Of the Conversations I Wish We'd Have

by

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Double-consciousness.

For safety, right?

For safety.

Through the materiality of installation, written word, painting, and performance, I have created a ritual place where I can once again feel safe and held in my body. From this embodiment I negotiate the conversation of body, race, and space while holding others accountable for their complacency, creating a space for people of color to process out loud rather than holding it in their bodies, and finding my place to exist in between.

While the exhibition *Of the Conversations I Wish We’d Have* focuses on installation and written word, the books and their display are built from my studio practice of painting and performance. After years of code switching, being the landing place for people’s questions about race, and dodging the questioning of my own body, double-consciousness became a way of self preservation. The term double-consciousness was coined by W.E.B. Du Bois, introduced in his book *The Souls of Black Folks*. Within it he includes this definition—“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” At times, it becomes safer to stay in this second self; at times it becomes difficult to break from it. For the sake of feeling safe in my body, this double-consciousness disconnected me from my inner world and memory, created a distrust of my intuition, and set the inability to process the image of my own body.
Once I recognized that I could no longer feel joy, I fought back in the ways that brought me the most joy and largest exhale as a child—dance and the movement of furniture. To feel grounded and present within my physical body, I danced. To feel a sense of control within a physical space, I would shift the presentation of my living space. My ritual practice for painting first began as an accident; I didn’t vocalize the process until I was pressed and questioned repeatedly at the beginning of my graduate school experience. The process is as follows:

1. ASSESS WHERE MY HEADSPACE IS. WHERE AM I HOLDING THAT IN MY BODY?
2. LISTEN TO A SONG THAT HAS RECENTLY MADE MY WHOLE BEING SWELL WITH EMOTION; DANCE NAKED.
3. PHOTOGRAPH SAID DANCING (not for you!)
4. CHOOSE THREE PHOTOS.
5. ON PANEL, DRAW THREE OVERLAI D BLIND CONTOUR DRAWINGS, ONE OF EACH PHOTO.
6. PAINT THE SPACES OF MYSELF IN BETWEEN THAT I ALLOW YOU TO SEE.
7. REPEAT COLORS THREE, FIVE, OR SEVEN TIMES ACROSS THE PANEL, CREATING A SENSE OF BALANCE. REPEAT UP TO NINE, ELEVEN, AND FOURTEEN AS PIECE GROWS TO BODY-SIZE.

I approach this list as a ritual practice that is allowed to flow and flex through explorations over time. It is a grounding place for me; a documentation of processes that I allow others to see. There is space for intuition to play, allowing trust to let embodiment settle in. This alternate mindset comes into play in the following ways:
WHEN I CHOOSE THE SONG.

WHEN I DANCE.

WHEN I PICK THE PHOTOS.

WHEN I DRAW BLINDLY.

WHEN I PICK COLORS.

WHEN I PAINT.

WHEN I DON’T LET MYSELF PAINT.

Through this somatic practice, I was not only forcing myself to look at images of my body in motion, but I was allowing myself to trust my intuitive decisions with everything that came from the dance onward. By grounding myself in my body during this private performance, I was finally able to tune into memories once shuddered for safety. At times, I would laugh or cry unexpectedly; I later came to learn that the two create the same physical release and sensation. From this release I painted.

When my body felt ostracized within my environment, painting— and remaining present in my daily life— became difficult. At those times, I moved the furniture in my studio. I allowed the space to shift and with it created time and physical movement to process where that stuck-ness stemmed from. When that didn’t work, I would go home and do the same, allowing my nervous system to resettte before I continued painting. Most of my early writing happened during these moments. As I moved throughout the space I would rant in my head, those things I wished I could say, the responses denied, and the voice made small. I finally realized that I would feel more resolution if I wrote those “conversations” down. And so I did. In different
stages of resettling I would write into the notes section of my phone; once the room was done I would sit down, read it, and make edits if I had something better I could say before finally fully exhaling.

After a year of graduate school, I compiled these disparate rants into a dated document, curious about what circumstances I played over the most. Soon, I left them in the archive with occasional updates. A few months later I took a course titled “Performance and Technology” with a dance professor out of curiosity alone. While I thought I could learn how to play more with a painted room I built, she challenged me to use the technologically advanced space we were given access to. I knew my dance practice was for me and me alone. I knew I wouldn’t paint for an audience. I read back through those compiled notes.

I remember being disciplined in front of the class when I was in the third grade. We were supposed to be quietly working or quietly listening but regardless being quiet. I remember receiving consistent comments about my biracial body in space “not making sense;” this one girl made it her full-time job. She whispered towards me, making snide comments until I finally reached my breaking point. I don’t remember what was said, but I remember the sensation of anger prickling along the edge of my body. I— louder than intended— said “NO, STOP IT.” I was not asked why. I was just disciplined for being too loud.

I silenced myself for a long time after that— and those unsightly emotions with it. I’m done with that now. I am tired of being calm and collected for the comfort of others. I am tired of making myself palatable enough for those that expect me to pick a side (even though they were still going to pick for me). I am tired of being kept out of context; that’s no way to witness a biracial black woman’s body. I am tired of not voicing my own needs because I might take up too much space; how am I supposed to make space for others within that reality? During these
rereading sessions I came to realize that my paintings were grounded in those moments I was denied space to speak. I wondered what would happen if they were actually spoken. I am reasserting the voice, narrative, and honesty I deserve.

The first couple of books I made were written for the purpose of performance. I activated my body in space and triggered motion capture technology with my body’s movement moving the pages. While I took meticulous care in their format, my physical voice was offered to others. The books gave me a way to not forget what I was saying and to avoid straying when I was afraid of possible reactions. One book included old photographs of my family and myself, giving me caring eyes to look into versus a crowd of people. In Of the Conversations I Wish We’d Have, I finally allowed the viewer to handle this text. While my body was no longer performing it, it was embedded in the process nonetheless.
I live in a constant state of fear of being a fraud.

As seasons shift the believability of my body comes under scrutiny.

My mother is black and my father is white. And yet, this claim above is not believable enough, followed by a soft rush choral of “are you sure?”

When I bring up my mother and my brownness, they are quick to assert she is not black. But then, they ask, “How can you say you are black? You don’t look black.”

So is my body a lie? A fraud?

My mother was a registered nurse in giant hospitals. She was a hard worker. She didn’t have a college degree. But she was a hard worker.

At four, I still remember the smell of hospital and the feeling of her arms around me. I was always the tallest kid in my class.

I would sit in the hospital waiting room or in the office with her, while she was working. We would play cards or read books.

When I was nine, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was 47 years old. She was told she had two years to live.

I was nine, and she was 47. She was going to die.

My mother was a nurse. She was a mother. She was a daughter. She was a sister. She was a wife. She was a grandmother.

She was a human being.

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My mother was a nurse. She was a mother. She was a daughter. She was a sister. She was a wife. She was a grandmother.

She was a human being.
Through written word— in the form of books— I was finally able to communicate why I made my paintings, all the moments contributing to the experience of double-consciousness that I worked so desperately to escape from. While some books included snark and humor, others became much more personal. Regardless, I always wrote in my conversational voice. I made my voice suitable for others through code switching for a large portion of my life. If I’m going to use my voice now, I’m going to be fully present. I played between speaking to a general audience, to A Person with the viewer as witness, back to the audience as a singular person. I toyed with intimacy and the expansion of the viewer’s body with care given to the scale of each book. While my body may not be present in the space, the experience and care paid to the body remains.
Figure 2: *to You, with care (volume 1)*, 7x7” hardbound linen covered book, 2024
(Figure 3: to You, with care (volume 2), 7x7” hardbound linen covered book, 2024)
Dear you the reader and us together,

I hope you know I hold care for you. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t let you in to see me this closely. I know I don’t owe you vulnerability, but theorizing can only get us so far. Sometimes witnessing affects your ability (and desire) to shift your responses. Let me open the door for that to happen. If not for me, I hope you can shift your response for:
your coworker
your childhood best friend
your partner that exists differently in this world than you do yourself

There comes a hesitancy when it comes to prefacing those parts of my life you’ll never experience. I am not a victim. I am disclosing happenings that I’m not alone in experiencing. For me, I deserve better. For them, they deserve better. I’ve spent my whole life meeting people “halfway” (normally, they don’t judge and inch) and making exceptions, but I know that you can be better. I know that we can do better. The only kicker is I can’t be in this alone. While it would be easier to heal myself and that be all, it’s not possible to do without change from you.

It could be really easy for me to hold anger about all the ways I wish things had gone differently. Anger isn’t always sustainable. Don’t get me wrong, it doesn’t mean I won’t uphold a boundary and cut you off if needed. But I’ve processed you— and this here— through and out of my body. I don’t have to hold you so tightly anymore because I’ve made space for myself once again.

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You no longer deserve to receive full priority and for that I am grateful. I deserve my own time, too. I deserve space, too. I hope that by extending you this grace means that you can do the same. We know it’s not going to be a one and done event to fix this. Apathy, of all things, will never heal this; in many ways, it’s what got us here. As uncomfortable as it is, how will we handle things on the other side of healing? Maybe I’m being optimistic, but I rather hold optimist than be cynical for the rest of my life. I know better exists.

This dual effort is going to stall out pretty quickly if you fall back into one of the following tendencies:

- I’ve had hard things happen in my life too
- Yes, it must not be that bad if they’re still in your life
- I grew up around Black people so I get it, we had the same experiences

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Sweet baby, if I was bitter I wouldn’t be doing this in the first place. I don’t have space for bitterness to make its home, but I do have space for you to sit next to me so we can figure out what’s next. I’m not saying I’ll hand you the answer back, but I am saying neither of us can do it in solitude. Learning, relearning, and reflection needs self and silence to process through. Where we go next requires community.

And I’m tired of doing it alone. It’s your turn, too.

Sincerely,

me 10a

(Figure 4: Dear you the reader and us together, two 8.5x11 sheets displayed side by side within a frame, 2024)

So what exactly is code switching? According to the article “To be, or not to be... Black: The effects of racial codeswitching on perceived professionalism in the workplace” from the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*: “Racial codeswitching is one impression management strategy where black people adjust their self-presentation to receive desirable outcomes (e.g., perceived professionalism) through mirroring the norms, behaviors, and attributes of the dominate group (i.e., White people) in specific contexts.” (McCluney et al 2021)

For myself this has included: burning my hair straight for years until it refused to straighten anymore; softening my voice while upping the pitch; not being too honest so someone doesn’t
get upset; not demanding better; controlling my face’s desire to speak for me before I open my mouth; including long periods of being quiet other than laughing at a bad joke here and there; and tucking my lips in, especially in pictures.

Ida Harris wrote an article titled “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving it” for YES! Magazine in 2019. While I’ve had conversations with friends and colleagues about their shared shifts of self, the first sentences of Harris’ Article made me feel less alone—“The voice that sprung from my throat was unfamiliar as I introduced myself to a classroom of White students. Its tone was high pitched and enthusiastic—a far cry from my naturally soft raspsiness.” (Harris, 2019)

I’ve found myself frustrated the past few years. Why do I have to soften my voice but a white woman with a similar intonation doesn’t have to think twice? Why is it that my voice is “too intense” or “too heavy” to teach children?

Sure, I’m really good at turning the persona on (albeit at times accidentally). It’s the turning off once I’m done teaching for the day that has proven difficult. Working in places where I’m the only Black teacher in the school (or district) only mimics the greater environment around me. Not that it’s new— for context, I started college in Colorado Springs. Within the first few weeks I received comments about how I spoke.

I quickly neutralized my voice.

It was at this college that I began my time as an education major. It was at this college in this city that I completed a placement at an elementary charter school. Of the schools I have worked at in Colorado Springs, this was the only one where the majority of the population was
children of color. I was in a second grade classroom. We had to keep a written log. I witnessed the lead teacher, daily, speak down towards the kids. I was furious about the way she spoke about them to my White peers. I was reprimanded, by my professor, for calling out this teacher’s behavior in a log only my professor would read. “She’s further in her career; know your place.”

Going to grad school in Boulder, Colorado hasn’t helped the matter. About halfway through I had a brief relationship with a boy from that college. Once it ended and the initial sting faded, I decided to consider the bad habits I carried while dating. It was then that I had to confront the fact that I switched my voice and mannerisms not only when teaching but in intimate relationships. My skin crawled with the ways I’ve abandoned myself. I was doing the silent work to be fully present in my body again, but my external presentation didn’t translate that determination.

I want to be in my body, voice and all.

I so badly want to be fully in my body…

and not just in private.

A few months ago I was home for Christmas. My little sister and I were running errands and we wound up in a… nicer suburb. I accidentally turned the voice on. She turned to me and said, “ew, what was that?” I was so taken aback by her question that I stumbled over my words in my attempt to explain myself. “Yeah, that sounds like it’s in your head.”

She had no idea what I was talking about because, at least consciously, she hadn’t needed to do the same.
Is it because she hasn’t lived long term in predominantly White spaces? Because she naturally enjoys dressing a certain way? Because she can straighten her hair without hair grease? Her stunning bone structure and general aura? Or does having four years and nine months between us allow her socialization in the world to protect her?

Please, let her remain protected.

What now? I’m not claiming to have a solution for how to turn it off or keep someone from code switching in the first place. All I can do is hope to create space where the alternative can exist. Okay maybe this isn’t so much a guide to code switching as much a notice about the ways it’s embedded into my life. So sorry to report, but I would like to be done doing this now. I much rather come back home to myself. As with everything, work in progress.
With this work comes redefining the boundaries both taken from me and sacrificed by myself in the name of self-preservation. Maria P.P. Root wrote the “Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People” in 1992. A few months after I was born she published it, and the rights’ rationale, in the book *The Multiracial Experience*. Her list includes the following:
I read this list every few days for three months. With knowing what you deserve comes acknowledging where lack exists, where it stems from, and what is now to be expected. I cannot assume one to respect boundaries that they don’t know exist. I can’t expect better without demanding better and removing those from my life that continually violate my basic rights to live safely and freely. So, let’s make it clear.
I HAVE THE RIGHT

to not accept disrespect and call it care
to not justify every one of your questions with a response
to not accept colorblindness in conversations you don't want to have
to not be solely responsible for teaching you everything you should know
to be a better person in race relations conversations

I HAVE THE RIGHT

to identify myself as deserving of rest and tenderness
to identify myself as both of my parents' child
to identify myself differently than past paperwork declared
to identify myself in a way that counters the demographic labels provided

I HAVE THE RIGHT

to create a space where empathy guides those conversations not predicated on your comfort
to create space where I too am welcome, wanted, seen, and heard
to have relationships where I can be held without explaining my existence
to freely exist as I am in this body with joy guiding my embodiment

(Figure 7: Bill of Rights for Noa Joyce Fodrie—A Wall Vinyl, 44x60” wall adhesive image, 2024)

I HAVE THE RIGHT

to not accept disrespect and call it care

I don’t know who made you think any alternative was true, but I’m here to let you know that you should fix it.

Like, now.

to not justify every one of your questions with a response
As seasons shift the believability of my body comes under scrutiny. My mother is black and my father is white and I know you were curious and wanted to ask but were either too polite or “waiting for the right time.” People said things like “are you sure they had you on purpose” and *that no no word* and “you’re like a poodle (pet pet pet)” and “are you sure they’re your parents” because we’re just not believable enough, followed by the soft rock chorus of “are you sure?”

I would like to know at what point you thought my body was any of your business. No no, imma let you think about it. Don’t tell me, I’m tired of hearing the excuse *after* you messed up.

*to not accept colorblindness in conversations you don’t want to have*

“I don’t see you as black. I just see you as Noa!” (I, Noa, am in fact black. Why do you have to remove my identity to see me?)

“Well you’re not really black.” (Okay great let’s call my mom. Just because it’s winter, or you want to try to get away with saying some mess, doesn’t make it less true.)

“Well, you’re not white obviously.” (Alright dad, time for you to tap in.)

“Race isn’t real anyway, so why are you talking about it?”

You’re right! People came up with the concept of race to intentionally take advantage of people deemed “other” for centuries. Just because people made it up doesn’t mean you get to discount the very real impacts racial identification has on people’s experiences and bodies.

*to not be solely responsible for teaching you everything you should know to be a better person in race relations conversations*

Other resources available to you:
• google.com (But let’s remember our internet literacy! Not all websites are reputable sources! Quora and Reddit are not the only way to learn about experiences different than yours and they don’t override the voices of those around you!)
• a book
• Podcasts by people of color. Want to learn about blackness? LISTEN TO A BLACK PERSON. Want to understand the caveats of being biracial? I’M NOT THE ONLY BIRACIAL PERSON THAT EXISTS. I don’t speak for the entire race, no one does. This here isn’t a monolith.

Fix yourself up before you disturb my peace. Thanks!!

I HAVE THE RIGHT

to identify myself as deserving of rest and tenderness

I shouldn’t only be allowed to be soft in situations when it make you more comfortable. I shouldn’t only be allowed to be soft when I speak to children. I shouldn’t only be allowed to be soft when you make it my job to make you feel better about riding on my nerves.

I’m tired. I would like to let my mind, body, and spirit to rest without disturbance. I don’t need to earn it, because it’s my right.

to identify myself as both of my parents’ child

Just because you don’t think I’m really black or actually white does not mean my parents are not my parents.

Just because someone decided which race to place on the form based on which was written in first does not mean my parents are not my parents.
Just because I have to have a soft crisis before filling in most demographic forms does not mean my parents are not my parents.

Being biracial—multiracial—means holding a multitude. I am not one or the other. I’m not neither “because you can’t be more than one.” I am more than one race. As crazy as it sounds, you can be fully more than one thing simultaneously.

_to identify myself differently than past paperwork declared_

Let’s think for a second—when I was growing up, schools picked my race for me or I had to deny one of my parents. Between the two districts I went to school in, I was black in one and white in the other despite my mom writing in both. Funnily enough, each school picked whichever race had a lower percentage in the overall demographics. So glad to help you balance things out, but now it’s my turn.

_to identify myself in a way that counters the demographic labels provided_

I didn’t see “two or more races,” “multiracial,” “bubble all that apply,” or “biracial” options on a demographics form until my junior year of high school on the PSAT. I was so taken aback I had to raise my hand and ask my teacher if I could actually bubble it in. I HAD TO ASK BECAUSE THE IDEA OF FULLY IDENTIFYING MYSELF SEEMED FOREIGN.

Just because I still can’t put it on all my forms, doesn’t make it any less true.

_I HAVE THE RIGHT_

_to create a space where empathy guides those conversations not predicated on your comfort_
Respectfully, not everything is for or about you. I promise you’ll be fine. Now let’s (you) practice active listening and not well-ing someone just because one time you read something by someone who said something different. Again, this isn’t a monolith.

_to create space where I too am welcome, wanted, seen, and heard_

My teaching philosophy is built around telling students that they are welcome, wanted, seen, and heard in my presence and in the classroom. From here we build a culture of mutual respect.

If I can CONSISTENTLY create this culture in my classroom for years—both in a middle school and college—tell me how you (a grown person) can’t do that. Tell me how you (A GROWN PERSON) don’t understand the concept of mutual respect. That’s right, baby. You have to respect me too. I know that sounds crazy, but let’s try it out, you know, since it’s my right.

_to have relationships where I can be held without explaining my existence_

I need you to learn empathy all by yourself. I shouldn’t have to validate my fears or concerns for you to be empathetic. A few years ago I finally told myself that I would never again beg a man to show up for me. Congrats! Now that I’ve found my voice, my boundaries extend to you. I don’t have to explain the entirety of the difference between our experiences for you to give me a soft place to land. If you need help, please read _all about love_ by bell hooks.

_to freely exist as I am in this body with joy guiding my embodiment_

I remember riding my bike with friends for hours around the neighborhood while our moms sat under a tree in the front yard. I remember climbing trees until I was hidden in the leaves, all fear of heights disappearing in that moment. I remember slapping together a tree house that could never support our bodies but our bodies still held the pride. I remember running around barefoot in richly green grass, still cool with dew; I remember the red clay mud between my toes and
crawling up my arms as we looked for frogs. I remember creating pillow forts in the room my sister and I shared until we created our own little world, reaching and climbing and sorting until everything found its rightful place. I remember sitting in the “couch” created by my mom bending her knees up while laying on her side on the couch. I would tuck between the back of the couch and her legs and stay there as long as she stayed. I remember feeling held.

I deserve to feel this same joy in my embodiment, now, as an adult. Now please stop interfering with this settling in. Thanks for your cooperation.

AND I DARE YOU TO TELL ME NO.
(Figure 8: *A Breakdown of the Bill of Rights For Noa Joyce Fodrie*, 8.5x11 hardbound book, 2024)

Let’s back up for a beat. I began my undergraduate career at Colorado College. Ah college— that place where you enter the ever expanding growth in search of your future. After two years of attending the glorious hallowed halls of this PWI liberal (when people are
watching) arts college, I decided to move home to finish school. Sure, my sister developing a brain tumor was the nail in the coffin, but it was initiated by a bunch of procrastinating students on an anonymous college-based app called Yik Yak. I deleted the app because of a busy month of class commitments, but the pages of screenshots showing posts like “I think white people are better than all other races, and that’s hard for many students here to accept” or “back to the cotton fields” showed me everything I missed the night before all at once. I spent years suppressing most of what was said; what was left behind was the sinking feeling taking the place of where my lunch was supposed to go.

I transferred to the University of Memphis starting in the 2016-2017 school year. I spent the first semester bitter and the second trying to get over myself. In April 2017 the show Dear White People was released. My mom called me into the living room, curious about the new show being advertised on Netflix. We watched two episodes. I silently sobbed. After that hour my mom looked at me asking, “wait, is this what it was like there?” “Yes.” Long pause (or long enough for my brain to register its presence), “maybe it’s best if you don’t watch this show with your dad. It may bring up some… conversations.” My dad watched Fox News everyday when I was a kid. I’ll let you fill in the blanks. He’s a good man, just painfully tone deaf. But he can’t be racist with a black wife and black kids, right? Anyways,

The show Dear White People was released five months after the 2016 election, a year and a half after the incident on Yik Yak. After some time, I eventually watched the full three seasons. Sam is the main character, a biracial (black mom, white dad) college junior attending a PWI liberal arts college. She runs a radio show called Dear White People, having those difficult conversations regarding race relations and calling folks out. In this setting her body is accepted
as black but called into question when it’s found that she’s dating a white grad student. That is until she documents the black face party.

The first episode is genius in its entirety. Rewatching it for this purpose, I laughed at the overlap of language. I didn’t realize how much this show helped me find my own words. The narrator begins with “the writers are depending on my ethnic but non threatening voice to explain things they’re too lazy to set up traditionally.” Moving into Sam’s first radio show she discussed those questions she receives on a daily basis– “what are you?’ a person about to slap the shit out of you.” After the black face party occurs, Sam addresses it on her show. Of course, students can call in. Thankfully, she’s quick on the drawback.

White man: I find your show offensive and highly
dismissive. We need to come together at a time like this.
Sam: Are you a white man?
White man: Uh, why? Race is a social construct.
Sam: I’ll take that as a yes. I didn’t create the divide, I’m
just calling attention to it.

Sam, in response to a white woman: I get it, the realization
that you contribute to a racist society can be unsettling, but
you sound like a grown ass woman to me, so, pass.

And then comes the well intentioned white folks and those who hope to protect them. The “in 2017 I can't believe something like this would happen” and the “just for devs [devil’s
advocate], all my white friends are talking about it.” Sam addresses it seamlessly, stating, “it was fascinating to see what was lurking beneath the surface when you were given permission to suspend your polite passive liberalism.”

The show gave me space to process, exhale, and laugh at how ridiculous it is that these conversations, happenings, and comments are so common that they can create a relatable show about it. The show holds simple honesty while making space for that to be reciprocated, pointing out the institutions in and out of higher education that contribute to these actions enacting the harm to be processed. I desire to create that space and conversation of accountability here, now within our realm of reality. I want my voice to take up space. My voice, not the voice academia has deemed worthy of being heard. My voice, the same written and it is spoken because why does the “academic voice” get credit for my story? I’m not doing this writing and installation for the academy, I’m doing this in spite of it.

I’ve realized how– knowingly or not– I’ve let this show open up the doors of possibilities of language. The way something is worded can completely change how the message is perceived. Dear White People showed how self-advocacy can guide the conversation moving forward. I allowed myself to feel comfortable in the passive voice for a long time. At this point, I want my voice to be just as prevalent if I’m in the room versus when I’ve left. I can’t ask to be heard while making myself small or limiting myself to the “effect” rather than illuminating the “cause.” By avoiding the conversation of cause, these cycles of harm will continue ceaselessly. If nothing else, maybe the conversation gives enough of a jar to reset. Otherwise, in the wise words of the narrator, “the hangover from this one is a motherfucker.”
Throughout this program I have finally found my voice with directness beyond the metaphors held within the binders of acrylic paint. I have found the language necessary to have difficult conversations, breaching honesty with space for others to exist as well. There is a certain amount of fear that can come with this openness. With creating the boundaries for my being to exist safely comes creating the physical space that is occupied with the embodiment of that safety. For the past few years that space has lived within the borders of a painting. Now, that space is occupied by the bodies of readers, both known and unknown. By giving myself months to curate the furniture and play with layouts digitally, I have handed myself the tools needed to process discomfort through and out of my muscles. By giving myself a week to arrange and rearrange and sit and contemplate and shift and arrange again, I can ensure that my full exhale comes, ready to embrace whatever conversations occur once my words are read.

So this is for me and also for you. But mainly for me.
BILL OF RIGHTS FOR RACIAL MINORITIES

I HAVE THE RIGHT
not to label my existence in the world
not to keep my silence as the mark
not to be responsible for society's response as a person

I HAVE THE RIGHT
to identify myself differently than externally imposed roles

to identify myself differently than my biological sex

to identify myself differently in different cultures

I HAVE THE RIGHT:
to create a vocabulary to articulate racialized narratives

to express my identity through the forms that best represent me

to have loyalties and identities that are of my choosing

to freely choose who I obey and respect

by Raquel Salas
BILL OF RIGHTS FOR NOA JOYCE FODRIE

I HAVE THE RIGHT
  to not accept disrespect and call it care
  to not justify every one of your questions with a response
  to not accept colorblindness in conversations you don’t want to have
  to not be solely responsible for teaching you everything you should know
  to be a better person in race relations conversations

I HAVE THE RIGHT
  to identify myself as deserving of rest and tenderness
  to identify myself as both of my parents’ child
  to identify myself differently than past paperwork declared
  to identify myself in a way that counters the demographic labels provided

I HAVE THE RIGHT
  to create a space where empathy guides those conversations not
  predicated on your comfort
  to create space where I too am welcome, wanted, seen, and heard
  to have relationships where I can be held without explaining my existence
  to freely exist as I am in this body with joy guiding my embodiment
(Figure 9-13: Installation images from *Of the Conversations I Wish We’d Have*, Noa Fodrie, 2024)
Bibliography

Souls of black folks


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