

Kara Springer

Because I come from the earth's inside

December 1, 2023 through February 24, 2024

Coal

(excerpt)

Audre Lorde

I

Is the total black, being spoken

From the earth's inside.

There are many kinds of open.

How a diamond comes into a knot of flame

How a sound comes into a word, coloured

By who pays what for speaking.

...

I am black because I come from the earth's inside

Take my word for jewel in your open light.¹

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space is very pleased to present *Because I come from the earth's inside*, featuring new and recent work by artist Kara Springer, alumna of AAI's LES Studio Program.

Borrowing from Audre Lorde's poem "Coal," the exhibition's title reflects on Springer's ongoing confrontation with the precarity of systems that undergird our relationships to one another and to the land we occupy, while positing the possibility for transformation, revision, and renewal. Springer considers the parallel impact of broken systems on black and brown bodies and inhabited lands, offering sites of familial and collective memory as spaces for potential liberation. Drawing from the archival matter of her maternal lineage, Springer "...employs several layers of abstraction in the work (in addition to the chromatic inversion, the extreme magnification of the images factors here) as a means of confronting, with the materials at hand, the phenomenological dilemma of the Body that produces its Appearance, which in turn produces its Idea, which in turn produces its Name."² Using repeated images that echo throughout the gallery in series and mirrors, Springer urges sustained, if not deeper, looking at the work on view, proposing that restructuring reality is perhaps the most productive place from which to begin making meaning.

Mountains form where two continental plates collide. The plates crumple and fold until rocks are forced up to form ranges of mountains. The poet and painter Etel Adnan, whose work Springer first encountered not long before departing for a six-month residency in Switzerland last year, once said, "Mountains are transitions. They are impatient spaceships." These words stayed with Springer as she encountered the Swiss Alps and prompted her to further reflect on the mountains of Jamaica, which formed the backdrop of her mother's childhood home in Stony Hill, Kingston. In the 17th and 18th centuries, communities of escaped enslaved Africans, Jamaican Maroons, relied on their knowledge of this rugged mountainous terrain of Jamaica's interior to resist British colonial forces and successfully maintain autonomy.

¹ The American poet, essayist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde published "Coal" in her 1976 collection of the same name.

² Ana Tuazon, Essay for Kara Springer's exhibition *I / must be given words*, Patel Brown, 2022.

<https://www.patelbrown.com/kara-springer-i-must-be-given-words>

Situated between photography, sculpture, and installation, Springer's series *The shape of mountains* is born of the artist's current research, reflecting on mountains as sites of refuge and representations of futurity, their connectedness to pyramids and spaceships, and the otherworldliness of their harshly beautiful terrain. The exhibition includes two works within this series of structural installations, featuring double-sided photographic prints on Japanese rice paper depicting high-resolution scans of repeatedly fired clay suspended from simple poplar wood support structures.

Judith Mae, part one and *part two* are part of the artist's current exploration using archival photographs from her maternal line, obscuring the women they feature with cutouts of repeatedly fired clay scanned at high resolution. The luminosity of the light boxes is synchronized in real-time to a sensor worn by the artist monitoring her breathing pattern. Each box brightens with every inhalation and dims upon exhalation. In this way, the installation becomes a system unto itself whose infrastructure relies on the artist continuing to breathe. In the backroom of the gallery, seven lightboxes feature the repeated image of the artist's mother at 7 years old, close in age to Springer's daughter now. In the adjacent space of the larger gallery, two double-sided light boxes feature the artist's mother at age 17 in Jamaica, just before beginning her studies at the University of the West Indies.

Finally, the photo-based work *Death Defying Acts and Everyday Abstractions* considers Springer's own maternal role, chronicling the artist's experience of pregnancy and childbirth amid reports of high maternal mortality rates experienced by Black women in the United States. Through portraiture, repetition, and sparse yet succinct text, Springer draws attention to the ways in which racialized bodies, particularly those of Black people, are frequently met with disregard and inattention within institutional settings such as healthcare systems, subtly positing that care can serve as an antidote to this predilection.

The seven text panels within the work detail the mounting indifference and anxiety that Springer experienced while pregnant, which were mitigated by the attentiveness of women of color. Each text is paired with a repeated photographic image of the artist and her daughter, exploring the artist's experience of giving birth in a moment where black maternal mortality rates soared. The physically small photograph, taken by the artist's mother shortly after the pair returned home following her birth, underscores Springer's experience with her own bodily fragility and its broken relationship to multiple systems of power, support, and care.

The exhibition is accompanied by an essay written by Muriel Kahwagi, available at artistsallianceinc.org

Kara Springer is an artist based between New York and Toronto. She is particularly concerned with armature—the underlying structure that holds the flesh of a body in place. She works with photography, sculpture, and site-specific interventions to explore systems of care and structural support through engagement with architecture, urban infrastructure, and systems of institutional and political power. Springer holds degrees from the University of Toronto, ENSCI les Ateliers in Paris, and the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. Her work has been exhibited at the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, the National Gallery of the Bahamas, the National Gallery of Jamaica, and the Frankfurt Museum of Applied Arts. She is an alum of the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Core fellowship at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. karaspringer.ca

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