

**Toisha Tucker: It's a most peculiar sensation; or that time Virginia Woolf wore Blackface**

KODA House, Building #404B, Colonels Row, Governors Island, New York

August 19-September 24, 2023

Opening: August 19, 2023 at 1-5pm



Toisha Tucker, *Orlando*, 2015. Photograph, 12 x 12 in.

An exploration of the perception of gender identity. Using the binary constructs of gender, 'Orlando' merges the profiles of two female gendered persons, both Virginia Woolf and myself, into a third masculine appearing male gendered identity that manifests between our merged images. In relation to other works, it is meant to create questions around gender in general and specifically in respect to my work on technology/empathy about the chosen gender identities we take on in virtual spaces and how our avatars reinforce or dilute gender norms. After Virginia Woolf's novel 'Orlando', which deals with gender binaries over the course of three and a half centuries. Addendum 2023: in conversation with *untitled (It's a most peculiar sensation or that time Virginia Woolf wore Blackface)* the work feels prescient; my Black body overlaid onto Woolf's.



Toisha Tucker, *untitled (It's a most peculiar sensation; or that time Virginia Woolf wore Blackface)*, 2022. White gloves, Fenty long wear soft matte foundation #100, empty Japanese bowl hand painted in Hong Kong, Kanaka Maoli, dimensions variable.

When I was 17, I first encountered Woolf in AP English. Surprisingly, it was not *Mrs. Dalloway* that was to be our meet cute, but *To the Lighthouse*. I saw in those pages a treatment of words and text that mirrored my own skills and that I had never previously seen; that novel awakened in me a belief in my ability to become a writer and solidified a lifelong love of lighthouses. I own almost the entirety of Woolf's catalog and have a shelf dedicated to her and the knickknacks I have collected about her in my home. That shelf is essentially an altar. It was 17 years after that first encounter that I learned about the Dreadnought Hoax and for five more that I sought and did not find any indication of reparation. At the end of the Dreadnought Hoax in

	<p>which Virginia Woolf assumes a male identity and wears Blackface, the hoaxers return to their train car and their final act is to claim that as Abyssinian royalty they could not be served soup with bare hands. The entire train was held in the station and its departure delayed while a worker ran into town to procure white gloves. In the image, the gloved hands are mine, the bowl was made in Japan and hand painted in Hong Kong (former British colony) and the other hands are those of a Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian).</p>
	<p>Toisha Tucker, <i>untitled (It's a most peculiar sensation; or that time Virginia Woolf wore Blackface, 2022</i>. Video, 12 minutes 3 seconds, dimensions variable.</p> <p>In the accompanying video, I am cleansing my skin of the Fenty #100 soft matte long wear makeup intended as foundation for use by individuals with pale white skin that I have engloved my hands in. The engloving was meant as a rumination of all the bare BIPOC hands that have served countless others but proved to be an act of self-inflicted trauma-a seemingly small change that dissociated me from my corporeal body and made my hands akin to those of colonizer, oppressor, hoaxer. As a series of individual acts, these pseudo-rituals served as an offering to myself. They were acts of repair, towards what end I am still unclear of but for whom I know: an idol fallen.</p>
	<p><i>Untitled, 1998-2019</i>. Virginia Woolf books and artifacts. dimensions variable.</p> <p>Items on loan from artists.</p>



*It's a most peculiar sensation*, 2023, text on paper 5.5 x 8 in.

A series of call and response dyads using text taken directly from Woolf's 1940 talk about the Dreadnought Hoax at the Rodmell Women's institute some three decades after the event. The dyads pair her memories with my own ruminations on race, nationalism and the realities of creating the various pieces in this body of work.



Toisha Tucker, *Behind the Mask of Infinite Energy: A Play in Two Acts (Act II)*, 2021. Velvet curtain, abandoned theatre, repurposed high school, filament, poster paper, all the women in me, 40 x 60 in.

An ode to resilience and an acknowledgement of weariness. During year one of the pandemic, I was in a BIPOC zoom that was an offering as a therapeutic space and we were discussing what masks we no longer had to wear because of the world we were currently-and still-grappling with and I said, "the mask of infinite energy". I no longer had to always be on, always be present, always BE. As an artist and organizer, I want people to be able to rest; if only for a moment, this work provides the space to be seen making that pause.



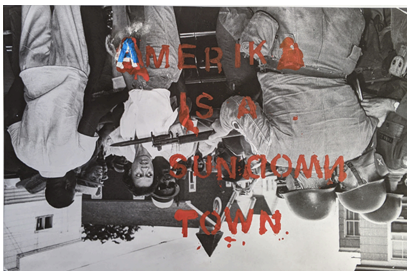
Toisha Tucker, *History 101*, 2019. 100 shredded US-centric documents, 1 coffin-length 49-star US Flag manufactured in Puerto Rico and dismantled 7/4/19, Reclaimed bulletin board from the NY Attorney General's office, 36 x 48 x 2 in.

The top layer is the remains of a 49-star coffin-length US flag manufactured in Puerto Rico dismantled on July 4th in Wisconsin. The middle layer accounts for the period of 1919-2019 ending with the NYTimes dated 9/24/19 front page section headlined by Nancy Pelosi announcing formal impeachment of the 45th President of the United States. The bottom layer is the period of 1918-768bc. The documents are promises of "Western Democracy" and "The American Dream". They were shredded to indicate that those promises were unfilled. They are encased in a reclaimed bulletin board from the NY Attorney General's office.



Toisha Tucker, *trigger warning*, 2018. White Mannequin Bust, 24K Gold Cross, MAGA hat, three blue Lowe’s paint buckets, white sheet, 66 x 14 x 30 in.

Explores the distinction between White supremacy and White nationalism, and the intrinsic, but often unacknowledged role of White women in each. From a distance, the mannequin body intentionally appears to be an adolescent male wearing a MAGA hat; a reference to the NY Times image of a jeering boy at a 2016 Election rally. Upon closer approach, the mannequin’s breasts show it to be female (per binary gender constructs), the body blemished, and a gold cross resting on its sternum. The flowing white fabric draped across the pedestal made of Lowe’s and Home Depot hardware store buckets reveals itself to be a white sheet and the viewer is confronted with the certainty that there are no White men without White women.



Toisha Tucker, *Amerika Is A Sundown Town*, 2021. Graffiti marker on upside down reproduction of Gloria Richardson, 18 x 13 in.

Sundown towns are all-white municipalities or neighborhoods in the United States that practice a form of racial segregation by excluding non-whites via some combination of discriminatory local laws, intimidation or violence. The term came from signs posted that "colored people" had to leave town by sundown.



Toisha Tucker, *The Scarlet Letter*, 2016-2020. Pieces of my soul sold to the Devil, Hobby Lobby home décor, Make America Great hats sourced from China, 24.5 x 15 in.

Process based work rooted in crafting and emotional labor. The MAGA hats are disassembled and applied to the ‘R’ to create a modern-day Scarlet Letter; something that should be displayed with shame is instead displayed in the home with pride. ‘R’ is for Racist, Republican, RedState, Righteous, Regressive, Revisionist, Repulsive.



Toisha Tucker, *alone together*, 2016. Filament, Chalk marker, Red flagging tape, Text, Mindful bodies, dimensions variable.

Immersive conceptual installation that explores our simultaneous presence and absence in a rumination on our screened lives. The viewer is confronted with the lack of face-to-face engagement involved in having our relationships continuously mediated through technologies. Each thread a placeholder for an absent body and each floating red line dually a placeholder for an absent mind and the various portable screens we privately engage with in public and social settings. Walking within the installation, the viewer's body becomes a potential weapon of destruction of the fragile bodies that aren't even present. Purposefully difficult to photograph with cell phones, there are also moments of invisibility for the naked eye – you lose the thread in the same way that we have lost the connections to people around us: even when we are sharing the same spaces we are reaching out to each other through our technologies or to other absent humans, for engagement; you no longer have to be present be present. Our digital devices are the biographers of our curated life, always with us, always documenting, but the story they are writing is one in which we are losing our capacity for solitude and our empathy for each other – without empathy we lose the last thread that separates us from machines. Relevant research material: Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together*. The phones used as templates in this iteration are the iPhone 14 pro, iPhone 13 pro and the Samsung Galaxy A13.