

soot stain on the pillowcase

Michaela Bridgemohan

The Woman Unseen

“Appalachian Elegy (section 1)” - bell hooks

hear them cry
the long dead
the long gone
speak to us
from beyond the grave
guide us
that we may learn
all the ways
to hold tender this land
hard clay direct
rock upon rock
charred earth
in time
strong green growth
will rise here
trees back to life
native flowers
pushing the fragrance of hope
the promise of resurrection

There is a woman who is sensed but never seen, leaving a trace in soot stain on the pillowcase. Tears slip down strands of her hair left behind in >~~~~< (passage, wakes, tears), and their iridescence is mirrored in indigo. Michaela Bridgemohan creates a slippery sheen all across the domestic scenes of soot stain on the pillowcase which have been lived in, have been full of feeling and memory. And now we stand here, in this place, bringing our own bodies into the wake. A new pattern/rhythm/orientation is created in this indigo

water.
wake.

Like Bridgemohan, I come to this place as a mixed race person and a settler child of immigrants. I am here both by chance and by choice—choices made by me and before me. I am here, as all settlers are, because of migration. Bodies moving across, between, and in-spite of borders become attuned to new geographies. For diasporic groups these geographies create new cultural compasses. soot stain on the pillowcase lays out some of these geographies as Bridgemohan holds and cares for the tensions of Black womanhood in the breathing wake of diaspora.

In the introduction for her book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And The Cartographies Of Struggle*, Dr. Katherine McKittrick notes that despite racist efforts to ignore the rootedness of Blackness, and particularly Black femininity on the land, it is specifically “the relationship between black women and geography [that] opens up a conceptual arena through which more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined.” (McKittirck, xii) What do we imagine these new geographies to look like? What does it mean to orient ourselves towards workable humanity? To encounter the humanity of those around us and those before us is integral to this process — to see the imprints of fingers, to witness the closeness of sisters sharing a telephone, to look at worn edges, to be here, right now. These items placed and precious to the woman who has gone before, are landmarks of living. The presence of these pieces change our movement patterns, they assert a new geography which is “not conceptualized as simply subordinate, or buried, or lost, but rather are indicative of an unresolved story.” (McKittrick, xviii) Bridgemohan asserts the sacredness of this new terrain. She praises the precarity of migration. She summons the spectre of this story. In air, and light, and movement, we sense the things unseen as they root us to the past.

We are in the wake. Dr. Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, is a poetic exploration of the cross-temporal reverberations of transatlantic slavery on contemporary Black existence in the diaspora. The wake’s movement surrounds and surprises; “in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present.” (Sharpe, 9) The language of rupturing is kinetic and urgent. So too is the need for wake work, a holistic approach to addressing the intricacies of contemporary Black being and culture. As a framework and a praxis, wake work resists racist domination, and it asserts dignity in everyday life. Celebrating existence, history, and ancestors in this place is radical. Indigo sits oleaginous in duppy-catcher. Earth meets light, folktale meets family. Duppy, the Caribbean folk being, moves with and in the wake. Diaspora cannot detach the already incorporeal.

Within the domestic scenes of indigo-hued memories, Duppy lingers, their presence defying temporal boundaries. In soot stain on the pillowcase, Michaela Bridgemohan unearths geographies of family and legend—a wake where past and present converge. In these spectral echoes, indigo emerges as both a symbol of resilience and a portal to the sacred terrain where the domestic becomes a resurrected landmark. Now we stand here, in this place, reading new landscapes for the first time, hearing old voices, and feeling the breath that moves here between you and the woman unseen.

Text by Karis Dimas-Lehndorf.

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INFO

Michaela Bridgemohan
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October 13-22
 Swallowfield Farm, 7296 Telegraph Trail, Langley, BC
 fortgallery.ca

EVENTS

Opening Reception
October 13, 7pm

Artist Workshop
October 15, 2pm

Artist Talk and Tour
October 22, 2pm

All events are free and open to the public

ARTIST BIO

Michaela Bridgemohan is an interdisciplinary artist of Jamaican and Australian descent who grew up in Mohkinstsis, also known as Calgary, but now gratefully resides on Syilx territory, Kelowna, B.C. She holds an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of British Columbia—Okanagan and received her BFA in Drawing (with Distinction) from the Alberta University of the Arts in 2017. Bridgemohan’s artistic research is driven to reinscribe new notions of multiplicity and multi-dimensionality within Black identity in Canada through her paternal Caribbean heritage. She includes cultural ways of making as a legitimate form of artistic expression and creative power. Wood, Indigo and familial objects materialize these immaterial anecdotal memories—a corporeal shadow in the shape of domestic spaces, brown bodies and fertile terrain. Theoretical and contemporary writings on Caribbean-Canadian thought, Black Feminism, Hauntology, Relationality, Indigenous Knowledge and Land-based practices inform these conversations.

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WORKS LIST

1. *dream drenched pillows*. 2023. silk and Indigo dyed cotton pillowcase filled with milkweed and lavender.
2. *>~~~< (passage, wake, tears)*. 2023. artist hair, felt, cane sugar and Indigo.
3. *an opulence crypt that keeps me still*. 2023. beeswax, shells, pearls embroidered on Indigo dyed mosquito net.
4. *Through the clairvoyance of ten Hail Mary’s*. 2023. beeswax, shells, pearls embroidered on Indigo dyed mosquito net.
5. *astronomical night*. 2023. video, 95.8% waning 3 august, 2023 11:18pm, Kelowna B.C. 3-minute duration.
6. *lotion for yuh constitution*. 2023. black walnut, wenge wood, hair, raku lid and all-spice salve.
7. *duppy-catcher, b.2021-2023 (family)*. 2023. assortment of heirloom decanters and assorted glassware filled with Indigo.
8. *northern cross sisters*. 2023. mixed media.
9. *domino (1-0)*. 2022. black walnut wood.
10. *a serious message of boundaries*. 2022. Indigo dipped wooden stakes embedded with staples and Grace’s Island Soda ginger beer bottle caps.
11. *black harbinger of spring*. 2021. acrylic mirror.

Presented by:

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