

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN RAYN RAINEY AND JEMAGWGA

Notes from talks with Gwylene & Jean-Marie about their work

The water's are rising, what will you do?

Jean-Marie A Colleague - Collaborator - Art Edge Dweller Study - Fellow Visionary

♡ Entering Jean-Marie's workshop is always a treat, because there is always something interesting and story driven that's being worked on. And if you're lucky you may catch the sounds of Opera or French radio!

♡ On this day and during this conversation there wasn't such playing, which was a little sadding but the silence matched well with the topics surrounding the current works JM is working on. In total there are 4-6 pieces planned for the work, which while I don't know the name of, I always think of it as "The Water's Are Raising". I was first introduced to this line of thought during our time on Reynolds Ave. At Reynolds TINYisPOWERFUL cultivated(?) a Community Lab where the work of TINY and artworks that were the result from multiple collaborations within the collective were around the space for anyone interested in participating.

It was there that I encountered "The Waters are Raising", a statement integrated into a wooden sculpture piece created by Morgan Kinne and Jean-Marie. In a way it feels like these upcoming works are connected to this piece, if not directed then indirectly through purpose.

♡ A major difference between that piece and the current one is a desire to step away from pieces with heavy word usage. A goal is the exploration of abstract thinking and visual representation. What will viewers take - away from each piece without being influenced by words?

Yes, Opera or other music from "France Musique". Opera for the usually high level of drama involved, the interplay of myths and universals. French radio for the sake of multiculturalism, multi-layered thinking.

I believe it was "The Waters Are Rising", reference to climate change, which was an important part of the background for the Reynolds Avenue installation and Community Lab. It is Morgan who wrote this, I think, (which became like a title for the whole installation). She also wrote "Let's talk about inequity" on the other side of the same piece. I mention this because it became a pivotal moment in the development of my future work with TINYisPOWERFUL. I asked Morgan what motivated her to use writing at that occasion. It was a compromise on her part, she said. She would usually consider the use of words in visual works as a concession to conceptualism. Not interesting to her. I took her answer so seriously that, as she and Arianne sort of drifted out of the project, I promised myself to pursue "TinyCulinary" as a word-free work. This choice slowed me down enormously but it helped me regenerate my visual vocabulary and give it other roots and virtual sources. A great intellectual exercise. therefore the perfect link with what follows

Back to visual symbolisms, universals, more basic use of size and scale, colored or raw materials, texture or evocative juxtapositions ... anything experiential, local, familiar, readily recognizable ...

♡ Another aspect of the work is homage to Matha Lou's and the importance of soul food to the community in large. One work was a deconstructed model of Martha Lou's. What is it saying, what does it mean? Part of it, if I'm remembering correctly, was to ask what now? What will be the future of Soul Food and culinary in general in Charleston?

(Paraphrasing of JM)

Soul Food has always had a strong presence in Charleston. But as of late it feels like we are losing more of our family run soul food establishments or they are moving to North Charleston. Marth Lou's being a prime example. Located in a spot on the edge of downtown before you get to the connector between Charleson and North Charleston it was a building that you may pass by as the outside appeared in a state of disrepair. But upon entering the establishment the building was pristine, with two noticeable features: a painting and a coat rack. Two elements incorporated in the upcoming works(?)

Focusing back on "Water's raising" the bigger model(?) or more bigger sculpture of Martha Lou's is on a stilts(?) as a way to explore aspects of the future. What does that mean? Well eventually parts, if not all of Charleston will be underwater. And so this poses the thought process of whether we'll fight aghast flooding or work with it. One so way is building up, or more so raising buildings above the tides/ocean water. The stilts represent that building up. All of it leads me to think, what other ways can we work with flooding to create new, unique and sustainable ways to build and evolve architecture?

♡ Another part is what JM dubbed/titled(?) the Elevated Commons. A table with three moving wood platters/planks(?) As it has been sometime since that conversation so my mind is a bit fuzzy on the details. But from what I remember it signified people being at the table equally? Or 3 aspects/elements/ characteristics of the city sharing resources, ideas and collaborating on the future?

Here, there is a bit of confusion on your part, Rayn! THERE ARE two visual representations of Martha Lou's as a relic, (1) a large scale building corner, with, outside, a mural painting of Martha Lou herself, partly hidden by invasive contemporary jail-like condos, complete with, inside, a mere sketch of the pristine interior you refer to, with paintings, coat racks ... (2) a crushed, dwarfed ghost of the restaurant, hanging at the end of a long cable which originates ten feet above from the extended arm of a make-believe crane-like tower. THEN, THERE ARE all the inferences to draw from such visual clues.

The Martha Lou's portrait on her building was painted by Artist Charles DeSaussure who passed away in 2013.

Here, Rayn, you are trying to make sense of the red part of the installation, if I understand. Good luck! It is not so clear to me either because it is all concerning the future. Every detail you describe represents an element to be developed later. Like "the Elevated Common" (so far, a combination of food court, urban farming, urban fishery, open public space) ... But you are perfectly right, stressing that, following the vision of a Tale of Charleston, it is my sense that for the city not to succumb to universal mainstreaming, tourism, uberification and total mercantilism, it will take from locals a full sense of sharing ideas and resources and collaborating on the future ...

♡ The last sculpture we talked about was a crane. It's meant to signify the cranes building all around Charleston. When I first saw it I thought it was a tower. It reminded me of a phone tower with its structure and the fact that it was a time before it had a hook on it. As it is constructed I'm eager to see how it transforms and takes on the shape of a piece of machinery that shaped Charleston regularly.

♡ At the end of our conversation on his work JM elicited that with each of his works he always tries to keep others in mind. A practice that is a good one to pick up and keep in one's pocket!

As a wrecking ball does!

If by "others" you mean people, thoughtful people, you are right. The myth of individual accomplishments is a fundamental negative in our contemporary cultures.

If you mean other works, thus creating a life-long type work of art, it is fine too. Look at Gwylène who, ever since I have known her, has talked about each of her works as a step within a journey of collaboration!

Rayn, may I make a last remark about "the Waters are Rising"?

It is very difficult for me, at this point, to separate into sections this whole continuum of TINYis POWERFUL, TinyCulinary, the Waters are Rising, the Jungle. They all belong in the piece which has been occupying my thinking mind ever since I wrote "A TALE OF CHARLESTON". Lately, I have understood that the Tale is a philosophical tale: it proposes a visual artist-philosopher's version of how a city can transform itself for the good of its citizens, as it adapts to the climatic changes the world has brought upon itself. As such, the array of proposals offered cannot be segmented for the sake of some improbable practicality. But, since each proposal has its own visual embodiment, visitors will make sense of the ensemble, the Tale, only when they piece up the installation in a mental exercise of cumulative thinking and a sensual exercise of visual intaking.

All this, remember, without a single "word" of any objective meaning. Artists do not create norms, they unfold possibilities. Can I call this the Ultimate Imaginary? Now, I just have to get there! JM

Reflections of the present through the past, the future and many techniques

Gwylene A Colleague - Collaborator - Art Edge Dweller Study - Fellow Visionary

♡ Have you ever simultaneously viewed an artwork as the artwork was viewing itself? Sounds surreal right? Well when I first stepped into Gwylene's studio, the current piece she was working on was that of a strip of rainbow work shoes worn by children. But what made the experience surreal was the sketching of faces around the shoes. Gwylene described them as viewers/spectators as they too were observing the shoes as you were. So in a way one could say "I viewed an artwork that was viewing itself". Or at least that's what I gleaned from the explanation of the work.

♡ This piece is 1 of 20 planned paintings/collages. It's the 5th(?) collage in a series Gwylene has dubbed "Working from Retrospective/Perspective?". This body of work is being constructed from a mixture of projects that Gwylene has been a collaborator on. All the materials are selected from parts of shows and projects that made a home in her studio.

♡ Not only are different parts of past projects being utilized, but a multitude of different techniques are being used. For example mason lines which are lines drawn from charcoal coated strings, where two people have to pull the string to its fullest tension then one of them has to pluck it so it interacts with the paper. This creates a very clean line on the paper.

♡ When talking about the main concept of the work Gwylene said this: "Everything is constantly moving, things from 8 yrs will come back as you grow older." So in a sense the whole exhibit looks at the concept "everything comes full circle" or that everything is constantly being transformed from other things, therefore constantly coming back and/or constantly evolving with time.

Each portrait may mirror/keep or draw in/introduce AUDIENCES. Yes, THEY/YOU/WE are both actors and audience, actors and viewers, insiders and outsiders, creators and critics. Since portraits may be artsy bullies, erasing in the memory all other aspects of the model, they are not meant here, to represent anyone specially. But they wish to represent PEOPLE, GROUPS, PUBLIC, POPULACE, MULTITUDE, COMMONALITY, OCCUPIERS, COMMONALTIES, FOLKS, ORGANIZERS ... and maybe YOU!

Actually I achieved only 15. My role, here, is to tentatively bring out the larger story(ies), a backdrop for YOU/WE to tell/re-tell, actually imagine future endeavors. This project is a way to re-use/re-CYCLE/UP-CYCLE leftovers, artifacts, older artworks or their documentation into new productions, which add or reset the perception and comprehension of that journey with OTHERS

So good that you understand techniques as one way to enter a representation! All these works are drafts, attempts, multiplicities.

This work is not a chronology, maybe an acknowledgement about how an artwork is not conceived alone and how it may take years to be on its own, with multiple owners able to touch it or talk about it. And offer multiple places of entrées.

♡ With this body of work Gwylene plans on making a publication of it to not only highlight past art works and the experiences that came with them but the people who have collaborated on the work. And in fact all of the works come from collaborations because a major practice of Gwylene's is to not just look at art as sacred but as a tool for collaborating and bringing about change. A belief that she often shares with me and others is that art needs to be more than just art for art's sake. What is the message that a piece or group of art works has? And what is it directly and indirectly putting out in the world?

I never considered an artwork as just a skilled expression becoming a commercial product, exclusively promoted and judged by its financial value.

♡ As for the other pieces in the exhibit there is a piece with a letter that Gwylene sent to her mother about not understanding her art career. There is also a piece that is multiple facisimiles - a French word meaning a draft/mock up - of a written piece that is in French.

*And one letter to a landlord, and transfers on canvas, and video panoramics.... Everything is possible.
Thank you Rayn.*

**Displacement,
Memory &
Erasure:
Collaborative
Challenges in
Three Parts**

March - April this exhibit was housed in 701 CCA in Columbia. It was the combination of these

works of Gwylene and Jean Marie (also known by their duo name JEMAGWGA) with even more than what was in this original artist conversation. This exhibit was coupled with a full one day workshop in collaboration with TINYisPOWERFUL.

"For us collaboration means reciprocity, shared ownership and autonomy."

9:30 A.M.	Welcomes, Introductions & Overview	1:30 P.M.	If Racism Was A Monster <i>making monsters as a tool for leading participants into meaningful conversations about the issues of racism and bias</i>
10:00 A.M.	Question/Relay technology <i>this format of dialogue and active listening transforms participants into leaders of the conversation</i>	2:45 P.M.	Mobile App Journey: Group Projects <i>advance or begin to ideate your own project, imagining online creative places with short and long-term uses (no technical expertise required!)</i>
11:15 A.M.	Booklet approach <i>a series of questions designed as a starting point for friendly conversations. TINY is about the power of human connections — the possibilities that exist when we take time to listen to each other</i>	4:00 P.M.	Tour of the show and questions about it <i>starting with Displacement, Memory, Erasure of TINY soul food restaurants and reviewing collaborative challenges around artifacts and more</i>
12:30 P.M.	Lunch <i>with a Feedback presentation and opportunity to reflect</i>		

Rayn Rainey
Jul 13, 2021