

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ARIANNE KING COMER AND JEAN-MARIE MAUCLET AROUND HER RESIDENCY AT THE GIBBES GALLERY

The first afternoon I met with Arianne at her Gibbes Gallery Residency Studio, she was also visited by High Chief Nathaniel B. Styles, Executive Director of the Community Builders Holistic Development Corporation. He was coming with three other persons who, immediately, went foraging in the vast inventory of the Gallery Boutique Arianne had installed. Every time one of them would ask for technical details or a price, Arianne would get into the origins of the piece, its history, its meaning and its significance within the collection. The way she was getting visitors immersed in her work through her warm insights, wasn't she actually creating stories? Wasn't she weaving them together into her story? I asked her. She confirmed that she was expanding her circle of connectivity, her network of friends, major actors in her story. Arianne uses the words friend, girlfriend, a lot. They are important to her. She counts on them to assign meaning and direction to her art. Arianne's art is relational. As illustrated in the way she communicates it and the techniques she uses to produce it. In fact, the communication itself is a technique to bring substance to her pieces. As for technical techniques (the craft), we will see that their very essence is communal.

Open any Arianne Facebook page. She will mostly appear as one among many, around a table or at an opening, always socializing and having a great time. Or, in her working mode, she will be practicing Batik at an over-cluttered table, left hand - blue - keeping down a piece of fabric crumpled up with wax, the other holding some sort of a pointed lump of ... maybe polyfoam or ... what a mysterious utensil ... her home-made wax-drawing pen. She plunges it ever so often in a ubiquitous slow cooker she carries with her everywhere: the wax melting apparatus! And for sure, you will be treated with her smile, generous and so joyous, facing the camera head on, to communicate true enthusiasm. This is Arianne telling you, on Facebook, that community batiking is so much fun! Why don't you try it for yourself!

There is an other familiar scene Arianne uses in her Batik/Indigo paintings: the artist sweating it out among vats of blue, yellow or green ... then lime, to seize the dye. See her push and churn the

It is interesting to see that Jean-Marie coming and observing had a revelation about how I process doing art versus how he does. How interacting with people in a residency is motivating what I do.

Genuinely I am impacted here by his words.

I am not a writer and it's difficult for me to do that here.

To be isolated from COVID was hard. It shut down my spontaneous relationship with communities while working with conNECKtedTOO. To be at the Gibbes was a reopening of sort, with people coming in and out. And also I handled zoom calls to plan studies of indigo, teaching refugees or special needs for the years to come.

Yes I talk and communicate when I have people in front of me. I use my art for service and being at the Gibbes brought that back. The exposure was awesome.

Yes I use and celebrate people who do art, through instagram and facebook. I enjoy to be a medium that way, a voice.

I'm driven with celebrating creative events. Creativity in art is a way to celebrate life and I use social media to do that. Before social media I was doing a lot of emails, sharing photographs and practicing storytelling through my workshops, my talks or panel discussions.

I saw my work as an artist in residency at the Gibbes as a performance. Something with demonstrations. Maybe because I had to do my work mostly outside.

fabric in the vats with a stick longer than herself, blending color and cloth, fishing them out and handing them to friends who diligently hang the production to dry, on lines strung between two way-big oak trees, Low Country style. This is what inspires Arianne: the representation of local peoples' activities, the telling of what it is to be here - and now... From solemn events like the 'Reburial of Enslaved' - for this necessary memorial project by Dr. Ajani Ofunnyin, who so suddenly departed, she made the Ancestral Indigo Burial Shrouds - to shrimper in a waterway, somewhere in marshland.

Many tactile colors, textures, transparencies, swaying tree limbs, shimmering leaves, blooming grass, to evoke the dense, semi-tropical, vaporous atmospheres of Gullah Country. Here, a dark indigo cedar frame does not constrict the scene. It makes it accessible, palpable. In other words, 'familiar'. A place to belong.

Technically, Arianne is intentionally traditional. Listen to her telling you of her experience in Nigeria. After she finished her Master studies at Cranbrook - Michigan, she wanted to go past such a proper and formal art education. She needed to affirm her own artistic language and discover its sources. She landed in a tiny Nigerian village where she met this unbelievably healthy, energetic and powerful 104 year old woman: artist, leader in her community, indigo practitioner, from growing it to processing it and making it into a dye, all along this with the entire village population. In this Indigo Village, Arianne observed shared labour. Whether in the industry of Indigo or in farming, herding, she witnessed the indispensable power of community work. She also learned that artists were messengers, valued (and paid) more than teachers! A role between griot and shaman, whose existence can only make sense in a culture steeped in tradition. I suppose that she was so taken by this philosophy of life that she promotes it still, wherever she does art.

Point of fact: at the Gibbes, every day she is there, Arianne transports her battery of vats, cloth, utensils, a tent, a table, chairs, from the studio to the garden - of course she gets help, this is a community activity after all - and back! She consistently operates her open-air studio for the trickle of visitors happening by... This is artist dedication, no?

All this personal experience keeps Arianne's work real, fresh and optimistic. Her codes are not those of the privileged language of art criticism. When I gaze at a painting of Island Breeze, I also

I have a common goal/interest with Dr. Ajani. So there was some passion in this "Reburial of Enslaved." I am always taking pictures of events in real time while documenting. It serves as reference for paintings and art projects. I talked about that in my application to the Gibbes. It was rewarding that the City wanted the painting of the burial. Dr. Ajani wanted me to do a piece for his play about Denmark Vesey. He did not see it finished.

Yes, my practice has been very much impacted by my stay in Nigeria. Storytelling and techniques learnt there are still with me.

see Norma and Norman. All they gave us, to the end, feeds an esthetics of generosity and enthusiasm. Arianne is a visual story teller with a 'hot foot', as an other painter-friend calls folks who are constantly between moves! Until covid, Arianne was seen driving her van as far as Wisconsin, New Rochelle, Florence SC. She presently stands ready to travel again. And, (should we tell?), she just purchased a trailer. Four more wheels, just in case. What if her project of a permanent brick and mortar, live-in-studio takes longer than expected? It will not slow down her vocation to 'reach out' as she loves to say - to 'fuse' the words and images she has made hers into the paintings she makes ours.

The disappointment of not having a brick and mortar place does not prevent me from practicing. This is the joy of it. It can be anywhere.

How can one forget the Charleston Rhizome expedition to Nairobi, Kenya in 2004. Arianne hauling her studio to the World Social Forum? Opening shop there, Inviting the World to batik their own words on a humongous piece of fabric, in so many languages ...Once the sheet is fully inscribed, we set up our indigo vats right outside the Plenary Stadium where thousands are constantly pouring in and out. And we perform the miracle of instant coloration: the white fabric turning colored, live, before the World's eyes! A bit of welcome magic? A symbolic premonition of change to come? Only at a speed only art can imagine!

What struck me in Nairobi reminded me that we got to do that workshop. We saw the challenges: could not find electricity, could not find the service people. We had to find the top people, the ones who would respect us enough and have access to resources to make things happen. We knew we had to put our thinking together to make that workshop happen. It was rewarding to finally see the table active, until the piece was going to be placed in that indigo pot and taken out publicly.

Nairobi was also a return to Africa for Arianne. We knew she had spent time in Nigeria before, to learn about farming Indigo, dyeing fabric, communal agriculture, shared cooking. She was also developing a sense of the outdoor as living space. This immersion in an Indigo Village is still feeding her dream to emulate its social dimension, its cooperative practices, here, in the Low Country, and to make it sustainable. Today she may be closer than ever to accomplishing her dream. As we noted earlier, she has acquired land on which to live, grow Indigo, invite other artists and create community. Arianne's story is one of Belonging through resilience and renewal. For her, the practice of art and all related crafts, from Batik to Shibori, is a celebration of tradition, transformation and enduring hope.

I would like to go back to Nathaniel Styles. Under the name, on his business card, a phrase reads: AWO EJI OGBE. Not knowing what to make of it, I texted him a question. He responded: "The Yoruba have 256 sacred Odu ..." , of which Eji Ogbe is an essential one, dealing with the reciprocal relationship of Good Character with Destiny. Although my Yoruba literacy is inexistant,

the kinship of Arianne with Nathaniel and their deeply felt spiritual commitments, tell me to beware of ethnocentric approximations which would offend them and bring about distrust, suspicion and fear of misinterpretation, appropriation. The amazing truth though is that cultures which have the wit to analyze so, the will to understand so, a way to tolerate so, and the wherewithal to develop long term visions ... such cultures are the wise ones; nimble, adaptable, patient, exemplary, for our times.

Here I am not saying that Arianne's art or anybody else's art alone, can reveal such vast and rich paradigms. But what a witness she is! Weaver of stories, facilitator for interracial, intergenerational and grassroots dialogues among people of goodwill.

At **conNECKtedTOO** → **TINYisPOWERFUL**, every day we collaborate with others, we learn how to repel ethnocentricity and stereotypes, to assure a world where every culture alive today embraces every other culture alive still. Thank you Arianne for your constancy ... and finally, for your candor to unveil what you called, at our last session, 'the panic of survival'. This darker aspect of our global commonality. You faced it often but it never discouraged you.

JEAN-MARIE MAUCLET, 2021

I came about the Yoruba practice of art through research. In being close to it for seven months it made me understand all connections of creativity. What resonated with me about the Yoruba culture is entrenched in creativity through the arts: storytelling, traditional crafts, performing arts, music, dancing and honoring ancestry in any culture.

Without the fluidity that was existed before COVID, it slowed all of us down and the Gibbes residency was welcome. Although I have become better at it, my challenge has always been to find stability for my creativity, to be able to survive. And I am very sensitive to the darker side of our world.

ARIANNE KING COMER, 2021