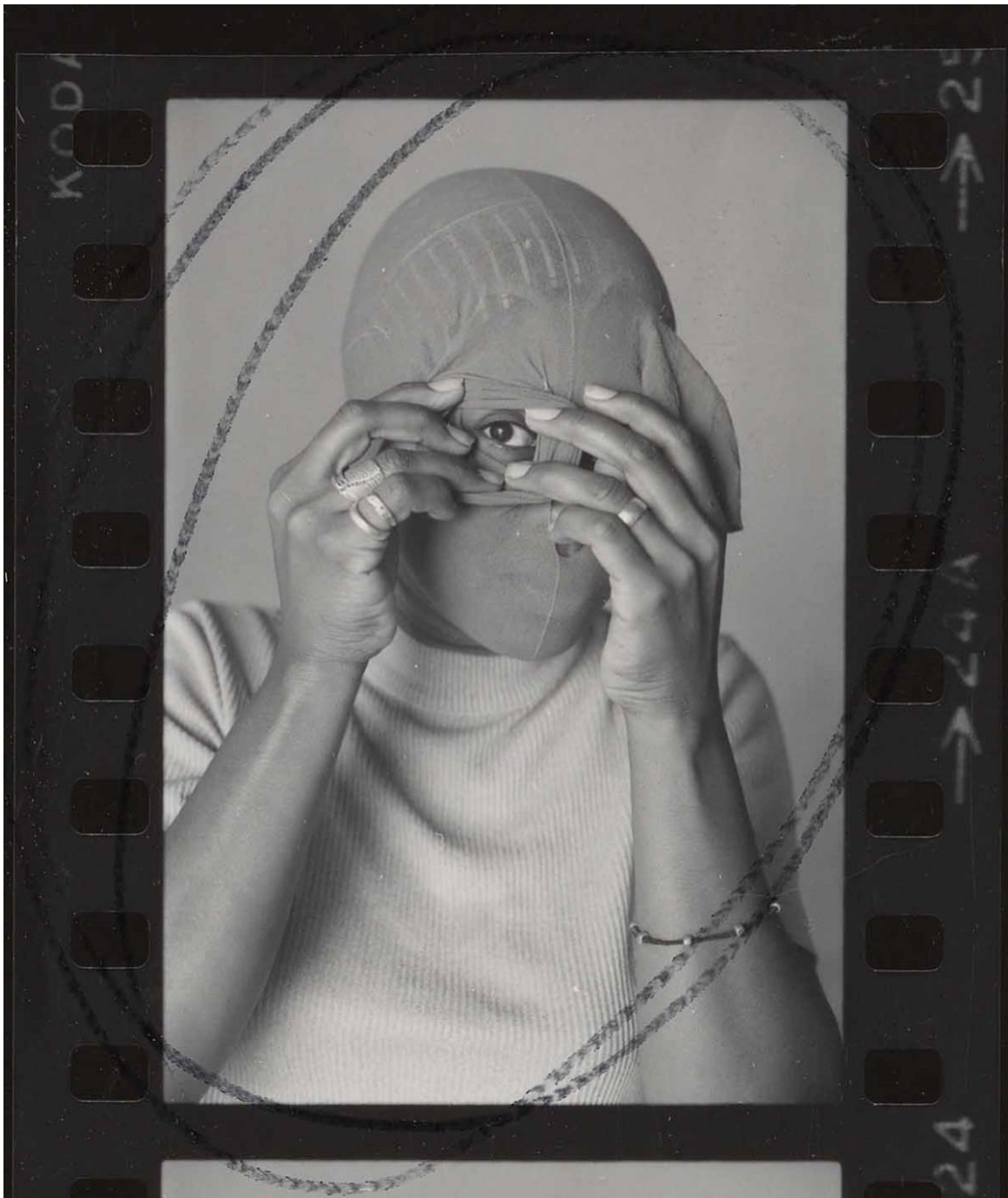
[Figure 5.13]

Shore, L., Cleveland, J., & Sanchez, D (2018) Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28, 176-189.



[Figure 5.14]

Museum visitors contemplating Senga Nengudi's *A.C.Q. I*, 2016–17. Courtesy of the Denver Art Museum.



[Figure 5.15]

Senga Nengudi ca. 1978 (detail from contact sheet). Photograph by Adam Avila Photography. Senga Nengudi Papers, Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Image accessed November 21, 2021. <https://www.aaa.si.edu/blog/2019/05/acquisitions-senga-nengudi-papers>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Robert. "A Challenge to Museums: Addressing Diversity." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1992): 272–276.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.1992.9944408> (Retrieved October 10, 2021).
- A.I.R. Gallery. *Dialectics of Entanglement*. Edited by Jaclyn Arndt. Henry Luce Foundation, 2018. Exhibition catalogue.
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574dd51d62cd942085f12091/t/5b6cb5cbaa4a992cbaac223c/1533851141682/AIR_DOE_publication_single-version.pdf (Retrieved February 22, 2020).
- A.I.R. Gallery. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, exhibition catalogue, September 2–20, 1980, A.I.R. Gallery, (New York, New York, 1980). Exhibition catalogue.
- Alexander, M., & Mohanty, C. *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures /* edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Alvarado, Leticia. *Abject Performances : Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Alvarado, Leticia. "Towards a Personal Will to Continue Being 'Other': Ana Mendieta's Abject Performances." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2015): 65-85.
- Auden, W.H, "Today's 'Wonder-World' Needs Alice." *Aspects of Alice*. Edited by Robert Phillips. (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1971), 3-12.
- Author Anonymous, "Here to Stay: Braving Barriers through Performance: Censorship at the UWM Union Art Gallery." *Thinking C21: Century for 21st Studies*, October 1, 2020
<https://www.c21uwm.com/2020/10/01/here-to-stay-braving-barriers-through-performance-censorship-at-the-uwm-union-art-gallery/> (Retrieved October 31, 2021.)
- Author, Elissa, Amelia Jones, and Gregory Angaza Pitts. *Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures*. Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. Phoenix: Sprint Press, 2015. Exhibition Catalogue.
- Batycka, Dorian, "Art and Creative Acts that Were Censored in 2019", *Hyperallergic* (January 7, 2020). <https://hyperallergic.com/534808/art-and-creative-acts-that-were-censored-in-2019/> (Retrieved December 15, 2021).
- Berger, Martin. "Museum Architecture and the Imperialism of Whiteness," *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 81-122.
- Blocker, Jane Blocker, "Ana Mendieta and the Politics of the *Venus Negra*." *Cultural Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1998): 45.

- Blocker, Jane. *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity, and Exile*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Bierens, Maribelle, "Looking Back in Moving Forward," *Questions and Art*. August 24, 2018. <https://questionsandart.com/2018/08/24/looking-back-to-move-forward/>. (Retrieved October 10, 2021).
- Britannica, "The Third Wave of Feminism." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>. (Retrieved December 10, 2021).
- Britannica. "Non-Alignment Movement." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Non-Alignment-Movement> (Retrieved May 19, 2021).
- Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta." *Traces: Ana Mendieta*. London: Hayward Publishing, 2013.
- Butler, Judith, and Athanasiou, Athena. *Dispossession : the Performative in the Political : Conversations with Athena Athanasiou*. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013.
- Butler, Judith. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988): 519-531.
- Brenton, Scott, & Bouckaert, Geert. "Managing Public Museums Appropriately and Consequentially: The Distinctiveness and Diversity of Leading Organizations." *Public Administration Review*, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13323>. (Retrieved May 18, 2021)
- Cash, Stephanie, "Senga Nengudi at Thomas Erben." *Art in America*, March (2004), 123.
- Cassel, Oliver, V., Arning, B., Bäcker, Y., Ochieng' Nyongó, T. A., Beckwith, N., Sirmans, F., & Owens, C. *Radical Presence : Black Performance in Contemporary Art / Valerie Cassel Oliver ; essays by Yona Backer, Naomi Beckwith, Valerie Cassel Oliver, Tavia Nyong'o, Clifford Owens, Franklin Sirmans*. Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2013.
- Castro, Fidel, "Speech to the UN in his position as chairman of the non-aligned countries movement October 12, 1979". <https://web.archive.org/web/20140111084626/http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1979/19791012.html> (Retrieved May 18, 2021)
- Catanese, Brandi Wilkins. *The Problem of the Color(blind) : Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Caves, Roger. *Encyclopedia of the City*. Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 2005.

- Cayo, Honorato. "The Predicament of Representation in the Politics of Diversity: A Discussion Through Tate Encounters." *Museum and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2020): 409–424. <https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v18i4.3363ca>
- Chave, Anna C. "O'Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze" *Reading American Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 351-370.*
- Colbert, Soyica Diggs, Douglas A. Jones Jr., Shane Vogel. *Race and Performance After Repetition*. Duke University Press, 2020.
- Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-cuba-relations> (Retrieved on May 18, 2021)
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum* University of Chicago Law School (1989).
- Denver Art Museum. "Senga Nengudi: Experimenting from the Start." Denver Art Museum. <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibition-guide-senga-nengudi-experimenting>. (Retrieved November 20, 2021).
- Desmond, Matthew., and Emirbayer, Mustafa. *Racial Domination, Racial Progress : the Sociology of Race in America. 1st ed.* New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010.
- Diversity Best Practices, Diversity Primer-Weaver <https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/publications/diversity-primer>
- Doran, Anne, "Senga Nengudi", *Art in America*, April 29 (2013). <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/senga-nengudi-61499/>. (Retrieved December 17, 2021)
- Douglas, Jennifer Darlene, *Like a Natural Woman: Constructing Gender from Performance to Performativity*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007.
- D'Souza, Aruna, Bright, P., & Lumumba, P. (2018). *Whitewalling : art, race & protest in 3 acts*; artwork by Parker Bright & Pastiche Lumumba. Badlands Unlimited, 2018.
- Duncan, Carol. "Public Spaces, Private Interests: Municipal Art Museum in New York and Chicago." *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 48-71.
- Fernandes, Leela. *Transnational Feminism in the United States : Knowledge, Ethics, and Power*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Tenth anniversary edition. New York: Norton, 1963.
- Fields, Barbara J. "Race. Ideology and Race in American History." *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*. Edited by d. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 143-169.

- Findlen, Paula, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy." *Museum Studies*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 23-50.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 4th ed. London, 1915.
- Gregory, Derek, et al. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 5th Edition. 5th ed., Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 2009.
- George, Janel, "A Lesson on Critical Race Theory." *American Bar Association*, January 11, 2021.
https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/ (Retrieved November 27, 2021)
- Grewal, Inderpal., and Kaplan, Caren. *Scattered Hegemonies : Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Groves, Harry E. "Separate but Equal--The Doctrine of Plessy V. Ferguson." *Phylon*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1951): 66–72.
- Goode-Bryant, Linda, Marcy S. Philips, *Contextures*. New York: Just Above Midtown Gallery, 1978. Exhibition catalogue.
- Hankins, Evelyn. "En/Gendering the Whitney's Collection of American Art," *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 2003), 163-189.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection : Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Henry Moore Institute. "Senga Nengudi." Henry Moore Institute, 2018. https://www.henry-moore.org/whats-on/2018/09/21/senga-nengudi?fbclid=IwAR08pPsR0HBbsT-.O6jYG3ihs7RtVmlXZsmhN37IV5j1oIKo9ZLL_VTpblf8# (Retrieved July 14, 2021).
- Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in D.C. (*At Home*) *On Art and Collaboration: Artist Talk with Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi*, hosted by the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in D.C. with Curator Evelyn Hankins on July 29, 2020, <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/at-home-on-art-and-collaboration-artist-talk-with-maren-hassinger-and-senga-nengudi/> (Retrieved December 12, 2020).
- Jacobs, Julia, "Philip Guston Blockbuster Show Postponed by Four Museums." *New York Times* (September 24, 2020). <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/24/arts/design/philip-guston-postponed-museums-klan.html> (Retrieved December 15, 2021).
- Jackson, Kenneth T, Lisa Keller, and Nancy Flood. *The Encyclopedia of New York City: Second Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Jay, Gregory. "Whiteness studies and the multicultural literature classroom." *MELUS*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2005), 99-120.

- Jones, Kellie. *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Kendall, Frances E. *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race / Frances E. Kendall*. 2nd ed. New York : Routledge, 2013.
- Ibram X. Kendi. *How to Be an Antiracist*. New York: One World, 2019.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection / Julia Kristeva ; Translated by Leon S. Roudiez*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Kwon, Miwon. "Bloody Valentines: Afterimages by Ana Mendieta." *Inside the Visible*, ed. M Catherine de Segher (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 167.
- Laskar, Rejaul Karim. "Respite from Disgraceful NDA Foreign Policy". *Congress Sandesh*, Vol. 6, No. 10 (June 2004): 8.
- Lincoln, Abraham. *The Emancipation Proclamation / by Abraham Lincoln*. Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, n.d.
- Lindsay, Beverly. *Comparative Perspectives of Third World Women: the Impact of Race, Sex, and Class*. New York: Praeger, 1980.
- Lum, Doman. *Culturally Competent Practice, A Framework for Understanding Diverse Groups and Justice Issues*, 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2011.
- Mendieta, Raquel "Kaky" and Nereyda García-Ferraz. "Ana Mendieta Fuego de Tierra (1987)", *Sulfur 22* (spring 1988): 57-65.
- Meyer, Richard. *Outlaw representation: censorship & homosexuality in twentieth-century American art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- McClellan, Andrew. "Ideals and Mission." *The Art Museum From Boullée to Bilbao* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2008).
- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Wellesley College Center for Research for Women, 1988. https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf (Retrieved December 15, 2021).
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Mühling, Matthias, Stephanie Weber. *Senga Nengudi: Topologies*. Munich, Germany: Hirmer Publishers, 2020. Exhibition catalogue.
- Mullaly, B. *Challenging oppression and Confronting Privilege: A Critical Social Work Approach*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford Publishing, 2010.

- National Coalition Against Censorship, Art and Culture, "Censorship Timeline: A Selective Timeline of Art Censorship from 1989 to the Present", *National Coalition Against Censorship*, (2019). <https://ncac.org/resource/art-and-culture-censorship-timeline> (Retrieved December 15, 2021).
- Narayan, Uma. *Dislocating Cultures : Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Neville, H. Awad, G., Brooks, J., et. al. "Color-Blind Racial Ideology; Theory, Training, and Measurement Implications in Psychology." *American Psychologist*, Vol. 68, No. 6 (2013): 455-463.
- Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Olivares, Alexandra, & Jaclyn Piatak, Jaclyn. "Exhibiting Inclusion: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Museum Participation." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, February 17, 2021.
- Ostrower, F. *Trustees of culture : power, wealth, and status on elite arts boards*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Phillips L.T. & Lowery, B.S. "The hard-knock life? Whites Claim Hardships in Response to Racial Inequity." *Journal. Of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 61 (2015): 12-17.
- Raven, Arlene, "Feminist content in current female art," *Sister*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (Oct/Nov 1975): 10.
- Rickey, Carrie, "The Passion of Ana", *The Village Voice* (10-16 September 1980), p. 75, reproduced in Stephanie Rosenthal (ed.). *Traces: Ana Mendieta, op. cit.*, (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013): 206.
- Rosenthal, Stephanie, Adrian Heathfield, and Julia Bryan-Wilson. *Traces : Ana Mendieta*. London: Hayward Publishing, 2013.
- Schonfel, R., Westermann M., & Sweeney L. (2019). "The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: 2018 Art museum staff demographic survey." Mellon. <https://mellon.org/resources/news/articles/case-studies-museum-diversity/> (Retrieved May 16, 2020)
- Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *In the Wake: on Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Sherlock, Amy, "Senga Nengudi: White Cube, London, UK", *Frieze Editorial*, February (2015).
- Shore, L., Cleveland, J., & Sanchez, D "Inclusive Workplaces: A Review and Model." *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2018): 176-189.

- Spruth Magers “Senga Nengudi,” Spruth Magers, <https://spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/senga-nengudi-senga-nengudi-los-angeles-2/> (Retrieved November 20, 2021)
- Steinhauer, Jillian “Review: A.I.R. Gallery Catches Up on Some Unfinished Business” *New York Times*, October 24, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/22/arts/design/dialectics-of-entanglement-gallery-review.html> (Retrieved October 10, 2021).
- Tauzon, Ana. “Revisiting a Seminal Exhibition on “Third World” Feminist Art at A.I.R. Gallery” *Hyperallergic*, August 30, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/457960/revisiting-a-seminal-exhibition-on-third-world-feminist-art-at-a-i-r-gallery/> (Retrieved October 10, 2021).
- Third World Communications. *Third World Women*. San Francisco: Third World Communications, 1972.
- Tomlinson, B.R. “What Was the Third World?” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Sage Publications, (2003), 307–321.
- Viso, Olga M. *Ana Mendieta Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985*. Washington D.C.: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004.
- Ward, Stephen, “Third World Women’s Alliance.” *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 141.
- Wark, Jayne. *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006.
- Wildman, Stephanie M and Adrienne D. Davis. “Language and Silence: Making Systems of Privilege Visible.” *Santa Clara Law Review* Vol. 35 (1995): 881-1379.
- Wilson, Judith, “Ana Mendieta Plants Her Garden”, in *The Village Voice*, (13-19 August 1980), p. 71, reproduced in Stephanie Rosenthal (ed.). *Traces: Ana Mendieta, op. cit.*, (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013): 207.
- Wolfskill, Phoebe. “Caricature and the New Negro in the Work of Archibald Motley, Jr. and Palmer Hayden,” *Art Bulletin* 91, Vol. 3 (September 2009): 343-365.
- Yasar, Begum. *SENGA NENGUDI*. New York: Dominique Levy The Back Room, 2015. Exhibition catalogue.