

KAI OFFETT

WANDERINGS: 2024 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ARTS THESIS EXHIBITION



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

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Glass Curtain Gallery May 10–June 7, 2024

Wanderings: 2024 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition features the works of eight BFA candidates in Columbia's Fine Arts program. The exhibition, which includes paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints, video, mixed media, and installation works, represents the culmination of four years of development of a cohesive body of work for each artist while earning their degrees.

Participating artists: Paul Bonokollie, Bai Bautista-Buckingham, Karington Cox, Marjorie Hellyer, Robyn Leah, Finch Naradowski, Kai Offett, and Bibiana Saucedo

Wanderings: 2024 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS) and the Art | Design Department, and Joan Giroux, Professor at Columbia College Chicago.

KAI OFFETT

In American society, the Black body has been simultaneously monetized and shamed. In **Kai Offett's** exploration of the experiences of black people who sit at the crossroads of gender, race, and other identities, she primarily focuses on this through the lens of the women in her family. Her current research surrounds African symbols from Ghana such as Sankofa. A word originating from the Akan Tribe, Sankofa is part of a more comprehensive series of Adrinka symbols. Sankofa loosely translates to "go back and get it."

Kai's work puts that phrase into action by capturing memories and past experiences and bringing them to the present in a new way. Historically, black people have had their family histories erased through "paper genocide," a term used to refer to the intentional destruction of documents and records. Kai's work is not only a visual representation of keeping memories alive but also an act of intentionally archiving the history of people, experiences, emotions, and traditions embedded within these erased cultures. Her research continues to inform her work surrounding capturing her family's history, and the history of her people, venerating both in the process. Additionally, she continues to explore the ties between African-American culture and the religious traditions that have developed within the Black community despite chattel slavery and institutional racism.

Materials such as oil paint, acrylic paint, beads, hair, and loose canvas become tools for the task of preserving memories and creating new ones in her mixed media pieces. Her practice also includes lithography and leftover materials created in the process. Her process involves identifying the views imposed on marginalized groups and forming a response through her art. With her work, she aims to create conversations about the society we live in and the things we do because of the invisible systems around us.

Kai Offett is an early career interdisciplinary artist born and currently working in Chicago. Her work focuses on exploring the liminal space between the stereotypes that Black people are subject to, and the histories of such, often based on violent oppression and subjugation. Her practice includes painting, drawing, printmaking, and photography. She has had her work exhibited in the *Black Creativity Juried Art Exhibition* at the Museum of Science and Industry as well as the Porous Gallery at Columbia College Chicago.

LinkedIn: Kai Offett

Instagram: [@KaiOffett](#)



BLIND FAITH, 2022, oil and acrylic on canvas



BLIND FAITH (Detail), 2022, oil and acrylic on canvas



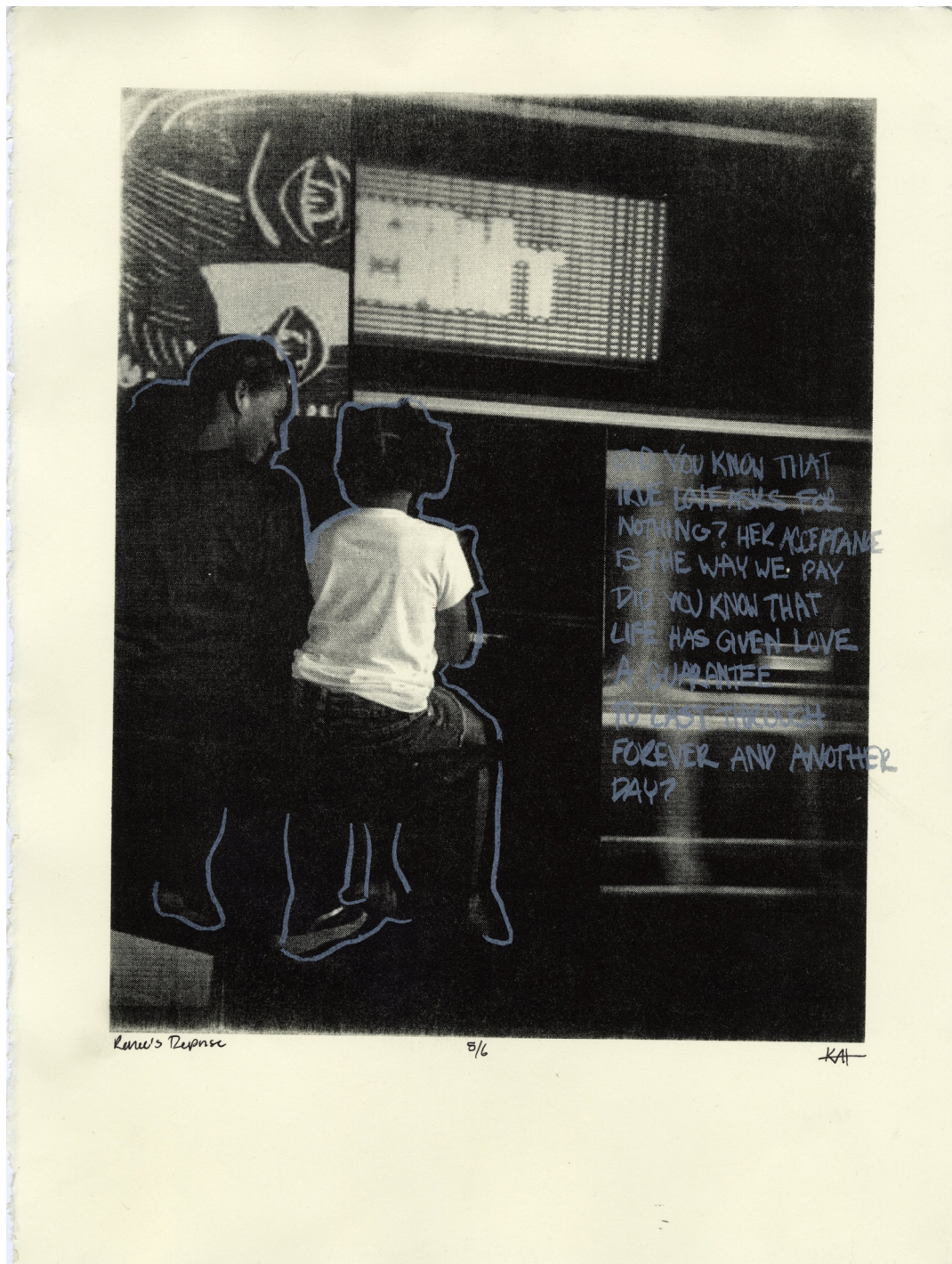
RISE, 2023, graphite, charcoal and ink on newsprint, 18" x 14"



FORTIFIED, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas , 20" x 16"



Forest From the Trees, 2022, intaglio, 15" x 11"



RENEE'S REPRISE, 2022, lithograph, 15" x 11"



RENEE'S REPRISE - SPECIAL EDITION, 2024, ink drawing on lithograph, 15" x 11"



KISSIAH & NICHOLAS CHAVERS, 2023, lithograph, 11" x 14"



EMA & ABA, 2023, lithograph, 15" x 11"

INTERVIEW WITH KAI OFFETT

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

Rachel Manlubatan: In your work, what visual elements do you use to address the intersectionality between Black communities and other identities? Alongside Sankofa, what additional African symbols from Ghana do you use to inform your work?

Kai Offett: The main visual elements that I use to address intersectionality between black communities and other identities most often is braids, appearing repeatedly in my work be it in my paintings, drawings or prints. Braids are significant to the black community because they are often used as a protective style for natural hair. The process for braiding natural hair is a laborious and time-consuming task to engage in, however they last for long periods of time and retain a physical imprint and pattern even after unraveling. I think these aspects of braids are representative of the way connections are formed in society whether those be through familial or platonic relationships. There is an immense amount of labor and time required to form any strong relationship, especially across people who share different identities and experiences. Even if these relationships 'unravel' both parties still leave impacted by this experience of connection and carry it with them in different ways. Through using this form as a ubiquitous symbol across my work I hope to remind others of this universal experience.

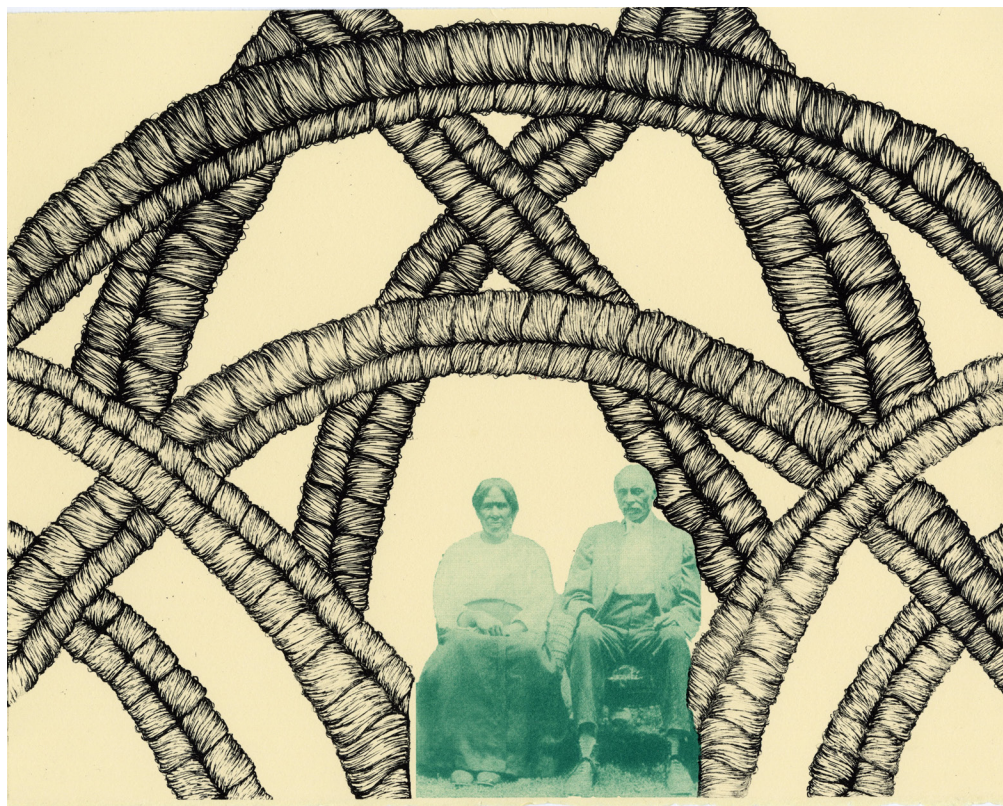
RM: How has creating art regarding Black traditions and experience in American society affected your growth as an artist and as a person?

KO: Creating art regarding Black traditions and experiences specifically in American society has revealed to me the wonderful complexity of the Black diaspora within America. Although Black people have developed a culture that has been magnified and exploited by western media, so many of the intricacies and differences that exist between black Americans

in different states is often overlooked. Due to many different historical events such as the Great Migration, Black Americans developed sub-cultures and slang specific to where they resided, and these distinctions still exist. Black Chicago culture is completely different than Black Texas culture, which is completely different than Black Atlanta culture, so on and so forth! Through continuing to depict black life in my work I hope to bring more light to these differences and continue to educate and immerse myself in viewing Black culture outside of a monolithic Eurocentric perspective.

RM: As you stated, your work seeks to reverse the "paper genocide" of histories, what methods do you use to conduct your research and how do you determine what information goes into your artwork?

KO: The methods I have been exploring to reverse "paper genocide" as far as conducting research has been mainly inspired by exploring my own family lineage. I grew up going to family reunions where my family members passed down stories and emphasized keeping the importance of the physical documentation just as much as oral history. Through this I realized how privileged I was to have access to as much physical documentation about my ancestors as I do especially as an African American who is the descendant of enslaved people. This realization inspires much of my research process which involves finding old family images and official documents that have connections to the experiences I have now as a free Black woman in the 21st Century (good or bad). Finding ways to connect my experiences with my ancestors through documents and photos left by them has been my primary method for determining what information goes into my work.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series and graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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Glass Curtain Gallery: 1104 S Wabash Ave, First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.