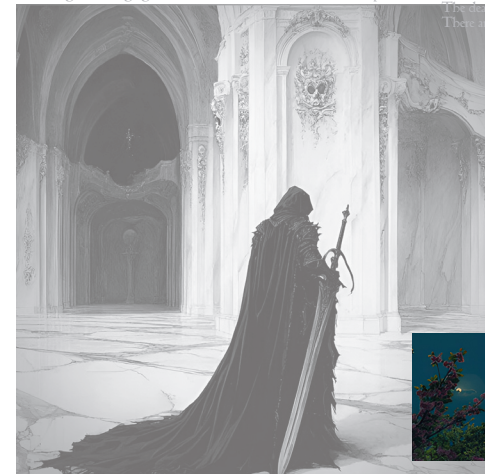


Thousands of miles from the shore as the wind blew up her skirt behind her and the deep light of the sun warming her cheeks she could smell salt. She could feel the hairs of her legs dancing.
 Who knows if the breach is something that ever seals and fades/
 In seeking to lose this body I seek the end of the world a blackness that crashes in to open another breach.



What comes out of the glimmer? Out of the shine on the water?
 A layering of shifting light that blinds to what lies behind the ships and history hidden in the shine.
 I'm lost in the shimmer beneath the sheen.
 There the dead beneath my skin.



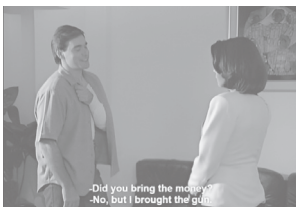
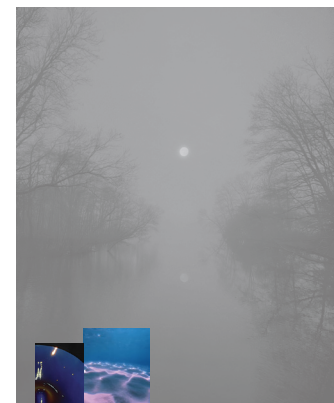
We have always reached for the shimmer
 this desire has been passed down.
 A longing for life.
 The glimmer promises life.



My body is formed in the water I was birthed in the water.
 I was born in the crossing in the world raised from the oceans that followed the ships onto the shore



In seeking to lose this body I seek the end of the world a blackness that crashes in to open another breach.
 I am condensate as material as the air beside me.
 I am sheen on your skin.
 I roll down your throat soothing the bite and the burn
 soothing the ache and the need.
 I am multiple catching light in my thousands on my
 thousand forms on my thousand surfaces.
 I am shifting light a bright flash so quick it was not
 registered a shine only present in the shine that follows
 in the movement of my thousands.



WET MEMORIES Ebum Sodipo

Curated by Alexis de Bonis & Elisa Leila Durand May 15 – June 22, 2025 Shmorréaz, Paris



Your body recalls the taste of the image its need for the image. The body's thirst is overwhelming.

LIST OF WORKS

What do you want here,
Mylar, digital prints, resin, 41 x 42 x 1 cm, 2025
You are multiple,
Mylar, digital prints, resin, 30 x 30 x 1 cm, 2025
Before we were contacted,
Mylar, digital prints, resin, 50 x 50 x 1 cm, 2025
Everyone you're looking at,
Mylar, digital prints, resin, 50 x 50 x 1 cm, 2025
Fannie Lou Hamer,
Mylar, digital prints, resin, 50 x 50 x 1 cm, 2025
The feel of the experience,
Mylar, digital prints, resin, 50 x 50 x 1 cm, 2025
Untitled,
Print on sticker, 59 x 59 cm, 2025



'One confronts and accepts dispersal, fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting.'⁴⁸ bell books

Wet Memories exhibition by Eburn Sodipo, marks her first solo show in France. Her multifaceted approach — encompassing assemblage, collage, sculpture, archiving, and poetry — draws on ancestral knowledge and visual culture to illuminate the Black trans feminine experience. Sodipo creates new languages centered on the body and its memory. In departing from the linear Western point of view and resisting the limits of the archive — marked by absence, silence, and violence — she navigates these gaps through fiction and reenactment, employing anachronistic iconography. Sourcing from the internet, social media, her personal archive, art history, and colonial records, this image-based *fabulation* opens new path/way for storytelling and constructs counter/narratives that challenge dominant historiographies.⁴⁹

Hosted in a former shoe store, Wet Memories presents seven site-specific works that engage with Shmouéwz's distinctive architecture, crafting a muse en abyme through the use of mirrors, shelves, alcoves, and evocative staging — echoing fragmentation, self-reflection, and the spatial memory of the site. In this new body of work, Sodipo resists the historical imperative of transparency forced upon colonized and queer bodies. Instead, she engages with its absences — recovering obscured figures while carving out space for prophetic imaginings. One work brings together activist Fannie Lou Hamer—a key figure in the U.S. civil rights movement—and R&B icon Mary J. Blige, conjuring their presence between speech and song, where political resistance meets cultural survival. The uniqueness of her collages lies in their translucency: layers of imagery do not obscure one another but instead reveal the complexity of their interrelations, evoking a cyclical and unfolding sense of time.

Her collages resist the diminishing discourses of identity assignment: *You are not one, You are multiple, You are yourself* (2025) and *Everyone you're looking at is also you* (2025) challenge the notion of a singular self. The possibility of self/construction is found in the diffraction of being—and perhaps, paradoxically, in disidentification and the relinquishment of any fixed, standardized identity. In this autofictional space, sensory perceptions become plural, and bodily possibilities multiply. These exchanges and borrowings of experiences resist naming and stand as evidence of the inconstancy of the living.

Wet Memories reflects on colonial histories, queer and trans memory, and embodied politics in the French context. It responds to ongoing social shifts and hopes to offer a space where silenced histories can be felt and reimaged.

Alexis de Bonis & Elisa Leila Durand

ELISA LEILA DURAND

Trained in Art History and Political Studies at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) and the Beaux-Arts de Paris (ENSBA), Elisa Leila Durand (she/they) is a researcher and independent curator specializing in cultural, social, and political histories through an intersectional lens. They have worked as a curator, mediator, and archivist with institutions such as the Palais de Tokyo, the Centre Pompidou, the Kandinsky Library, and AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions. In 2024, they curated Crossing Waters: Ripples of Tomorrow by Jeannette Ehlers at Le Bicolore / Maison du Danemark (FR) and the Randers Kunstmuseum (DK). They are currently a finalist for the 2025 Prix Dauphine pour l'Art contemporain, alongside artist Lê Hoàng Nguyễn. Their research focuses on queer and postcolonial memory, and the challenges of political subjectivation in contemporary art.

ALEXIS DE BONIS

Alexis de Bonis (he/him) began his academic journey studying medicine at Paris Cité University before shifting his focus on the humanities. He holds degrees in Italian literature and philosophy, and his interdisciplinary approach integrates theoretical reflection with sensory exploration. Alexis de Bonis examines the dynamics of power at the intersection of the intimate and the political. His current research projects focus on the personal diary in its various forms, investigating the creation of memory that is both individual and collective.

EBUN SODIPO

Eburn Sodipo's (b. 1993, London, UK) work has recently been included in exhibitions held at g39, Cardiff; Southwark Park Galleries, London; Site Gallery, Sheffield and Collective, Edinburgh as part of Jerwood Survey III (2024); Soft Opening at Paul Soto, Los Angeles; (2024, solo); CCA Derry~Londonderry: The Centre for Contemporary Art, Derry (2024); Inter.pble, Copenhagen (2024, solo); Phillida Reid, London (2024); Hannah Barry Gallery, London (2024); Hauser & Wirth, Somerset (2024); Neven, London (2024); VITRINE, Basel (2023, solo); VO Curations, London (2023, solo); Goldsmiths CCA, London (2022, solo); VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art, Carlow (2022); FACT, Liverpool (2022) and The Block Museum of Art, Evanston (2021) among others. The artist has performed at venues including the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2025); Performance Art Museum, Los Angeles (2024); Edinburgh Arts Festival, Edinburgh (2024); Le Guess Who Festival, The Netherlands (2023); Low Collision International Festival at Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2023); Juf, Madrid (2023); Bergen Kunsthall, Norway (2022); Turner Contemporary, Margate (2022); Camden Arts Centre, London (2021); Frieze Art Fair, London (2021); South London Gallery, London (2020) and Auto Italia, London (2019).

⁴⁸ books bell, "Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness", in Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, Wayne State University Press, no.36, 1989, p.19.



⁴⁹ Critical fabulation is a methodological practice coined by Saidiya Hartman in Venus in Two Acts (2008). It merges archival research with speculative narrative to address the silences, omissions, and violences embedded in the historical record of slavery. Hartman employs critical fabulation to reimagine the lives of the enslaved — particularly Black women — whose experiences are often irretrievable or distorted within the archive, refusing both its authority and its erasures. Saidiya Hartman, Venus in Two Acts, in: Small Axe 12, no.2, June 2008, p.174.



Wet Memories is supported by Fluxus Art Projects — a programme initiated by the British Council and the Institut français — and by The Jenni Grain Foundation — an initiative dedicated to preserving the legacy of the esteemed artist and curator.



Acknowledgements
Salomé Burstein, Mathilde Cassan, Léa Debusschère, Mila Landreau, Dabla Li, Antonia Marsh, Faustine Pallez-Beauchamp, Soft Opening, Sabrina Tamar, Salomé Veilleux

E.S. A lot of the time, it's a matter of forgetting and ignoring. I've been thinking about poetics, about being seen, and who gets to see you. I guess I've been thinking a lot about obscuring things, and I feel like poetry is one of the ways I move through that.

I make use of poetry's resistance to fixed meaning so I can do what I need to do, or perform what I need to do, but in a way that feels like a compromise I can live with where I'm not giving everything, but I'm giving enough. Or at least it feels like enough. At the same time, it means I've had to trust the quick decisions I do make. Coming back to what I was saying earlier: I've had to put some distance between the things that originally grounded my work, because I needed to survive. I needed to make money. And I feel like only certain spaces can really hold and appreciate the kind of work I want to make, and the way I want to think through it. Also, constantly working has meant I haven't had time to sit with certain contradictions, especially the ones that come from trying to think about transness in a spiritual way, or using the body as an archive. I haven't had time to stay with those thoughts, to feel them fully. I've just had to keep going, and do the thing.

The collages that I make grab people's attention. The work I'm making right now involves developing this whole series of archaeological objects. And to do that, I really have to sit with and imagine the kinds of scenarios that could have brought them into being—what kinds of bodily desires, what kinds of lived experiences, might have produced these particular objects. That process requires me to sit with myself, which is incredibly hard. Because doing that means thinking about the world, about history, about myself in relation to the past. And honestly, there's a part of me that resists that. There are so many things keeping me from doing the work of what trans history actually is and from asking what kinds of stories I want to tell from the past, specifically.

It's become so easy to speak in a modern visual language. I've always liked the idea of paying attention to the body as a way to delve into the past. But it's hard to do that when there's so much happening around me all the time.

D.L. There's so many interesting things you said that I want to hear about because I think a lot of this is what I'm trying to figure out how to do. I started off my artistic career as a poet, but then at some point I realized that many of the poems I wrote were about the body.

This was my second-to-last year of University and I was also working on this exhibition ca/

talog about "New Jersey as Non Site" that dealt with avant-garde US visual and performance art around the Fluxus group. Part of my job was to write didactics and entries to describe the movement and the dance for a visual arts museum. I remember wondering, how do I even write about this? I've never done this before. Let's see what art historians have written. I figured out that they didn't really write anything that good about the movement. When I tried to write a little bit more poetically, my boss Kelly Baum, who was great, told me that sometimes we have to sacrifice poetry for clarity, because these are didactics. I was like: *oh, you're totally right*. But this also alerts me to something about the presentational format of the museum. When performances get situated alongside the visual arts an art historical tradition tied to the visual overtakes the kind of projects that the performing body wants to surface. So I wanted to figure out how to write through this impasse.

My solution was to start taking dance classes. Up until that point, I'd had no formal dance training. My dance was dancing in the club and doing Zumba classes with a militant Italian American Jersey Zumba instructor named Giancarla, who just screamed at us. So in some ways, I kind of did get the normative dance training, because that's what many ballet teachers do with children. Anyway, I started by going into these advanced Cunningham classes I had absolutely no business being in. But it was actually so necessary to be in that space, where I just really wanted to know, and to be able to feel and do something, even though I felt like I had so few tools to do it. Since I was at Princeton for undergrad and had come from suburban Salt Lake City as a young queer person, I had spent so much of my life up until then doing the model minority overworking bit just to survive and escape bad situation. I felt like everything that I ever got in life I could only get if I worked my ass off at it and figured out what the codes were. But with dance there was this thing that I ardently wanted to understand and do and couldn't. I just didn't have the training for it and I wasn't at all successful or even "good" in the classes but I kept going back. I had to give myself the permission to fail and this was exactly what I needed to start actually connecting with my body and my desires. Because literally, nobody was telling me to become a dancer at 21 or 22 with no dance training.

I'm unwinding this story to model or name trans methodology for being able to articulate how it is that we find the internal resources to be able to become trans people when we didn't have any positive representation for trans women. Often times nobody or very few people, especially now, is telling anyone to be trans (and if they are—be somewhat wary!). I'm assuming you have a similar media history as I did growing up. In the 90s environment I grew up



in, a trans woman is either hiding it or she's going to end up dead in a dumpster. These were and are such fucked up representations because they actually tell us very little about trans women's reality. Those kinds of forced hiding and explicit violence are symptoms of other people's inability to hold reality. The reality of there being many ways of embodying gender or living life and, with the sexual violence against trans women, the reality that many people actually desire trans women. This the script I was given, but as a dancer that can't be the score that my body is dancing into. Becoming a dancer that late in life gave me a certain roadmap to understand how to become an embodied trans woman. Dance created an opening for my body. Like dance, transitioning was this thing that nobody was telling me to do and very few people were supporting, celebrating, or even seeing me through the process. It's so strange to talk about. I'm not sure that people saw me in my early 20's, when I started dancing, or my late 20's, when I started transitioning, and could tell by looking that I had desires to dance or transition. So nobody was showing me how. To be honest, I was actively being discouraged from doing both externally and internally (I was just not good at it at first!).

I think this reality is so hidden when people look at me and many other trans women now. Once you get to the point of being able to be perceived by other people as a trans woman, all your labor and difficulty in getting there and maintaining it just dissolves. This is true for all women, I think, but particularly true for trans women. As a trans woman there's this visual assumption that we're always glamorous. We have to be available as an icon to other people. That iconicity is ravenous and can really snuff out the space to entertain what the trans woman wants. Some of glamour is something you want. But then another part of it is simply the social tax required to be a woman.

I bring all that up to say that I think part of the work of trans femme theory and trans femme of color theory is saying how impossible it is to show up. And then also naming the histories that bring us into the scene of possibility that allows us to still show up. There's so much talk right now about women and especially trans women as the future. Trans women are figuring the future, and everyone's so excited to witness that. But looping back to what I said earlier, I'm just like: *okay, but who's backstage helping me make this happen?* And also if I know that I can't identify who's helping me do that, then at least *what are the artistic practices or the experiences that help me make impossibility more probable?* If you're really deep inside of a creative practice, you're always dealing with impossibility. You don't have enough time to work. You don't know exactly what you want to do, what you want to happen is something you haven't

seen in the world yet. I don't know if it's that being trans helps me be an artist or being an artist helps me be trans. There are variations of a similar kind of very difficult practice of knowing. There's something I need in the world to continue existing. It's not something that existed in the past or exists in the future. How do I work with this impossibility? And how do I work with this without already foreclosing it as impossible so that it's not totally science fiction or fantasy? The fiction and imagination part, or even speculation which everyone seems to be working with now, is almost too easy and cheap because at this point, we're all trying to escape reality in our own ways. It's that science part, where science is a rigorous testing of reality done in conversation with others, that feels so much harder. And I think I'm trying to bring that word/science/into the conversation, because it ties so much into Sylvia Wynter's thinking, into her relationship with method. What does it mean to approach this all as a science of being human?

E.S. That idea of science carries a certain discomfort for me: the sense that answers are being sought on a plane where they'll never actually exist. So often, that search overlooks the practical, lived realities of being human. Not everything is genetic, not everything is measurable, and certainly not everything is replicable.

When I was in the early stages of my transition, I was thinking a lot about the place I was in, and how that related to my transness. I kept wondering: *would I have realized this if I were still in Nigeria? Would I have taken this path? If there was a different world, would I always be this?* Sometimes I feel like I have to write the story as if yes, I would've always become this. But other times, it really feels like it depends on so many things, on the specific conditions around me. And I'm always a bit wary of that, because I think part of what it means to push against normative structures is to live in contingency. It's kind of accidental, and yet you were also always meant to be here. Maybe. Maybe not. And it's always a really interesting interplay of the two things.

To respond to that idea of like trans women are the future or that we are supposed to be the end goal, I know I've had people be: *oh, you know, trans women are going to change the world and blah, blah, blah.* In a way, I think that truly taking trans women seriously, especially when it comes to understanding the past, requires unraveling the ways we think about things in the present. If people are genuinely committed to caring for trans people, or even just accepting our existence, then it demands a deep rethinking of how we understand bodies, gender, and identity. It's also what it means to care deeply about other people and to recognize the humanity of every single person: to unravel

things and to end the world that we have. And maybe in that way, we *are* doing something but at the same time, it can also become a way of deflecting responsibility for actual change.

D.L I have some really deep suspicions of science. Especially the way science is approached in the current moment, like it's synonymous with fact. But if you're actually around scientists, that's not what they're doing. Science isn't about facts: it's about propositions, hypotheses. Every thing is a hypothesis until it's proven otherwise.

In fact, science is maybe the least factitious even though it's held up with this kind of forensic faith, as if it has an answer or even *the* answer. Scientists have to learn techniques in order to develop new hypotheses or to test the reality that's been proposed. You need a really high level of rigor and technique and technology to be able to do that. Which is maybe also how I understand an aspect of artistic practice beyond just the desire for something. If that desire is there, then what's the process of acquiring technicity? Of acquiring history? Of finding or building a community of peers who are also checking the validity of what you're proposing, who are offering feedback, who you're working with collaboratively and collectively? And the other place my mind goes when I think about technology is yeah, there's the site of technology that's all about hardware fetishism: the new watch, the new iPad, the highest definition of image production. And sure, all of that can be really interesting and even great. But it leans more toward spectacle. Technology isn't just hardware, it's also a series of softwares. Not just code, but systems and practices that need to be circulated and kept moving whether that's in an externalized object or even internally. That's how I understand dance technique and choreography. My body is trained to have a certain series of hardware functionalities, but I also need to constantly assess what is the software? What is its context of performative enunciation?

One place that I've been going a lot is the feminist theorist who was actually one of the first people to declare the academic discipline of queer theory: Teresa de Lauretis. I forget if it's an essay or if it's just a phrase she uses, but she talks about the technologies of the self and she approaches art forms and genres as technologies of the self. One of my mentor at Swarthmore College where I work now, is a feminist theorist Patricia White, whose first book *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*, makes a distinction between representability and representation. A demand for lesbian representation assumes there is an authentic, true, maybe even scientific lesbian out there in the world that the cinema should accurately represent. But she's looking at classical Hollywood in the 1930s where there are kinds of moral and legal codes that bar one from

depicting a lesbian. But you can nonetheless depict certain lesbian/esque feeling things that now, through what she calls "retrospecta/torship," we can and do use to identify a lesbian. Her distinction is that representation assumes that somewhere out there in the world, there is already a concrete, true lesbian that the camera just has to discover. But representability is something else entirely; it's a conjuncture of what are the actual technologies that are available, where technology is a combination of industry hardwares and formats that merge what people feel, what kinds of literacies and fantasies they have, and what kinds of performative modes are accessible in any given moment of politics and culture. The representability of a lesbian or the representability of a trans woman is actually always contingent on a number of factors. But we're so focused, I think now, on representation and the assumption that representation will save us, that representation are approached with the hermeneutics of science or faith. There is a desire for representation to find and give us a readymade version of the world, a perfect world that we should be striving for, when that's not the situation at all. This is what another mentor of mine, Kaja Silverman, drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis would critique as the future anterior: "In the future I will be perfect!". But this doesn't work for us amidst all the kinds of new and ongoing catastrophes. As artists and practitioners of the aesthetic, we're dealing with forms of contingency and representability, given what frankly is just a lot of material decline in the world. We're also, nonetheless, trying to keep alive really strong political and psychic desires to be in a lot of varying queer ways.

E.S I want to read that writing and I really love the idea of representability and representation. It strikes me deeply, because I often think about the names we take on, where they come from, and the histories they carry. Even in working with this woman, Victoria—for all intents and purposes, in modern parlance, we'd refer to her as a trans woman. So I'm constantly negotiating how and why I'm using that term. As you said, it's almost like a series of gestures—something that becomes recognizable without being fixed or anchored in time. And I guess that always leaves me reflecting... maybe with a hint of bitterness, too. But if we're always shifting, never quite real, and not consistently present across time—I'll come back to that—but I like to think of desire as the connective tissue, something more concrete and constant than a container. But where does that leave cisgender people—have they always been constant? Obviously, the notion of what it means to be a man or a woman has changed. But I keep thinking about those forms of identity, how the self is recognized. How do I also think of them as not being constant? As always shifting, never fully recognizable, but in some ways still are.

I wanted to return to what I said about desire—as the thing that lets me trace things. It's also why I keep coming back to this idea of being in the body, listening to the body. And I really love this notion of software that you brought in. When you spoke about it, I started thinking of it as a series of ideas, concepts, and shifts—both in the body and the mind—that shape how we engage with different technologies, different kinds of hardware in the world in a really different way. And it has to shift, sometimes. The software—that's the internal part of the technology. And I think that ties back to desire: it's through desire that I trace connections, that I link myself to others. So when I think about representability, especially in naming ourselves as trans women, I wonder—what exactly are we naming? It feels like we're gathering a bunch of desires under this moniker. We make do within this shared space, this umbrella. There's the desire for another form, the desire to perform certain kinds of labor, a desire to lose particular forms, or to be in connection with other people. There's the desire to be seen differently, even if you don't want to change your body, but you want to be seen as something else, you want to move alongside with other people.

And then maybe you've always wanted to change your body, but there was never really a way to articulate that. Or maybe you've gone through a whole series of technological interventions—not necessarily medical ones, not all at once—but each one shaped by a different kind of desire. And yet, as trans women now, we tend to see all of that as the same thing. I feel really connected to that lineage, but I often find myself asking: who exactly am I connected to? And how? Would they have even seen themselves as trans women? Am I part of their genealogy—or have I named something that didn't exist in their time, in their terms? I worry sometimes—am I undermining the womanhood of trans women by making it feel so contingent? Maybe it's because I haven't yet found a way to think of cis womanhood as just as contingent—as constructed, as situated—as 'arch womanhood.' Or maybe I've just been trained not to see it that way.

D.L. Yeah, that's the perennial tension—the feminist conundrum. I want to speak from my own experience, to say it loudly and clearly, in case it resonates with someone else. But at the same time, I know I can't represent all women, either in the now or in the past or the future. And I think that's part of what a feminist ethics asks of us. It's a method, too. Beyond all the ways people demand that I 'be' a woman, how do I *know myself to be a woman*? How do I affirm the validity of having always been a woman to some degree, even if that wasn't known to others at the time? And where I keep landing, in conversation with the legions of women in my life—cis and trans—is this: *it's the labor*.

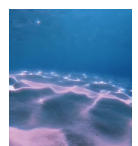
I've always been doing a certain kind of labor that men don't do. And that's one of the ways I know—I've always been feminized, even when I was young. When I came out as queer to my mom, there was this kind of freak out resistance. And I'm actually sympathetic with it now, because I understand it to be less about 'we don't want you to be you,' and more about being scared that if you do this, certain things will happen to you. But then, when I came out as trans, it was a non-issue. It was almost like, 'Oh, this actually makes sense.' I always sort of knew this, but I couldn't see how this was a viable reality. So there's that question of: how do you know yourself to be a woman when other people don't give you that name? And also, if other people are naming you that, and you want to resist the demand—does that mean you can't be a woman anymore? Yeah, maybe you don't want to be a woman. Maybe you're a trans man, or you're non-binary. But you still have a kind of intimate relationship with the experience of womanhood—in the way men have mistreated you.

On the one hand, 'woman' is something that can be perceived. And then there's also 'woman'—in the psychoanalytic and feminist Marxist sense—as a symptom of patriarchy. All of that is absolutely on the table, along with the forms of womanhood I don't even know about because I've never experienced them—forms shaped by different histories, different parts of the world. One of the ways I try to synthesize and learn from these different experiences is understanding that being a woman—or maybe even just realizing one has gender in general—is, to borrow a crude analogy from today's technological world, is about trying to recode the hardware of our corporeality by using different forms of software. The question becomes: *Who are you recoding reality with? Who's your team?* This brings in the punk, trans, backing discourse: are you hacking the human, to draw on the language used by Denise Ferreira da Silva?⁰¹ Who else is in the vestibule or anteriority of being human with you? ⁰² Who are the people who taught you how to recode? And then there's the ethical conundrum: when you look back at the past and think, *maybe I'd see this person today as possibly being trans*—what if they wouldn't call themselves that? That's where a feminist ethic comes into play. It's the idea that: *I can invite you to the dinner table, but you don't have to accept the invitation. You're free to decline.* There has to be space for dissent within the project of feminism. For example, I think JK Rowling is absurd. But I'm not going to say she's any less of a woman. She's a particular type of woman—a type I find ridiculous. She's recycling the most tired and harmful rhetoric. It's classic pick-me behavior. The analogy I think of—at least in a U.S. context—is this: what's the most effective way to prove you're a "real" American if you're not white? It's to perform anti-

⁰¹ <https://www.e/flux.com/journal/123/436929/black/feminist/tools/critique/and/techno-poethics/>



⁰² <https://www.sup.org/books/art/and/visual/culture/antaeasthetics>



Blackness. In much the same way, what's the best way to convince a misogynistic man that you're on his side? What's the best way to try to, as a working-class single mother (if we are to believe the story of how she wrote Harry Potter on napkins), prove one's belonging to a conservative upper crust that bows to the rules of men? It's to perform TERFism.

E.S. Yeah, I think I want to respond to that. When you were speaking, I kept thinking about what it means to be adjacent to one another—and how we find different ways of existing. I really resonated with what you said about labor, but also about these other forms of being: being a woman, being woman/like, being perceived as a woman but not *quite* a woman, or maybe being a woman *and more*, or *not yet* a woman. There are all these ways of being that move in the same orbit. And for me, that's where it becomes meaningful: you might not want the name, you might not identify with it—but still, there's a relationship between us because we have similar desires. Because we encounter it in the same way. And that's the kind of relationship I want to preserve. It also shapes how I think about the past. Part of the reason I qualify naming someone as a trans woman is because it makes things more consumable and understandable. It avoids the whole rigmarole of having to explain what it *means* to be—of having to justify or unpack identity from scratch every time. But at the same time, I feel like something gets undermined when we allow for a third gender as a kind of catch-all. And maybe that's me kind of ceding, conceding a defeat in that way. But I guess I don't have the time, or maybe it's not my task right now, to fully engage in the work of recovery. Especially not when it comes to people who are alive right now, who are thinking and relating to each other in very specific ways. At the same time, there are moments when I think—okay, maybe this person didn't envision themselves *this* way, but now, the ways of being feel more constrained. Even though we *appear* to have more freedom to name ourselves differently, there are still limits. In the West, you're still funneled through the binary. You're still being read through it, passed through it. Before, in different contexts or times, there were so many ways of understanding the body, of recognizing and relating to people beyond just “man” or “woman.” There was “woman,” “almost woman,” “not quite woman,” “more than woman,” “spirit woman,” or something else entirely. All these other possibilities. And so, when I choose to use certain terms now—when I try to make someone legible within today's frameworks—I do feel like I'm conceding something.

But also, I keep coming back to this idea of: *who are you rewriting the script with?* Who are you breaking the code with? And to what end? Where is all of this taking us? What is our

version of womanhood *in service of?* That's something I think about a lot. For me, one of the moments where things really clicked was realizing—okay, I'm being femme, I'm doing this, I'm doing that—but also, what's the point if it isn't in service of making my own life better? And so that also means dealing with misogyny. It's not that I *wanted* to confront misogyny, but I realized that, whatever kind of person I become, I have to bring this into my being. So, part of my womanhood is also an anti-patriarchal gesture. That's part of why I feel called to this. That's part of why I'm here, in the way that I am. But yeah, there has to be—and I chose this journey. So it's not a benign kind of place. My womanhood isn't just to be there and to exist. It's not passive. This decision is also *doing* something in the world, intentionally. And not in that generic way—like, “trans identity is always political” or “all identities are political.” Sure, yes, but it's more than that. There's something I have to *do* with this being, this format that I take, this path I want to follow.

D.L. You're making me thinking of so many more things. Firstly, something that scholars Jules Gill-Peterson and C. Riley Snorton talks about is that when doing trans history, one has to be able to sit with irrational animisms that maybe don't seem to make sense at first. One thing I'm hearing in what you're saying is: how do you *be* with other people when you intentionally decide to be trans? That decision brings with it a whole series of ethical, philosophical, moral, and aesthetic questions. Because what you're also saying is: *who is your beauty for?* One thing I absolutely hate being called is a *doll*. I know for some trans women, it's like—“it's for the dolls,” or “the gays and the dolls.” And I get it. I use doll discourse too. Because, you know who calls me a doll? Gay men—some of whom I love, but the doll discourse feels like what I am called when my femininity is circulated as a token (yes also as appreciation too) between men. There's a real history of gay men cashing in on high femme aesthetics but then being physically absent when the production line of femininity is imperiled, or enjoying the production line's products without any real care for the workers. My resentment around this history sometimes comes to me I wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and think *my hair, my skin—they look so good*. I then usually immediately think: *this is wasted on men*. So I get the doll discourse—and I also hate it. Because every time I find myself beautiful, it's usually because I'm reminded of another woman I've seen. Or when I dress up, I really do try to abide by the idea that I'm not dressing up for men. I'm dressing up for a little girl, or for *your child* who might see me and think, *wow, that's so beautiful*, and want to be that, or just be in the same world. Men sometimes get to be around to witness that. I hold these scenes of pedagogy and performance because that's also

how I learned how to be a woman. It was sitting with my mom while she put on her makeup—but also while she was laboring in the kitchen, and there's something so beautiful about this. I was in her world. And I remember wondering: what do I need to do to stay in this world? And later: what can I do to help her have more space in it? To demonstrate better ways of being in that world—for both of us?

E.S. I've always thought of it this way, though I don't even know if it's *the right way*—my mom had what I'd call an *easy femininity*. She didn't really do much. For most of my life, she had really short hair. She was just very casual. And that's kind of what I tried to replicate because for me, that was the model. She made it possible for me to realize that I didn't *have* to be glamorous. I didn't have to perform that expectation—not just the one about the male gaze, but also the pressure to be hyper feminine. Which is totally fine. But I feel like I was presented with a different kind of example.

And I really appreciate what you said about dressing up for the little queer kids—for the kids who are growing up and are going to see you. I think about that too. I think about one of the first times I saw a non-binary person, a transfeminine person, and I just thought, *oh—that's possible*. And *that's* something I could do. That moment has never left me. I remember exactly what they were wearing—this outfit with a West African print, blue and green and yellow, I think, and a little headscarf. I saw them across from me on the bus. And funny enough, I know that person now. But I don't think they know that they were my little “*oh*” moment. My moment of realization. And I think about that a lot and I want to be that for someone else.

And I've been called a doll but I don't really mind it. Because for me, I'm not particularly invested in heavy feminine aesthetics. But I still feel like there's a sense of sisterhood in the word *doll* that I'm trying to lean into. And even as I say that, I'm also thinking about my mom again. She presented one image of femininity—but at the same time, there's this very specific *middleclass* femininity in the art world, where women don't wear makeup. So there's a classed dimension to all of this too. I often find myself reacting—like, rejecting that art world standard by saying no, I *do* want to wear makeup, and yes, sometimes dressing up makes me feel good. But I'm also aware that I'm communicating something—about feminism, about femininity, about womanhood. There's a kind of refusal embedded in not performing sometimes too, like, when I'm not wearing makeup. So it's never just *oh, this is just me*, it's also a statement of a particular kind of class aspiration and position for both of those things as well.

As a Black trans woman, I think about the different ways we've been represented on screen. All these kinds of images tend to be incredibly hyper-femme. And I think it's really only with *Pose* that you start to see a shift. Or maybe not even *Pose* exactly—I'm sure there were other things that existed just a few years before. Do you know Liniker, in Brazil? She's a trans woman and was in the show *September Mornings*. I'm trying to remember if that came out before or after *Pose*. But I'm sure there's also another kind of woman—someone who's very everyday femme, who doesn't wear much makeup. Of course, what's considered “minimal” makeup on screen is still quite a lot—but the dominant image of the Black trans woman tends to be heavily made up, heavily femme. And that comes from many different places—some of them good, some gentle and affirming, and others shaped by pressure and expectation. Those images were also so/ something I found myself trying to push against.

You know, when we talk about these aesthetic strategies we use to develop ourselves, those are the kinds of things that come to mind for me. It's almost like that *two paths* meme—you know, the one where there's a kid standing at a crossroads, trying to choose between two options. That's how these images appear in my mind. I think of them as images of transphobia—these trans/and/such visuals that just flash into my mind. And it's like: *I never want to be this. I never want to be that*. So those are the kinds of things I'm also responding to. And I think also, being an African trans woman—as in, I lived in Nigeria for 11 years—I grew up with a specific conception of Blackness, of love, and of the practice of African femininity. Though those practices have been, and I think increasingly are, inflected by Western conceptions of femininity. I also grew up in a place where I saw a lot of people with afros, a lot of natural hair, and also a lot of people who relaxed their hair. So I got to witness a wide range of expressions. I also started to transition in my mid-20s, which I think gave me a certain measure of safety—to navigate the world without needing to present in very particular ways or do specific things.

D.L. And this is the other thing—as much as I'm doing womanhood for little girls, I'm also totally doing womanhood for aunts. One of my social practices is throwing parties—hosting gatherings. I'm going to set the table, and I want to see who shows up. Another practice I have is just being where I live. I'm in a building in Prospect Lefferts Gardens in Brooklyn as a gentrifier. But the moment I finally felt most like a New Yorker wasn't from doing stuff at museums, or going out, or having fun dates with finance people and living what some of my friends who visit have, much to my embarrassment, observed as a “Sex and the City”

lifestyle. It wasn't any of that. It was this year when the Jamaican aunties in my building realized I was staying long enough for them to start talking to me. Now, in the elevator, a Jamaican auntie will say, "You smell so nice," or "Your skin is so soft." And honestly, those are the most powerful affirming moments of womanhood for me—when the aunties and I are taking out the trash in the back, and one of them goes, "I like your earrings."

E.S Yeah, and you're like, I'm seen. I'm here. I'm part of the family.

D.L Yeah. I feel like the queen has given me her blessing. The aunties see me as a junior initiate!

E.S Exactly. I feel like it's the everyday things that really get me. Like going to the super market and just... being spoken to properly. I think that was actually one of the moments that made me realize—okay, I think I want to be a woman. I think this is the path I'm supposed to be on. It was because I wanted to go to the shop in tracksuit bottoms. I just wanted to go in PJs and have the guy be like, "Hey, you go, miss." I just wanted to always be seen—and to wear whatever the hell I wanted. I didn't want to have to dress up, or put on makeup, or do my hair in a particular way. I just wanted to be as basic as, I literally just woke up, and I need to go get some eggs, maybe some milk. That was the moment I was like, oh yeah—I don't want to be seen any other way but as a woman. Because it's in those everyday, simple moments of life—when you're just doing regular, quotidian stuff—that I realized: this is how I want to be seen.

D.L I transitioned somewhat later in life. I don't think I started taking any real steps, hormone-wise or presentation-wise, until I was 29. I remember having this moment walking around Philly, where I was living at the time, and having what I thought was this profound existential question. I was like, when will random men on the street stop averting their gaze because they see queerness, and instead start looking at me with desire? And I thought, wow, this is such a deep, poetic question. That really was the middle school boy answer—like, the kind of answer that's just so dumb. It was literally the second I got boobs. That was all it took. And suddenly, I was like, wow, I wish I'd never had that thought, because now I can never be anonymous in public space again. It they saw a semblance of boobs.

E.S Yeah. There was a phase—and honestly, sometimes it's still really confusing for me. I'm always like, what's happening? How am I being seen? And it's never fully comfortable. I try not to give a fuck. There was this one point where men would walk past and whisper things

in my ear—really randomly and quickly. And that spun me for a loop. I think it also had to do with the fact that I'm quite tall, and I can come across as intimidating in certain ways. I always have my headphones in, so I don't fully register what's happening around me. I just walk, and people kind of do whatever. Like, everyone's always going to look—and they always have looked at me, even before I transitioned, even before I was visibly queer, let's say, I've always been. That was the one that really spun me because everything else, I kind of expected. I'd be like, of course this is happening. But that one—where they would just walk past and whisper something—I don't even know what they were saying. They'd just whisper something, and that was it. That one really creeped me out. It was too much, I think, for me.

D.L Absolutely. That's one of the funny things about being a trans woman, especially if you're aiming for a more normative presentation—or even if you just desire that. You win by losing. Because you lose your anonymity. Men suddenly feel entitled to your personal space. I always tell my students, you know, one of the things that doesn't get talked about enough when it comes to transitioning—especially for trans women—is that passing is something you might want... but it's not always the best thing because what comes with is misogyny. Constantly. And I've said this to friends too—I knew I was passing when I started experiencing gender-affirming gender dysphoria. Like, oh wow, you perceive me as a woman... and this is horrible.

D.L I also think this is a great place to end this. I love that the arc of our conversation went from theory to practice to just... girl talk.

E.S Yeah. I mean, it's how they kind of go together—they are together. You know, we have to make sense of ourselves somehow. And I think that's how we've gotten to this point. At least for me, I feel that if I hadn't encountered the work of Sylvia Wynter or bell hooks, it would've taken me much longer to realize that I could be whoever the fuck I wanted to be. And also—to realize that the way the world is, is someone else's fiction, not mine. So yeah, I think theory was one of the things that really made that possible for me.

D.L Yeah, to the theory aunties who told us we smelled nice and had smart thoughts!

DAHLIA LI

Dahlia Li (she/her) is a Consortium for Faculty Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow in the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies at Swarthmore College. She is a writer and artist working in the expanded field of feminist poetics as it intersects with diasporic articulations of gender and race across the mediums of film, performance, and literature. Her published work can be found in the journal *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas*, *The Routledge Companion to Dance and US Popular Culture*, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko's *Black Body Amnesia* and the exhibition catalogue for the 2022 show *Dancing Plague* at the Contemporary Art Museum of Bergamo. Her monograph in progress *Stranded Affect: Trans/of/Color Screen Ecologies and Diasporas of Disappointment* explores the convergence of the moving body, the moving image, 20th and 21st century transnational politics, and trans/of/color theories and practices of the technological. She earned a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in English with certificates in Cinema and Media Studies and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies. From 2022/2023 she was a Helena Rubenstein Critical Studies Fellow at the Whitney Independent Studies Program.

EBUN SODIPO

Ebun Sodipo's (b. 1993, London, UK) work has recently been included in exhibitions held at g39, Cardiff; Southwark Park Galleries, London; Site Gallery, Sheffield and Collective, Edinburgh as part of *Jerwood Survey III* (2024); *Soft Opening* at Paul Soto, Los Angeles; (2024, solo); *CCA Derry~Londonderry: The Centre for Contemporary Art, Derry* (2024); *Inter.pblc*, Copenhagen (2024, solo); *Phillida Reid*, London (2024); *Hannah Barry Gallery*, London (2024); *Hauser & Wirth*, Somerset (2024); *Neven*, London (2024); *VITRINE*, Basel (2023, solo); *VO Curations*, London (2023, solo); *Goldsmiths CCA*, London (2022, solo); *VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art*, Carlow (2022); *FACT*, Liverpool (2022) and *The Block Museum of Art*, Evanston (2021) among others. The artist has performed at venues including the *Institute of Contemporary Arts*, London (2025); *Performance Art Museum*, Los Angeles (2024); *Edinburgh Arts Festival*, Edinburgh (2024); *Le Guess Who Festival*, The Netherlands (2023); *Live Collision International Festival* at *Project Arts Centre*, Dublin (2023); *Juf*, Madrid (2023); *Bergen Kunsthall*, Norway (2022); *Turner Contemporary*, Margate (2022); *Camden Arts Centre*, London (2021); *Frieze Art Fair*, London (2021); *South London Gallery*, London (2020) and *Auto Italia*, London (2019).

