Displacement, Spiritual Mobility and Retention
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How often is the Western static functionality of art set as a default, rejecting, dismissing and or erasing artworks that are instead understood as objects that require activation, ritual, use in order to function? The staticity of work that we associate with the Western canon has been constructed in fairly recent years with the removal of sacred objects, venerated with ritual for centuries, that found themselves displaced into environments for which they were not created. In the process, the capacity for spiritual mobility, or the transplanting of spiritual practice into these new environments, was not only stifled, but gestures of prayer themselves would be deemed inappropriate within the museum structures that would come to house these works. This is true of the altarpieces that shift from the church to the museum or objects that are moved from public space as gestures of power to the comfort and exclusivity of the indoors. Often the cry for preservation and care, or the idea that these objects are at risk in their ritual or vernacular environments drives these conceptions, and the distancing, absenting and obscuring of other forms of engagement with these objects becomes a sit in for protection and an impetuous for defense.

What rituals might we reimagine or retain? How might we bring them into the sterility if not outright hostility of exhibition spaces as a form of resistance? Could they in turn function as speculative anticipations of the awakening of works deadened by a lack of engagement or a suggestion of interactions that are yet to come? How might we avoid falling prey to the presumptions embedded in an association of the Western canon with a conservative preservationist framing, but also engage in a critical awareness of the distancing of art itself from our lived experiences in the process? Who has this distancing, this obfuscating of the function of art served? What is actually being preserved? What does it mean to read statements regarding restitution of the life force of these works issued by institutions that can be understood as an articulation of mechanisms of defense, designed to hold in place a dominant order? Mechanisms that employ the language of caring for what is archivable? How might we reconcile and remain vigilant and cognizant not only of all that was never intended to be archived, but also all that which was intentionally, structurally and systematically excluded from the archive?

The work of Raziel Perin is anchored in forms of activation that insist on movement beyond the static unchanging archivable object. His use of organic

materials, the initiation of sculptures through ritual covering, frying, burning and physical interaction is part of a framework that pushes notions of use and function to the fore. This framework is aligned with the relationship of artistic productions across history that extend beyond and ground themselves outside of the Western context. The relationship between objects and community, the understanding of the spirit of objects themselves and the inclusion of these objects into life cycles, including initiation and burial, carry through a crucial consideration of at the heart of what Christine Sharpe refers to when she declares pastness as a position. Anchored in the sankofian conception of the past in relation to the present, as an indicator of the future that is yet to come, as a reminder of roots and ancestry, as a guide for paths yet uncharted, his practice places an emphasis on the ethereal, the fleeting that resists notions of unchanging permanence.

The past that Perin references and is fed by requires engagement, reconsideration, repositioning and time to remain not only meaningful but relevant. His is a practice born from obsessive drawing that emerges as a form of speaking to self that leaves no space for amputating judgment. Freeform notes and lines are collaged with encounters, references and diaristic entries seemingly enveloping every impulse and reflection in language that is textual or visual. Annotations, restatements, adjustments and reworkings are key and central to these note books just as much as a freshness and immediacy define their language. Evocations of spiritual symbols and imagery anchored in broad range of Afro-diasporic spiritual practices are the crux of a broad range of works grounded in ideologies, perceptions and ways of knowing that were transported across the waters of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, shifted and adapted in the process in order to maintain conceptions of relevance often fortified rather than diminished by displacement. The spirituality that guides these works resonate with an urgency to remain anchored and connected to the ancestral realm.

Raziel Perin’s work is grounded in this diasporic spiritual retention and the capacity of organic elements to resist the cultural currency of permanence. The arrogance of permanence is questioned and dismantled with its attempt to position itself as a carrier of intrinsic value washed away like a removal of a veil and a return to the earth of materials so violently claimed from it. Looking to the protection of Orishas evoked in Vodun and practices that evoke healing and repair, Perin’s work pushes for a consideration of collectivity as posited in our relation to the natural world and to those that preceded us. The displacement of

the individual through symbolism and iconography embedded across diaspora is the subject of a series of drawings that are rendered in steel echoing the protective gates of sanctuaries and sites of refuge. These works surround but do not enclose the viewer, anchored in perishable and ever changing materials such as yam, garlic, unfired clay and palm hearts, these works indicate a restorative power that is interior, one that can only be enacted through grounding within psycho-spiritual meditations on the linkages between physical and mental health.

The series of works called *Mami,* composed of yucca roots carved into siren like forms with semi precious stones embedded in their abdomen are just one example of works that conceptually and physically embody notions of the persistently changing, as if a reminder of the relationship between nature and ritual or the non-fixity of form and meaning. These works conform to Perin's notion of feeding the ancestors transforming the material of food into a carrier of veneration. The impermanence of the root itself shriveling and hardening over time evades the preciousness we often associate with delicately sculpted works. The artist applies oils to their surfaces which is in turn absorbed through the incised skin and exposed flesh of these objects. The semi precious stones, amethyst carrying its own healing properties, are dug into the naval of these Mami Wata inspired figures. The stones are either ingested by the form, becoming completely enveloped in the changing skin of the sculpture and vanishing its minerals beyond visibility, or, by contrast, the skin pushes the stone out almost as a rejection of its physicality from within. This sense of movement, of constant change, is the essence of these works, which sooth and heal while rejecting and dismantling the canonical gaze that they refuse to sit within. The oily residue that these works produce, dripping onto their support, like the scents that they emit, permeating the environment around them, persist like reminders of the transient nature of artistic practice and the futility of attempts to hold them still.

Perin's works and approaches towards artistic activation harken back to a performativity that is urgently necessary as a carrier of ways of knowing past and present, imbued with what he refers to as sacred breath. The air, atmosphere and environment round the work impacting and shaping the capacity to see these works, pushing beyond form, yet transported by it, beyond the gestures that create and initiate, beyond the trappings of a structural pre-configuration of viewership and consumption of works that is void of the spirituality for which they are carriers. Like the artist's series of fried drawing which vanish or shift towards the blur of recognition, what remains beyond the gesture of creation is a product of retentions and reconciliations food for ancestors that nourishes in the now.