



Visuals

Veiled Sight: Un/Masking Identities and Experiences

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Gender Articulated – Visual Language and the Un/Seeable Self

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Shari Phoenix

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Marlon James

Masculinity in the Anglophone Caribbean presents itself as a rich site for interrogation. It is not fixed or tangible, I see it is a set of expectations and prescribed behaviours set out for men and boys. As a Jamaican man, I come from a society which upholds these ideas of hardness in the different enactments of maleness, where sexuality often appears as a central organising principle. Based on my experiences and interactions with men from different countries and backgrounds across the region, this is a shared principle “embedded in historical, political, and sociocultural conditions of a particular society” (Mortley and Senior 2022). Traditionally, softness and displays of vulnerability are reserved for romantic relationships, major upheavals in life or critical illness.

In recent years, I have noticed a shift in how some Caribbean men and boys discuss, regard and demonstrate vulnerability as they establish relationships/ friendships and lean on each other for support. Taking from online (gendered) discourse, as well as my own observations and interpersonal interactions, I see a younger generation disrupting these traditional ideas of how cis-gender (heterosexual) men show support for each other, demonstrating emotions, openness and physical affection.

This series, titled *Pink Matter*, was produced from a guerilla photoshoot with two young men. They wanted to experiment with different elements to tell a story of difference and brotherhood. What emerged was something different for me, the artist. I spent the day with them moving from location to location. I quietly listened to them and observed their interactions. What struck me was their connection. There was a freedom and vulnerability in how they shared and related to each other, the things they said, their physical interactions. This was not something I was accustomed to witnessing in male relationships.

There was an intimacy that emanated from their free expressions of affection and encouragement, as well as their understanding of each other. It allowed for a story bigger than their intended message. The choice of black and white for me is an indication of the hard versus soft lines of hegemonic versus subordinate masculinity. The lace, a transparent material is symbolic of a departure from the solid shroud of prescribed male behaviours. It signals the permeable nature of masculinity as we reckon with its historical impact on Caribbean society, and the disruptions some younger men are attempting as they demonstrate healthier attitudes and behaviours toward each other and younger generations through socialisation. The movement of the water – a universal symbol of life and transformation – washes over them. As the wave gradually builds and washes over them, it unmask and reveals them. This unmasking is contrary to what masculinities scholar Michael Kimmel (1997) referred to when discussing fear that men will unmask and emasculate other men who do not fit the definition of “real” men. Rather, this unmasking is symbolic of attitudinal and behavioural shifts. We are witnessing a gradual or slow transformation of what we understand Caribbean masculinity to be in the younger generations. While there may be far more expert persons to theorise on how these shifts are occurring, as an artist who is interested in Caribbean gender relations and masculinity, I offer this series as my contribution to what I see as the shifting landscape of Caribbean masculinity, and the opportunities it presents for improved social and gender relations.

References

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- Mortley, Natasha and Keino Senior. 2022. “Jamaican Realities and Masculinities and Sexualities: Where have we come since Michel Foucault?” In *Gendered Lives: Global Issues*, edited by Nelson, K. and Fernandez, N., 267-286. New York: Suny Press.



Marlon James, *Pink Matter I*, 2020.
Digital photography.



Marlon James, *Pink Matter II*, 2020.
Digital photography.



Marlon James, ***Pink Matter III***, 2020.
Digital photography.



Marlon James, *Pink Matter IV*, 2020.
Digital photography.

Ray Arcadio

I was born in the Dominican Republic and emigrated to the US in 1975. Since then I've been absorbing American pop culture, a Eurocentric education, and the multicultural influences of my family, friends and colleagues. In high school, I became obsessed with the idea of icons, logos and symbols. My art considers the importance of iconography and symbols on our psyche. The work encompasses paintings, drawings and sculpture that I combine with pop imagery and street art elements. Whether in the form of superheroes or through a stylisation of portraiture, I make reference to my Caribbean roots. I superimpose "tribal/urban" abstractions over classical elements to address the shocking effect American culture has had on my Caribbean mind.

In my Messenger series, the central protagonist is the woman. This series is inspired by my mother, who raised six of us alone, taking us out of poverty in the Dominican Republic to college graduates, business and property owners in the USA – and did it with unbelievable spiritual and physical strength, resilience and cunning. The series is also informed by my wife, who is the rock in my life and a strong, passionate, super intelligent mother, teacher, wife and big-hearted angel, and my daughter, who is beyond her years, determined and fearless, and a queen in her own right.

The use of masks in my work is a central theme and originates from my African roots. In African culture, masks serve as a way for people to communicate with the spirit world. The spirits that take up residence in the masks can be ancestors or natural entities. They also serve as educational tools, as part of rituals to teach social roles and physical control or to settle disputes. Masking in my art is also inspired by my love for superheroes and their mythical and symbolic importance in pop culture, and how masks are used to conceal identities and expressions while sheltering us from judgment. Throughout my work you will see visual juxtapositions of artistic styles as well as geometric structures and the use of 17th and 18th century Spanish fashion propped against Afro-Caribbean graphics. I employ the use of bold colours, gestures, outlines and cartoons as a nod to my love for graffiti and comic books. There are also references to curly hair, Taino and African symbols that I use to keep the culture in people's consciousness.

Ray Arcadio, **The Ebon Venus**, 2023
Acrylic on canvas; 48 x 48 in.





Ray Arcadio, **Remix: Don't Touch My Hair**, 2023
Acrylic on wood, foam, board and canvas; 30 x 49 in.



Ray Arcadio, **Head Dress**, 2023
Acrylic on wood and board; 30 x 50 in.



Ray Arcadio, *Blue Velvet*, 2023.
Acrylic on canvas; 30 x 40 in.

Shari Phoenix

This work offers a liberatory space for the female form, which has been dictated by the male gaze/perspective. My *Pin up Rebels* series wages war against the representation of women as we have been historically imagined by men. I accomplish this by reconstructing the female form through costume. The costume itself is a naked female in her most natural state, with exaggerated elements.

I use references from Gil Elvgren, who is known for his paintings of pin-up models. The models and their posters are symbolic of the ideal and mass-produced woman, typically represented by men, for consumption by men. For this special issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, I incorporated tropical landscapes to further reflect on ideas of staging and setting, as they relate to costuming and performing gendered identities.

The *Pin up Rebels* aim to foster new ideas of individual perfection and reject mainstream standards of beauty.



Shari Phoenix, **Pin up Rebel #20 Floating and Sunken Lands**, 2024
Watercolour and acrylic on paper; 15 x 12 in.

Shari Phoenix, **Pin up Rebel #21 Village Bus Stop**, 2024
Watercolour, acrylic and coloured pencil on paper; 15 x 12 in.

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Shari Phoenix, *Pin up Rebel #22 Traversing the World, Taking the Tropical To and Fro*, 2024
Watercolour, acrylic and coloured pencil on paper; 15 x 12 in.

Sasha-Kay Nicole Hinds

Using experimental photography, I delve into the haunting realm of abuse, creating a vivid tapestry of images that reveal the dark underbelly of gender-based violence affecting my homeland. This is not merely an abstract concept; it is rooted in my personal experiences, etched into muscle memory. With each intentional staging of my body and every shutter click of my camera, I aim to unmask the horrors that shroud the existence of Black womxn and girls in Jamaica. These femmes, much like me, carry the heavy burden of trauma, navigating the treacherous waters of sexual and domestic violence, experiencing loss, disappearance, and isolation, and far too often, succumbing to horrific femicide. In this dark narrative, regardless of age, no femme is spared. My work bears witness to the grim reality documented in Jamaican news reports day after day – each one a testament to the unforgiving violence inflicted upon us. These stories that enter the nation's consciousness, often fade into obscurity, concealed in the shadows, seemingly forgotten until they reignite. I am immersed in an act of a chilling chronicle in the pursuit of justice, striving to unearth the harrowing realities that define our lives.



Sasha-Kay Nicole Hinds, *A Cultural Subject (from the series A Body Was Found)*, 2023
Experimental photography; 4 x 6 in.

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Sasha-Kay Nicole Hinds, *Untitled (from the series Her Truth Is)*, 2021
Performance and photography; 4 x 6 in.



Sasha-Kay Nicole Hinds, ***Belly Pickney and Herself (from the series Her Truth Is)***, 2020
Performance and photography; 4 x 6 in.





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