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The King is Dead! Condoleezza's Coup D'etat
Installation Proposal
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CONTEXT

Though Friedan was aware of discrimination that African American women and poor working class women encountered in the work force and emotional maladjustment with their roles in the United States, her classic text, *The Feminine Mystique* is based on her own observations, analysis and supported by the survey information of her mainly white former college graduate peers who forsook their careers in favor of remaining at home to take care of their husbands and children.

The focus of her work has been critiqued as being limited and short sighted by feminist academics including bell hooks and others – their work relentlessly integrates the struggle of workers, the poor and women of color.

However, Friedan and hooks share an important perception that the fragmented self and the hunger for wholeness is/was a significant aspect of Black and white womanhood in the mid twentieth century. Friedan concentrated on the hunger, the yearning – what she labeled the “feminine mystique” of women, mainly as white domestic caretakers in their families and hooks the theory of “self recovery” to “...reunite fragments of being...” concentrates on a cultural yearning of Black women in the United States.

ARTIST STATEMENT

“Discarding the notion that the self exists in opposition to an other that must be destroyed, annihilated (for when I left the segregated world of home and moved in and among white people, and their ways of knowing, I learned this way of understanding the social construction of the self)... We learned that the self existed in relation, was dependent for its very being on the lives and experiences of everyone, the self not as signifier of one “I” but the coming together of many “I”s the self as embodying collective reality past and present, family and community. Social construction of the self in relation would mean, then, that we would know the voices that speak in and to us from the past, that we would be in touch with what Paule Marshall calls “our ancient properties” – our history... We oppose this violation, this dehumanization, when we seek self-recovery, when we work to reunite fragments of being to recover our history.” – **Talking Back, bell hooks 30-31**

The King is dead!

Originating in Europe this term signifies new leadership – the transition from one King to the next. African American women and girls in 1963 experienced dynamic transitions during this period in their identities as Blacks, women, citizens and spiritual beings.

The transition and identity confusion of being of African origin and simultaneously the oppressed citizen in a First World country that had completely shed its colonized past and now

was emerging as an exploding superpower politically; merged with an international visual media that created a cultural identity that represented the vanguard of violence, change and revolution.

However, this period created the tension to again seriously critique the role of men: white and Black as the ultimate authority on spiritual and political matters and the ultimate decision makers of what roles women should have.

The limited shifting of labor options to outside the caretaking realm into industrial spaces shifted the immediacy of white men and boy children being the primary labor concern for Black women. These options assisted Black women in escaping the sexual and overall physical violence of working in slave and antebellum households.

Finally, the development of a Black female identity that was not intricately tied to Black manhood that challenged in a visual way that African American woman could be conduits for spiritual leadership and vision. It was a period where the myths of tradition, safety and access to spirituality were radically being challenged.

This piece is about masks, loss, longing and reclamation. The journey of liberation and cultural conflict, work and community is the journey of the revelation of the self.

C'OUP D'ETAT OF THE SELF

1963 was the release of *The Feminine Mystique* and the fatal bombing of the Birmingham Church that killed four young girls, including 10 year old Denise McNair a friend of USA Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

One of dozens of church bombings that were a concentrated campaign by white supremacists to terrorize activists and Blacks in the South to no longer push for legal and social reform after a hard won school desegregation law was passed.

Dr. Rice who was just two months shy of 9 at the time cites the bombing and the murder of her friend Denise McNair as one of the things that sustains her virulence against all forms of terrorism. Home schooled by her parents Dr. Rice was trained to be “herself” and a credit to the race.

Here, Dr. Rice is portrayed in this scene flying. Flying motifs are a staple of African American spirituality representing the ability to transform environment, body and experience through the spiritual strength of the mind and heart. It also references the story of Ibo Landing where West African slaves upon descending in the South saw into the future of what their lives would be like and decided to fly back by “drowning” themselves. White is the color of spirit, ritual and spiritual transition.

It captures this moment of transition – Rice flying, wearing a Yoruba headdress representing the transition of the king being the only public representation of the space between government and

spirituality. Her unreconciled self looks back at us and her flying self symbolizing the longing of the fragmented self in our imaginations.

This daughter of what was seen to be conflicting multiple ideas, of African descent, in a first world country, privileged middle class Blacks, prey of white supremacists, deeply steeped in the spirituality of a redemptive God but deeply invested in the worldly claims and goods.

Expected to no longer be the servants of whites, but encouraged to take on what it meant to be truly feminine and woman in the United States. This is a piece of conflicts dressed in late 50's and 60's styles American dresses with the spiritual cultural regalia of West Africa reinterpreted.

Dr. Rice becomes the embodiment of the self recovered. In the midst of killing all the Kings, she re-emerges as King.