

Bend Down Boutique: non-spaces

Pauline Marcelle has a story to tell, a tale not of insidious histories and ambivalent traditions; no, it is instead of lands enriched with endless poetic possibilities. These are stories – paintings, performances, communities – that find an unexpected sense of potential in the often-dubious fragments left in the wake of colonialism. Marcelle's honesty is startling, her compassion refreshing, and her physical presence demanding in Bend Down Boutique, her latest body of work. Digitally manipulated prints and sculptural forms reflect upon themes of globalization through the consumption of second hand clothing sold at informal boutiques across Africa and the Caribbean while inviting the viewer to question their own positions of agency and access. This body of work originated off the Ghanaian coast, where Marcelle happened upon these small forms, sculptures she calls them, bundles of second hand clothing. Locally they are called 'obroni wa wo', a phrase in Twi meaning "clothing of the dead whites": ghostly remnants of a pervasive Western legacy. They were a new set of discoveries, autonomous unto themselves. Sets of traumas, ruptures, and irreconcilable fragmentations; nested with the abilities to transcend their equivocal purpose and fate, one obscured through cultural obsolescence.

Marcelle in a sense saw herself within these bundles of clothes. Entangled, made from a lovely syncretism of pattern, color and form; embroiled with stories oft ridden with trouble and oppression, but lying now on the horizon, forming a new landscape filled with discovery and imagination. Bend Down Boutique is a metaphor, self-reflexive, of Pauline Marcelle herself.

These images become charged organic forms through her process of layering paint, excavating previously unforeseen structures, formal and sociopolitical, reformed and constructed into an amorphous sense of unity through subtle and nuanced relationships of color. Race, gender, class, history: these are all part of a palette which composes our experienced life and its felt realities. These are the nuanced layers at the foundation of Marcelle's large-scale paintings. Her use of primary colors pictorially renders the commonality formed through diverse identities. They are ubiquitous, belonging to everyone and no one, providing the potential for a third space, a new imaginary outside of past oppressions.

What is of particular importance in Marcelle's painting are the regions of pattern devoid fully of color, white washed grays, fluctuating non-spaces, in which the potential of the whole world can be found. For in these gray passages exist all the colors of the world, mapping endless scapes influenced, but never bound, by their social constructs. They are something entirely new. Marcelle takes us back to remind us of the challenges and troubles that face the so-called "developing world," only to re-emphasize the beauty of what can emerge.

This is a love affair, you see: a love for people, for art, for life. Bend Down Boutique is a story of love, of Pauline Marcelle, of how, entangled upon the marginalized shores of our societies, exists a series of limitless horizons, bundled in the most uncanny of forms, taking on new perspectives, willing to synthesize, to build out of the ruined remnants of Western empires landscapes without borders, seething with the potential to not just repair, but create anew.

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