

California African American Museum

Enunciated Life

Opening date TBD – March 1, 2021

Enunciated Life utilizes Black spiritual beliefs as a point of departure for considering modes of surrender, taking into consideration the sounds and bodily expressions that have grown within and extend beyond Black church sites. The term “enunciated life” derives from the scholarship of Ashon Crawley, who describes the “aesthetic production of breath” in Black Pentecostalism as “black pneuma” or the creative force of a person. This black pneuma is a communal choreography of inhalation and exhalation that has the power “to enunciate life, life that is exorbitant, capacious, and fundamentally social, though it is also life that is structured through and engulfed by brutal violence.”^[1] Enunciated life, in other words, alerts us to the audaciousness of Black breath that endures in the wake of continued anti-Blackness. Black Pentecostalism and other Black spiritualities that involve possession, or “catching the Spirit,” can be viewed as an ultimate articulation of ferocity and faith—an enduring and beautiful breath that sustains in an atmosphere perpetually undermining its survival.

The contemporary artists presented here draw upon cathartic bodily expressions and visible signs of submission found in Black spirituality, such as sweating, whooping, shouting, back-bending, and chest-opening. Their works help us explore the innermost emotions that are shared through religion, making clear the less legible sensations that surround the event of incarnation, such as desire, longing, faith, and vulnerability. These artists also remind us of the dramatic architecture and specific aromas that aid in the prospect of surrender and ecstatic freedom.

Enunciated Life thinks through vulnerability and pleasure in the container of Black life and the sites of sanctuary that make it livable—as well as hopes for sanctuaries not yet actualized but deeply imagined. Rather than providing answers for how one might achieve incarnation, the exhibition defers to the unknown and encourages viewers to speculate about all the freedoms that might take place there. *Enunciated Life* specifically asks: What kinds of impulses make us more vulnerable, and therefore more open? What might be gained from this kind of exposure? How do our bodies illustrate our more complex desires for faith, possibility, and liberation?

Enunciated Life is curated by Taylor Renee Aldridge, Visual Arts Curator and Program Manager.

[1] Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 38.