

# Afropessimism in the Aviary

by

Petra Floyd

BA, Swarthmore College, 2012

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTERS OF FINE ART

in ART

at Carnegie Mellon University

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Approved by:



---

Katie Hubbard., Project Advisory Committee Member



---

Nica Ross, Project Advisory Committee Member



---

Alisha Wormsley, Project Advisory Committee Member



---

Jon Rubin, MFA Program Director



---

Charlie White, Head of the School



---

Mary Ellen Poole, Dean, College of Fine Arts

Date Degree Conferred: (May, 2022)

## **Afropessimism in the Aviary**

This thesis is an audio work, a conscious turn away from the traditional written thesis form, to sonically trace the conditions of performing and playing with a Black body in the geological epoch of the Anthropocene. The speaker studies her ambivalence about performing, surveying her embraces and refusals of performance as choreographed and chance encounters with hegemonic imaginaries at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, PA. Transiting through self-interrogations, field recordings, direct addresses to the listener, and conversations with loved ones, this experiential audio essay relishes sound as a chronologically flexible container, location, event, and substance. Sampling the artists and scholars Audre Lorde, Frank Wilderson, Sonia Khurana, Neha Choksi, and Kathryn Yusoff, the speaker considers how breath, clowning, play and the erotic are strategies of passing through and disordering anti-black narratives as a Black performer and audience member.

## Acknowledgements

Katie Hubbard  
Nica Ross  
Sharmistha Ray  
Alisha Wormsley

Jon Rubin  
Julie Azzam

Angeline Harmon  
Tony Moaton

Lyndon Barrois, Jr.  
Hajira Qazi

Lena Chen

Jessica Fuquay  
Marianne Hoffmeister Castro  
Matthew McGaughey

Marie Alarcon  
Carmel Brown  
Dorothy Floyd  
Najee Haynes-Follins  
Ricardo Iamuuri  
Cyree Jarelle Johnson  
Aya Kaufman  
Jennifer Kidwell  
Naeem Martinez  
Donna Oblongata  
J.D. Stokely

## Bibliography

- Abumrad, Jad and Shima Oliiae. "Neon Moss." Produced by WNYC Studios. *Dolly Parton's America*. November 5, 2019. Podcast, MP3 audio, 43:18. <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/dolly-partons-america/episodes/neon-moss>.
- "Anthropocene." In *National Geographic Resource Library*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1996-. Accessed November 14, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/anthropocene>.
- Chude-Sokei, Louis. *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Technopoetics*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015.
- Ekomané, Jessica. "Open Sources #4: West and Central Africa." *Open Sources*. September 18, 2018. Podcast, MP3 audio, 1:29:11. <https://cashmereradio.com/episode/open-sources-4-west-and-central-africa>.
- Khurana, Sonia, Julianna Huxtable, Wu Tsang, Victoria Sin, and Melati Suryodarmo. "Artist Talk | Body Work: Performance and Practice." Art Basel. March 29, 2019. YouTube video, 1:25:58. [https://youtu.be/\\_OpvZNqEZMY](https://youtu.be/_OpvZNqEZMY).
- Lorde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic" In *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*, 87-91. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007.
- Wilderson III, Frank B. *Afropessimism*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020.
- Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018.