

*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 OVERLAID 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 resettle 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.

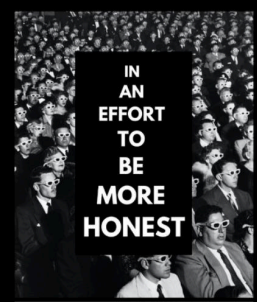




After a year of graduate school, I compiled these disparate rants into a dated document, curious about what circumstances I played over the most. Soon, I left them in the archive with occasional updates. A few months later I took a course titled “Performance and Technology” with a dance professor out 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.

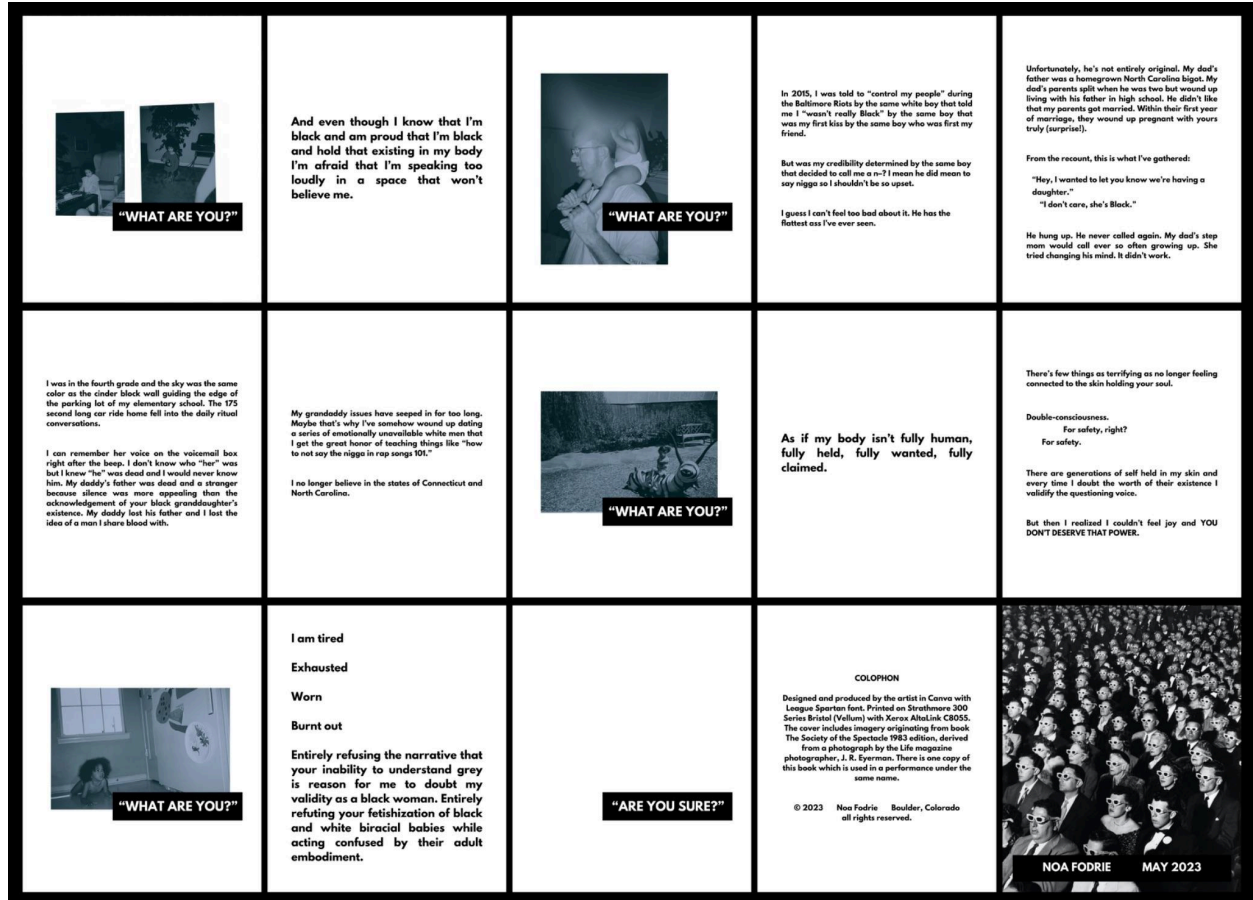
I remember being disciplined in front of the class when I was in the third grade. We were supposed to be quietly working or quietly listening but regardless being quiet. I remember receiving consistent comments about my biracial body in space “not making sense;” this one girl made it her full-time job. 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.

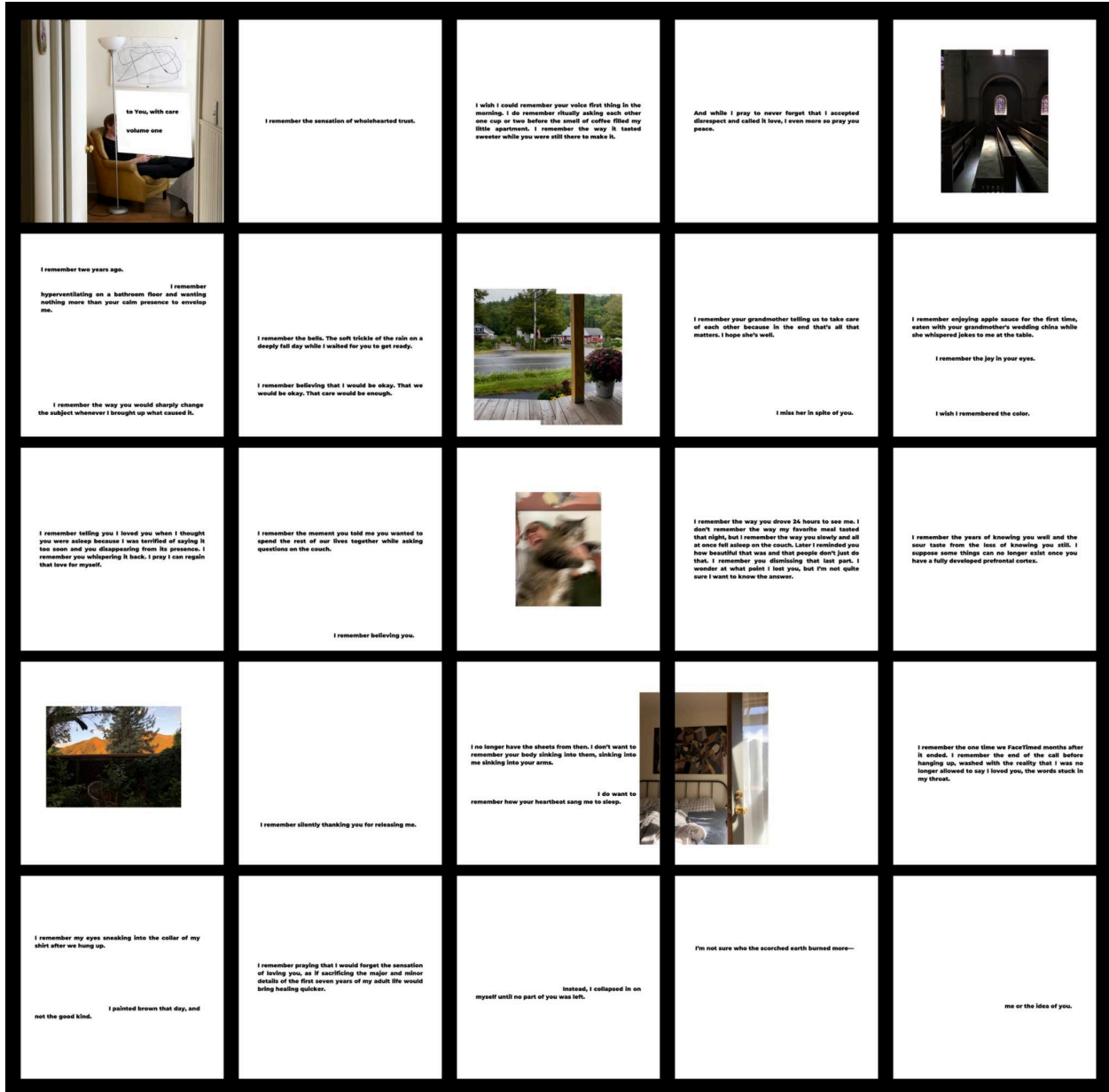
The first couple of books I made were written for the purpose of performance. I activated my body in space and triggered motion capture technology with my body's movement moving the pages. While I took meticulous care in their format, my physical voice was offered to others. The books gave me a way to 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.

 <p><b>IN AN EFFORT TO BE MORE HONEST</b></p>	 <p><b>"WHAT ARE YOU?"</b></p>	<p><b>I live in a constant state of fear of being a fraud.</b></p>	<p><b>As seasons shift the believability of my body comes under scrutiny.</b></p> <p><b>My mother is black and my father is white. And yet, the claim alone is not believable enough, followed by a soft rock chorus of "are you sure?"</b></p>	<p>back when soft rock was in its prime—1993 of course—my mom was in her late 20s and my dad was in his mid 30s. At the time, my dad was a car salesman Chicago Catholic who hit that moment in his life where either "I meet the woman I'm gonna marry or I'm going into the church." My mom needed a car. She walks into the dealership, he loses his breath for a moment, rushes out his current customer, and sells her that car.</p> <p>In her words:</p> <p>"In hindsight, maybe a bit of a creepy move. Maybe don't do that these days. But hey, it worked out."</p> <p>In his words:</p> <p>"And then I paid for that car."</p> <p>He proposed during the Memphis Six Storms of '94. They got married eight months later, and the rest is history.</p>
<p>When I was younger, my dad came home with baby's breath. My mom got upset because, "Ray, these are filler flowers. You didn't even take off the \$2.75 price tag." He was hush and quietly went to their room to change out of his work clothes. She sighed before prapping the flowers and putting them in a vase. He came back, they apologized, and slow danced in the kitchen.</p> <p>Summer 2016 was deep wedding season. It was also the season that everyone used baby's breath as their decorative flower. My mom leaned over and whispered, "you can't tell him. He'll never let it go." Naturally, I did.</p> <p>"Did you hear that, baby? We're trend setters!"</p>	 <p><b>"WHAT ARE YOU?"</b></p>	<p>When I was in kindergarten, my mom would always take me to school and volunteer in the classroom. One day my dad came and had lunch with me. We're sitting at a tiny table with a classroom's curious eyes moving back and forth between us. "I don't get it." Because it was the year 2000 in Crayola's color collection, my response was "black and white makes yellow."</p> <p>At five I didn't understand how to mix colors, but even if I did the two would feel like home, not a physical description of the separation between my body and theirs.</p> <p>Maybe that's why I hate mixing two "skin" tones and stick to skin adjacent instead. Something about the process feels painfully off-putting. I would like to think I'm too busy to be pined down by a ratio of Golden Acrylic paints.</p>	<p>I almost prefer "I don't get it" to "what are you?" I mean there has to be a third option here, but I've yet to hear it. I think my favorite point of the conversation is when it shifts to:</p> <p>"So is your dad black?"</p> <p>"No, my mom is."</p> <p>A shocked "oh" follows.</p> <p>"So are they together?"</p> <p>"Yes."</p> <p>A higher pitched, more shocked "oh" mimics the first (as if the only way I could exist is by accident).</p> <p>"So is she ghetto?"</p> <p>"I mean, no I guess not."</p> <p>"Oh, so she acts white."</p>	<p>Why is it that, even from the perspective of a black high school girl in PE class, the standard for a college degree is withheld? Yes, this is rhetorical. You can figure it out.</p> <p>Maybe I should come up with a suggestion list of hobbies for when people get too bored and too curious about how to look up my day by asking about my parent's sex life.</p> <p>"I just don't feel like it matters or is my business. I just see you for who you are." I love well intentioned white people when they're safer in PC environments. They're so tender in the way they hold space for the aspects of my existence that make them most comfortable.</p>
 <p><b>"WHAT ARE YOU?"</b></p>	<p>My grandma has (had? how do you qualify loss?) ten children. Six girls, four boys. My mom, Stacy Jean, has a twin brother, Tracy Gene, because apparently she was running short on names at the moment. My Aunt Wendy is one of the funniest women I've ever met. She references herself as "Aicy," Aicy was diagnosed with cancer when I was in the seventh grade. When the doctor asked her if she wanted to know how long she had, she said that she was gonna live as long as she wanted unless the Lord took her because "a list could take me out quicker than this cancer does." By some miracle she's still alive and well, calling herself "Aicy."</p>	<p>When I was seven, as we were leaving a large family gathering in a small town, I finally asked my mom why my Aunt Wendy (her favorite of the nine siblings) called me milk carton. She sighed, looked in the backseat and said:</p> <p>"They used to put missing children on milk cartons."</p> <p>"I'm not missing. I'm right here."</p> <p>"No, honey. She's saying you don't look like either one of us."</p> <p>"But you always say I have dad's flat feet and you—"</p> <p>"No, baby. She means your skin."</p>	<p>At one point when I was older we were all at Aunt Wendy's house for a big family cookout. Us kids sat up on the hill while one of the aunts took our picture. Grammy said, "now that there is the rainbow coalition." We love a moment to honor the variety pack of biracial possibilities. I wonder what ever happened to that photo.</p> <p>I was always curious to know what my other aunts and uncles thought of me based on my body alone. Did they agree? Not care because my dad's a good man who stuck around? Did they not think twice about it? Did they not care because it's not like we lived in the same small town as the rest of them anyway? (most likely the last one)</p>	<p>All through growing up Grammy would call me Ray Jean—Ray being my dad's name and Jean being my mom's middle—as her way of pointing out the funny way both of my parent's traits showed up in me. She nearly called me that more than my given name. I much preferred Ray Jean to milk carton. It held a sense of belonging, a naming of recognition rather than categorization.</p> <p>Grammy died exactly two weeks after she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Slowly and all at once, she was reunited with her Lord. Her personhood didn't die, her soul just decided to sing glory hallelujah instead. I have a lot of things I wish I knew, but I suppose not all questions warrant answers.</p>
 <p><b>"WHAT ARE YOU?"</b></p>	<p>The Imitation of Life is a 1959 film that I've seen enough times to count me as covered. Lore, a white single mother aiming to be an actress, meets Annie, a black widow, at the beach. Annie takes care of Lore's daughter, Suzie, while Lore builds her career. Lore's push for acclaim strains her relationship with Suzie. Annie's light-skinned daughter, Sarah Jane, denies her blackness within white spaces, distancing herself from her mother until her mother's death. At this point, Sarah Jane mourns with regret and my mom weeps.</p>	<p>My mom has a VHS copy of The Imitation of Life. For a long time, part of me wondered at what point in her life she bought it. The idea of hypothesizing for too long made me ache so eventually I asked. With it being a classic film, she grew up watching it on TV with her family. When my sister and I were just below school age, she saw it at Wal-Mart and bought it out of nostalgia alone. Once I was in elementary school and the constant barrage of questions began, the plot moved from entertainment to a sharp jar into reality. The way it now had the possibility of imitating her life made her realize that this was a movie to be seen, a conversation to be had. It wasn't a movie I saw in the back of the cabinet but one that I remember watching several times, each one my mom tearfully looking at me and saying, "please don't deny me; you'll still tell me your mom once you're out of the house, right?" I would sit in a soft stun each time, swallowing the lump in my throat before saying, "of course." I didn't realize how long her plea would haunt me.</p>	<p>Cherene Sherrard Johnson writes, "even when the multirace cannot pass as white, she manifests the same symptoms of alienation, confusion, and unease that beleaguers the passing subject."</p> <p>There were times growing up when my mom asked what it was like being biracial, especially where I grew up in the south, and again when I was away for college. A few times she asked me if she did me a disservice by loving my dad. The idea that she would ever have to wonder that is sickening. Then again, interracial marriage was legalized in their lifetime. There was a lot I never told her so she wouldn't have to question her love. I guess I'm blowing that now.</p>	<p><b>To my loving mother:</b></p> <p><b>Their failures are not your fault. Their failures are not your fault. Their failures are not your fault.</b></p>

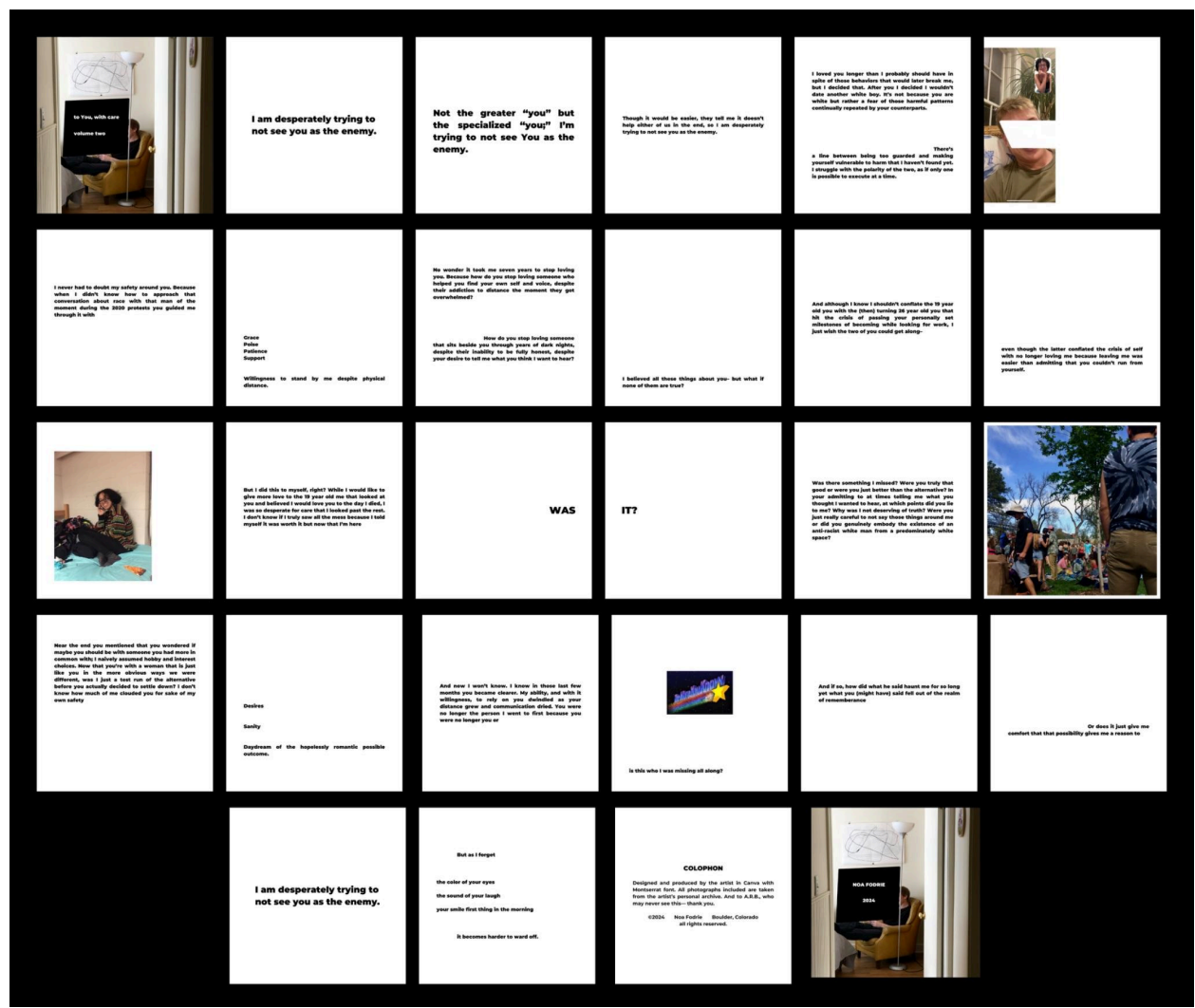


(Figure 1: *In An Effort To Be More Honest*, 10x12" accordion book, 2023)

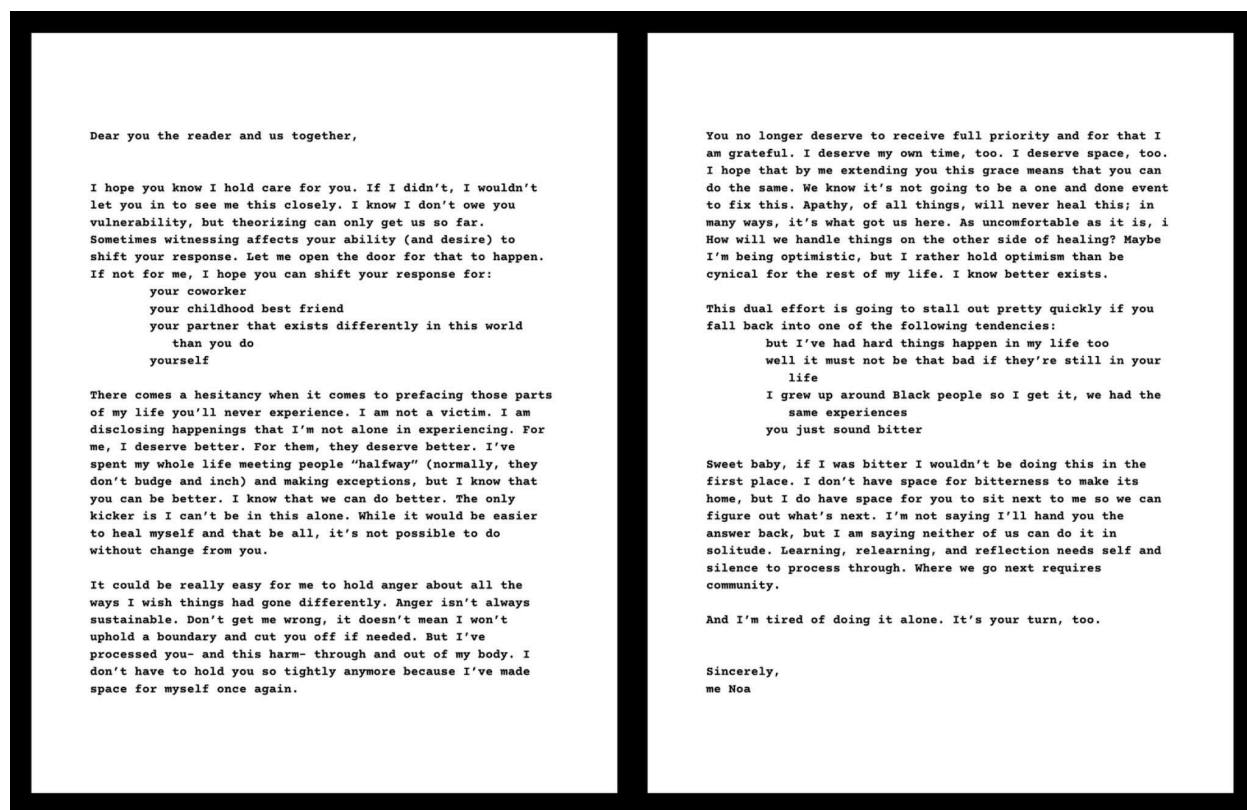
Through written word— in the form of books— I was finally able to communicate why I made my paintings, all the moments contributing to the experience of double-consciousness that I worked so desperately to escape from. While some books included snark and humor, others became much more personal. Regardless, 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)



(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 raspiness.” (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.





(Figure 6: *Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People*– Maria P.P. Root– *A Wall Vinyl*, 44x60” wall adhesive image, 2024)

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.

## **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 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.”

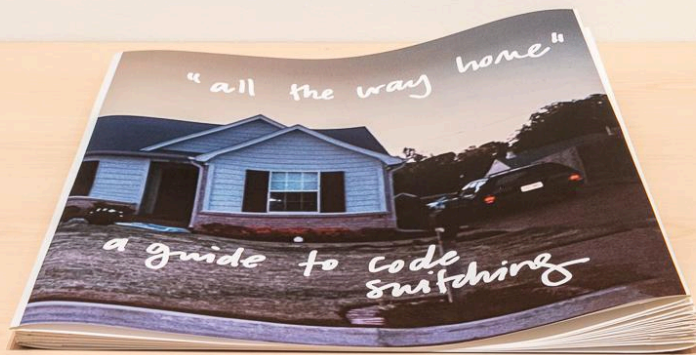
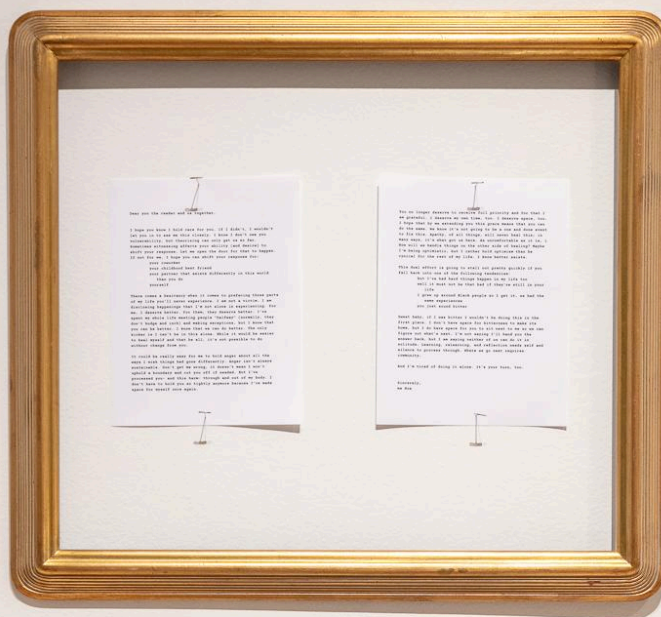
The show gave me space to process, exhale, and laugh at how ridiculous it is that these conversations, happenings, and comments are so common that they can create a relatable show about it. The show holds simple honesty while making space for that to be reciprocated, pointing out the institutions in 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 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



Photograph provided by the artist. All other images are the property of the artist. All other images are the property of the artist.



(Figure 9-13: Installation images from *Of the Conversations I Wish We'd Have*, Noa Fodrie, 2024)

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