

EMISFÉRICA

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First Offering

A. TEBA | Austin, Texas

A convergence of extended media sculpture, performance art, and photography, *First Offering* is a queer assemblage of genres, found objects, and collaborators. Inspired by the aesthetic crossroads of African-descended spiritual traditions across the Americas, this work is especially grounded in the kinship between sacred visual traditions in the U.S. South and the Caribbean (white pigment, nkisi-charms, bottle trees, thread binding, performative masquerade, etc.). Set on the banks and in the bosom of a river fed by a natural spring, literally positioned between the rising sun and the fading moon, this offering is also a mystery of divine timing and positioning that has forced me to extend the vision for what I hoped to create even beyond my most surreal intentions.

The project is built around three sculptural pieces crafted primarily from the detritus of gentrification. Wood pieces, mirror shards, and a broken commode fixture were all salvaged from an expansive open lot in South Austin. Now an impromptu urban park—reclaimed by wild greenery—this very temporary public space was once an entire apartment complex occupied primarily by working-class people of color. Their homes leveled to the ground in anticipation of housing developments priced beyond those vacated, these former occupants still haunt the spaces they were forced to leave behind. Amidst the squatting trees and the gangs of wild flowers, wood, mirror, and porcelain provide energetic reminders of the displaced.

To these talismans of the imperfect erasures of gentrification, I have added other seemingly mundane elements with spiritual significance, including white pigment, brass nails, medicine bottles, cotton, red thread, gold pigment, Florida Water, and VHS cassette tape. I have faith that certain elements asked to be used, manipulated, and juxtaposed in order to achieve a higher intention. I recognize with a humble awe that I am a creative vessel utilizing the objects at hand. And I endeavor to open space to think in other registers that challenge certainty of mind to contend with other ways of knowing. At its heart, *First Offering* is about the trinity of sculptural pieces that extend their secular media into a sacred realm.

Sea Salve, Light Scepter, and Spirit Standard are objects both related to and yet independent of each other that have slowly come to crave a relationship with bodies—bodies in motion,

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balancing bodies, bodies as pedestals. The actual body with which these art items share the frame is that of Odaymara Cuesta Rousseaux, one half of the Cuban lesbian hip hop duo Las Krudas Cubensi. An Ifa practitioner and remarkable visual artist in her own right, Rousseaux lends a big spirited voluptuousness to the work. Especially through Rousseaux's sexy warrior-priestess character and in the setting in which we find her, I readily admit the beautiful influence of Jamaican-American photographer Renée Cox's Queen Nanny of the Maroons series, but especially her stern "River Queen," which also indirectly summons the Yoruba river goddess Oshun.

Acknowledgments

For this project, I gathered a black queer diasporic support team, who, like me, all currently reside in Austin, Texas. This improvised artistic team of black lesbians and gay men proved supremely patient and fearlessly improvisational. In addition to thanking Rousseaux, I wish to offer some deep, sweet gratitude to Nigerian-American photographer and photo editor H. Adewumi, Cuban makeup artist and prop assistant Olivia Kruda Prendes, and my Dominican-American artist assistant Jamel Taylor.

A.TEBA was born in New York City and raised on all the Trinbagonian culture Jamaica, Queens, would allow. He currently lives and works mostly in Austin, Texas, but occasionally in Lowlands, Tobago. This black queer Caribbean-American artist is also currently an Assistant Professor of African & African Diaspora Studies and Anthropology at The University of Texas at Austin. This is the first showing of his work.