



Xpace Cultural Centre
2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6
www.xpace.info

Taymah Armatrading

Place of Be(longing)

September 6 – October 5, 2019

TL;DR.

Place of Be(longing) is a video installation aimed at disturbing the historic notion of Canada as a sanctuary for racialized individuals. The work centers the dialogue of five West Indian Canadians invited to the table for a traditional Caribbean meal. This work functions as both a method of retracing and representing silenced black histories and as an assertion of black identity. This work addresses issues of representation, systemic erasure, and anti-black violence within a Canadian context. At its core is the aim to contextualize these histories, combatting the perpetual erasure of the black presence in Canada.

An Offering

“ DUMPLINGS¹

A familiar mode of cooking with flour to people of the Caribbean;
by people I mean women who do 99.9% of the cooking in the Caribbean.
Dumplings for frying and dumplings for boiling:
Dumplings with sugar, yeast or salt.
Boiling dumplings with casava flour, cornmeal or oatmeal.

NB. A good boiled dumpling is one which grabs your teeth as
you try to bite it and squelches with satisfaction as you bite.

You will need:

8oz self raising flour

½ tsp salt

Oil

¾ cup of water

*For sweet dumplings add 2 tbs of
sugar*

*For light dumplings add ½ oz
yeast ”*

An account on the work

This exhibition is called *Place of Be(longing)* and is made by Taymah
Armatrading.

Taymah is a Black, trans and queer Toronto based artist.

Their work is grounded in discourses around Black subjectivity, African &
Caribbean diaspora, foodways, and rigorous critical art practice.

They are interested in activating this research through their art practice in
order to push Black histories and Black voices into a visual realm, surpassing
their longing for belonging, into a space where they refuse erasure.

¹ This recipe is written by Claudette Williams and is featured in *Turning the Tables: Recipes and*

Williams, Claudette. “ Caribbean Dumplings”. *Turning the Tables: Recipes and Reflections from Women*.
Compiled by Sue O’Sullivan. Sheba Feminist Publishers: London,UK, 1987

Place of Be(longing) is an installation based work that seeks to unsettle the notion of Canada as a sanctuary for racialized people.

This full-room installation features a table set from a traditional west Indian kitchen, a carpet, a projection of a video installation, a hutch with familial objects and plates and knickknacks from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. At times there may be an offering of Sorrel.. If you know what it is, enjoy.

The work is 22 minutes in duration.

The viewer is invited into the space to sit, observe, reflect, and then engage with the dialogue.

In Taymah's words, "the realization of this project means the creation of a space that disrupts the colonial ideologies pervading the existing Canadian social and political systems. The space is a starting point to an envisioned possibility of progression and black liberation specifically within a Canadian context. It also stands as a space of comfort for racialized bodies, where Caribbean culture, food, and memories are centralized, inviting room for both: participants, and viewers—to breathe, unburden, and heal."

The video does this by centring five Black, Caribbean Canadians at a table in a home for a traditional Caribbean meal..

Here, this meal is a place maker; the cutlery, dishes, table cloth and mats - markers of class, culture and origins.

Taymah sought to use food and story as a medium with which they could generate comfort, conversation and truth-telling.

In this video installation, conversations often heard in Black backyards, BBQs and in the confines of basements are brought to this white walled gallery space intentionally.

Through this kind of insertion, Taymah is setting the tone for a space where if the audience is given the space and time, a sense of care and patience may rise to the surface

Using their extensive knowledge of staging and years production experience both in front—as a long time actor—and behind the camera—shooting documentaries and films—Taymah sets the stage for something that is meant to be witnessed, meant to have an audience.

If eating together, talking and laughing together is an act of communion, what is proposed in the watching and listening of this communion. Who does the audience become?

For one thing, they are speaking to the ways in which the Black Caribbean experience in Canada has its own centre.

This centre is a place that is rich, diverse, overlapping and also distinct. This centre is a place of power, a place that as writer and scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says "is the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there can never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world have their culture and environment as the centre. The relevant question [is] therefore of how one centre relates to other centres."²

How does your centre relate to this centre?

Much like the recipe for dumplings, the space to bear witness to this work, is an offering.

For some, while watching this, you may feel pushed to a periphery, but do not panic. Stay present as you witness. Like cooking Caribbean food, the calibration from your centre to this centre, just takes time and love - that's it.

This creates a site of intervention, where Black experience in the shadow of slavery in Canada is pushed within and beyond the frame.

This site of intervention becomes one that can name and contextualize the current erasure of Black Caribbeans. It does this by reaching as far back as the enslavement of thousands in Canada until August 1834, to the more

² Taken from Nigerian curator Bisi Silva's forward in *Asiko: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa* (2017). Here she cites this quote from Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993).

recent shared trauma that was the Halifax Explosion in 1917, in which a French ship full of explosives crashed, killing thousands of black folks on the coast, with those affected being offered little to no support at the time due to ongoing racism. By naming these events, the subjects in this work are then able to also make visible for the audience how racism functions and how erasure is employed, to this day.

In this way, *Place of Be(longing)* functions as a kind of offering. One that is an old story told in a new moment with fresh eyes, plights and faces. One that is rightly inserting itself into many other narratives of the Afro-Caribbean diasporas.

Healing and reclaiming of space is part of why this work is so needed and why it is relevant now.

The subjects in this video, through stories of migration, discrimination, food, family, loss and of course love, present an opportunity to contextualize the Black Caribbean experience as one that is tender and worthy of witnesses and recording.

In documenting this moment through recording, Taymah is creating an homage to members of the Caribbean diaspora that stands as a way of locating *one another*, like an antenna.

The esteemed poet, novelist and activist Dionne Brand has said of the Black Caribbean experience, “we’re rooted here, and they can’t pull us up.”³ *Place of Be(longing)* affirms this through its resolve to take a seat at the table, centre stage and to pick up the first dumpling.

- Chiedza Pasipanodya

³ Bristow, Peggy, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, And Adrienne Shadd. *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. University of Toronto Press, 1994. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442683273>.