

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I'm Farrah Karapetian and I'm C.O.L.A 2021 Fellow. When I found photography I found something that really took me out of my head. Took me out a constant sense of criticality and spoke for itself on the wall. The question of representation, the capacity of the camera to represent, moves the conversation immediately away from how it was represented and into the wide into that manner. Into the questions that would unite a group of images.

But over time even that wasn't enough and the each new unfolding of process opened up a new set of questions. And most of those questions defined my our practice surround the relational aspect of a work of art between the subjects the author and the audience.

And that's been true even when I was making pictures with a camera I just didn't know how to get out of the frame and make that conversation really available built into the work. Until I began to do these more experiential processes around camera lens photography and performance.

The primary characters in this project circumnavigate the Paris salon of this woman named Paulette Nardil. She was the oldest of seven sisters. So she, Jane, Andre, and a couple of her other sisters all lived in Paris. She was the first black student at the Sorbonne.

I think I'm really invested in these women on a personal level, because of their career stage and life stage. Paulette was by the time I really encounter her writing. She is basically my age, not married doesn't have children. Is caring for all of her other sisters. Is really interested in the creative community she can forge.

So I love the kind of community that she's creating and that all of these women are creating. And the way that they're transnational in their thinking. It's very contemporary. And I also, of course, want to advocate for them as historical figures.

But I think even more than that. I'm interested in finding philosophies that can help us with our visual literacy today. Because we have so many opportunities missed, every time there's a problem that hits the news around retraumatization of communities that don't want to see themselves constantly depicted as victims of xyz. Or questions of exoticism, and questions of identity.

And we really just don't have an early language. We have the people who came right after her like what's going on. And all these people who were literally writing about the same place. But there's a woman at the spout of the fountainhead of that who's never a part of the conversation.

Whenever I encounter a situation that needs to be re-reconstructed, I start with objects I start with really banal things. Because I think that's our entry point into muscle memory and visual memory. So in this case these women maybe a couple of them maybe [INAUDIBLE] because she's a photographer. She has images of herself that we can source.

But most of these thinkers are really poorly represented online you can find like one picture of Paulette Nardil's face. And like nothing of her body. Nothing of her apartment. Nothing of the stuff of her practice. Even though she published all these different things and had this dramatic events in World War II or she's like jumping off a ship and breaks open her knee. Like beautiful visuals you can read about if you really, really look but there are no pictures.

And so I began to create an archive of details. Just life details, which I think start to flesh out these characters in a way re-embody them as much as build their world. So Jane Nardil, for example wore one earring occasionally just to be sassy or she would carry a cane just to be sassy.

So when I say world building or re-emboding. That's what I mean. I'm elaborating them personally so that we can even begin to rely on them as political and philosophical narrators.

In this case I simply could not string together the details of these people's lives without writing a film script. There was no other way to do it. I tried to take notes. I tried to put things in timelines but it didn't work because I wasn't just making a timeline. I wasn't just looking at major events of when things were published and whose ideas came from, where.

It really did have to be both characterized in terms of, what a character would wear, what they were listening to musically. In their living room and the black balls of time in Paris. So it's in order to world build entirely I did have to write a script.

So on a very, very experiential level. I hope that it begins to touch people's personal experience of the informal labor. That derives from domestic space. Where women work or not always but where the traditionally a lot of work has gotten done and certainly for everyone during COVID.

There's a lot of secondary layers of that. OK this is a free set. I identify with but the secondary layer to it is, what informal labor do you do? And what informal labor are you seeing around you? And manifestos the only thing that causes revolution or is it conversation and that development of vocabulary's.

And then of course more specifically still, what is the language of this revolution that took place in this living room? What were they trying to instigate and are those questions still relevant today like, when you're talking about ethnicity are you exodus. When you're talking about the female body where are you putting that in your politics. It's really hard to recognize those things in yourself. And I think that encountering it in this way in this living room with these women may be the in-road today that it was then.

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