



**Project  
Space**



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Eve Tagny, *Sanctuaries*

**October 26- December 1, 2018**

There's a scene in the recent remake of *Roots* the miniseries, where Matilda says, "Blessed is this earth, because my people lie beneath it. Blessed is the rain because it moistens their faces. Blessed is the wind because it carries their names back to us."<sup>1</sup>

Earth as our planet and as a handful of dirt, as a small amount of soil, and by another name as land, is sacred to Indigenous Peoples including Continental and Diasporic Africans. One of the reasons for this, is that is where our people are buried as a final resting place. In many cultural and spiritual practises across the African Continent and African Diaspora, the living and the dead co-exist on territories that are ancestral or adopted homelands. The dead return to the land and become it over a period of time. The land sustains the living; they live off of it, make their homes on it, etc. Thus, life, death and renewal are ever-present cycles in the landscape and in our lives. Simply, we are the land.

Loss, absense, grief and mourning, both public and private and in accordance with the cycles of nature, are palpable themes in Eve Tagny's exhibition, *Sanctuaries*. Tagny reflects; "I think my personal aim is to also offer a quiet space of recollection-contemplation."<sup>2</sup> In this installation-based work, Tagny presents to the audience natural elements such as a mounds of dirt, a loaded material signifying life and death, cycles of

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<sup>1</sup> "Part 4." *Roots: Season 1*. Writ Alex Haley, Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal. Dir Bruce Beresford.

<sup>2</sup> Tagny, Eve. *Sanctuaries*. Interview by Bishara Elmi. 2018

renewal and ultimately fragility. The concept of a sanctuary itself suggests a refuge, a sacred space, a sanctified space or monument, a holy place, a place of reverence, a place of worship, meditation and finally, a place of respite. The themes present in this exhibition are sanctuary and sanctity of nature, of life, of death, of death rites and ceremonies, graves, tombs and memorials as a shared experience, on which one can meditate and reflect upon, both in the gallery space and long after the exhibition run.

Navigating between writing, photography, video and plant-based installations, Tagny explores themes pertaining to body politics and the ever-changing definitions of hybrid identities. Most recently, her practice has focused on mending traumatic disruptions through nature.

Each component forming the installation discloses a tension between a romanced experience of nature in a controlled environment, and the instances when nature reclaims space. This tension reveals how life, death, renewal, and preservation, can manifest in one's environment. On the far end of the Project Space, there is a large photograph of a quarry printed on vinyl. The scale of the vinyl renders the sublimity of such human made environment, one that paradoxically grants comfort while demanding humility. Facing the vinyl, there is a large mound of soil, appearing to be a grave site or a sort of natural occurrence that can be found on a construction site or in a garden. The mound is carefully adorned with mementos such as flowers and small rocks. There is also a video entombed in the pile of dirt featuring a montage of different bodies of water that are contrasting one another. Calm streams and rivers overlap with a roaring pool of water flooding a subway station in Berlin. The idealized perception of nature as a refuge is thus contradicted by the unleashing of a forceful stream disrupting the rigid urban fabric- as a call to remember the intrinsic untamability of natural elements. Furthermore, the inclusion of water sources in this installation highlights its role in mourning and renewal rituals as a cleansing agent for the living and the dead.

Within the installation, the visitors become performers, mourners, grievors and simultaneously collaborators. Interacting with the contained natural elements and created sanctity of the space, they are also witnesses to rites of grief and mourning surrounding them.

The side walls of the space are completely covered with clear plastic curtains, of the type used for painting or gardening. On one side wall there are tiny plastic pockets hooked onto the larger plastic curtain containing dried and fresh flowers and rocks adorned with golden leaves.

Creating a sanctuary and meditative space of sacredness that the spirit and vibration of the space strikes you silent and sombre and quietly powerful which is the charged and calm energy that is felt by devotees in holy spaces.

On another side wall an image titled *Renewal* is projected. *Renewal* consists of a photograph of dirt with plants growing out of it, green, lush and full of life with a sprinkling of fall leaves appearing signifying the start of autumn. The artist says that; "Images are testaments and vestiges of personal and collective memory, thus informing our present and future. By integrating them into nature's fabric, they get reinterpreted, they can dissolve and reintegrate the natural cycle, mend traumatic ruptures and reinstate a sense of normalcy and continuity."<sup>3</sup>

Death and decay are happening alongside life, the ever present cycle in nature that is a certainty and has a solace to that certainty of impermanent permanence.

Mourning and grief rituals both in public and private spheres, reflect our love for the dead and how we continue to have a relationship with them after they die. In many traditions death doesn't end relationships, it just changes them. Ancestor Reverence is one of the most profound ways we sustain relationships with the dead in many Continental African and across African Diaspora cultures. Memorials and memorializations through monuments or actions are ways in which love is expressed, loss

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<sup>3</sup> Tagny, Eve. *Sanctuaries*. Interview by Bishara Elmi. 2018

is meditated on and private and shared pain is expressed and witnessed. Leaving space for the the healing process to begin. Healing is an ongoing process where remembering becomes a constant act leaving markings onto the landscapes and oftentimes with monuments.

Memorials and memorialization through monuments are apparent in the cairns that Tagny has stacked on top of one another in front of the west wall of the gallery. In many cultures across the world cairns serve as either tombs or memorials to the dead that often blend in with their natural environments. Interestingly, these cairns also commingle with the vinyl and the projection, mimicking grieving sites found in nature.

In conversation about the intentions behind this piece Tagny states that she wished “to create a site-specific installation at the junction of found natural materials and lens-based expressions, that would form an open sanctuary for these times of upheaval. Taking into account the underlying privileges of being able to inhabit and occupy this specific space, in this temporary sanctuary, nature would act as a guide to counteract oppressive structures and find the bases for new decolonized, intersectional and sustainable futurities.<sup>4</sup>”

In *Sanctuaries*, one is invited to remember through a set of rites, and to witness one another. The presence of nature here functions as a continuous cycle in which solace can be found, traumatic interruptions can be healed from and transformed into places where we integrate our lives and deaths. This exhibition generates a sacred and meditative space of prayer, worship, reverence and peace, opening this experience as a collective. One may leave struck by the quiet power of the installation or haunted long after in reflection.

-Bishara Elmi

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<sup>4</sup> Tagny, Eve. *Sanctuaries*. Interview by Bishara Elmi. 2018