

THE BLACK EMBODIMENTS STUDIO

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In collaboration with The Jacob Lawrence Gallery, Directed by Emily Zimmerman

PROJECT NARRATIVE

The Black Embodiments Studio is a writing incubator that brings graduate students from a range of disciplines and knowledge-based practices together to query how definitions of blackness are produced and expressed through visual, aural, and affective realms—engaging three domains that underwrite the physical and metaphysical dimensions of inhabiting black skin. Organized as a residency, The Black Embodiments Studio provides students (aka “residents”) a structure of support to develop short pieces of writing concerning black embodiments in the contemporary, post-1970s moment. Residents deeply engage with innovative modes of writing and of presenting information that will enhance their critical dexterity surrounding race and embodiments, while developing their writing to be accessible to multiple audiences, ultimately shaping their practice as public intellectuals. Importantly, The Studio provides residents access to artists, scholars, and curators whose work on contemporary black embodiments models the innovation, accessibility, and flexibility *as well as* criticality that residents strive for in their own writing. The Black Embodiments Studio subsequently invites one artist, scholar, and/or curator to themselves be “in residence” for two days each quarter, during which time they participate in an intimate, engaged workshop with residents’ works alongside their own, as well as give a public presentation on their practice.

In focusing on embodiments, plural, The Studio highlights the term as a *verb* that invokes activity and movement, as well as the temporary and fleeting; as a dynamic category of analysis that is accessible across disciplines, the language embodiment clears space to consider the repeated, performative constitution of blackness while remaining attuned to the material consequences of being black. To be sure, The Studio is staged at a time when the traumatic legacies of being black are continually reinvigorated by increasingly visible, spectacular violence done to black people, particularly at the hands of the police. At the same time that black bodies are targets of violence, blackness—defined here as the cultural productions of people with black skin, as well as the set of cultural norms, values, and senses of being shared amongst black people with common histories—is endlessly mined for social, cultural, and economic wealth. The Black Embodiments Studio recognizes the status of blackness as always produced within this dialectic of terror and/or pleasure. Guided by Paul Gilroy’s concept of black politics that exist on a lower frequency, The Studio specifically pursues investigations into those quotidian, often-mundane moments where blackness is produced outside of (while never being inextricable from) a rhetoric of violence. To do so, The Studio steeps residents in the work of contemporary black makers across a variety of aesthetic and theoretical practices—including dance, visual art, sound, and new media, as well as

those working through quotidian performance theory and poetics—engaging them in works that model a critical writing practice that attends to the many and diverse politics, practices, and pleasures surrounding black embodiments.

The Black Embodiments Studio proceeds from the assumption that we are facing three crises of writing, and seeks to develop writers whose work bridges the kinds of criticism that is staged in academic writing, contemporary art writing, and writing in the larger public sphere. First, the continued disconnect between the increasingly outmoded writing styles required to secure legitimacy in the academy and the writing styles that characterize much of the world beyond it. Second, that contemporary art, especially surrounding artists of color, continues to need writers who possess creative and engaging writing skills as well as the research and interpretive skills needed to historicize, contextualize, and interpret aesthetic practices through the prism of political economy. Finally, there remains a dearth of *local* art criticism: writing on contemporary aesthetic practices within Seattle itself. The Studio's efforts to bring artists, scholars, and curators to Seattle contributes much-needed perspective on black embodiments to the area's art community, to be sure, while providing opportunities for The Studio residents to assert themselves as valuable members of that community as well.

COMPONENTS OF THE BLACK EMBODIMENTS STUDIO, 2017-2018

The Black Embodiments Studio is structured to foster multiple models of, and levels of feedback surrounding, writing and critical intellectual practice as they intersect with questions of race and aesthetic practices. Over the course of an academic year, residents will (1) investigate diverse forms of creative writing surrounding black embodiments; (2) workshop works-in-progress with other Studio residents; (3) directly interface with guest residents whose work as leading theorists and practitioners whose work models critical and creative reflection on black embodiments; (4) and present their works to the University and Seattle community. The modular shape and scope of The Studio leaves much room for expansion after its inaugural 2017-2018 year.

RESIDENTIAL INCUBATOR

The residential incubator is the umbrella container for The Black Embodiments Studio activity. The incubator is a semi-formal gathering akin to a traditional graduate seminar, but is not officially aligned with coursework and/or thesis timelines. The incubator allows residents the time and space to think creatively and to develop a more flexible writing practice and tone, while also engaging with the theories and methods of their existing considerations of black embodiments in perhaps more expansive ways.

During incubator sessions, residents will be immersed in models of writing that bridge the academic and non-academic audiences, paying particular attention to the genre of exhibition catalogs as well as to the performative writing embraced by the discipline of Performance Studies,

which itself draws on the theories and innovations of black feminist writing. In these sessions, residents will also develop and workshop at least 1 piece of short-form writing concerning black embodiments. This writing is not meant to exacerbate residents's already-busy schedules, nor to add additional sites or objects to their already existing thesis projects. The goals of these writings are to practice new methodologies, forms, and tones that will give residents practice at making their projects (and themselves) accessible. By the end of the academic year, residents will come away with pieces that can be published in a variety of outlets that press against the boundaries of academic writing such as *Performa Magazine*, *Art Lies*, and *Artforum* and the journal of the Jacob Lawrence Gallery, *Monday*; writing that can be incorporated into their larger thesis projects; and/or writing that can be further revised into publishable peer-review articles.

GUEST RESIDENCY: PUBLIC PRESENTATION + WORKSHOP SESSION

Each quarter, a guest artist, scholar, and/or curator will be invited to be “in residence” with The Black Embodiments Studio for two days at the University of Washington. Residents of The Studio directly engage with guest residents whose work models and/or benefits from multi-faceted approaches to writing on black embodiments, and who in turn provide invaluable feedback to residents' own practices. Each guest resident will participate in a closed workshop session with The Black Embodiments Studio, allowing everyone an intimate setting to exercise their insight and expertise, and giving residents the particular opportunity to receive structured conversation and feedback from leading thinkers and makers. During their time with The Black Embodiments Studio, each guest resident will give a public presentation of their work as it bridges academic formalism with creative criticality.

OPEN STUDIO

While The Black Embodiments Studio values the intimacy of closed workshop sessions, it equally values giving residents the opportunity to present their work to the University community and to local stakeholders in Seattle. In late Spring, The Studio will culminate in an Open Studio: a public, half-day session where residents will have the opportunity to present the works they have developed over the course of their residency. The Open Studio will represent the accumulation of thought surrounding black embodiments on campus, highlighting the University as a key thought leader in a national conversation.