

MARY SIBANDE, *THE ADMIRATION OF
THE PURPLE FIGURE*, 2013, DIGITAL
ARCHIVAL PRINT 150x110 CM /
59.1x43.3 IN. GALLERY MOMO/
LICENSED BY GALLERY MOMO, CAPE
TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.



Aesthetic Deception in *Selling the Shadow*

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The carte-de-visite is perhaps the *truest* historical record we have that Sojourner Truth left behind.¹ The carte-de-visite assisted in making portraits less expensive and reproducible. Combined with wet-plate negative technology it was possible to produce multiple prints from one negative. Through the use of this new technology, Nell Irvin Painter notes, “Truth established what few nineteenth-century black women were able to prove: that she was present in her time. Her success in distributing her portraits plays no small role in her place in historical memory.”² While appearing unmediated these photographs were strategically and carefully staged. Juxtaposing the careful staging of these cartes-de-visite with Truth’s publicized oratory practice and a speech in Akron, Ohio on May 29, 1851—widely known as *Ar’n’t I a Woman*—is to negotiate the terms of *aesthetic deception*.³ The

cartes-de-visite present a counter representation of Truth and reveal historical interpretation as neither utterly objective nor transparent. These historical narratives of black women often suggest that they are not afforded the right to be strategic and unconscious curators of their own image or put differently, *aesthetically deceptive* in the development of subjectivity.⁴ This article meditates on the burden of the real and the fictive as it becomes capable of producing aesthetic modes of suspension.

Selling the Shadow, exhibited at Gallery Momo in Cape Town, South Africa (2017), takes its name from Truth’s practice of selling photographs to finance her livelihood as a traveling preacher and activist. Captioned with, “I sell the shadow, to support the substance,” the “I” in this phrase warrants further scrutiny. Given the inability of the slave or

freed black to own their labor let alone their bodies, Truth's caption suggests an understanding of the importance of controlling her visual presentation and performance. By selling her likeness, to support the substance—the body that was located elsewhere from the image—Truth holds in suspension blackness as an ontological position that sutures modern capitalism, while simultaneously disrupting its logic of surveillance of blackness. Taking a nod from Truth, *Selling the Shadow* grapples with this juxtaposition between blackness, aesthetics, and capital. The exhibition offers several considerations on the politics of deception through the works of a diasporic collection of artists while holding in space Truth's influence on black visibility.⁵

In this article, I argue, much like the contexts and interpretive enmeshments in which Sojourner

Truth sells her likeness and precisely where black embodiment struggles through illicit criminality, that blackness re-writes subjecthood and the human through strategies of aesthetic deception. Through the suggestive connotations of 'liquid blackness,' whereby suspension grapples with the ethics, aesthetics, timespace and forms blackness may take, I understand aesthetic deception to be a re/invention, both strategic and unconscious, conventional and outside of convention, of blackness itself. We might think of deception as a set of practices that utilize illicit subject formation, in time; is subversive and ruptures normative logics of deviant blackness; and conjures pause where the very terms of blackness befuddle and frustrate pathology.

Aesthetic deception is to invade and trespass on anti-blackness. Yet, deception is not without the

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ULTIMATELY TRUTH'S TRUE AND "MULTIPLE MEANINGS CANNOT BE RECONCILED

burden of neoliberalism's moral compass of "common sense," which understands deception as criminal, illicit, and the propagation of beliefs and ideas that are *not true*. This iteration of deception assumes a relationship to race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality that mobilizes white supremacy, to mark a universal subject as the barometer of subjectivity, and relies on the over-determination of what is truth, real, and authentic.⁶ Thus, much like Mirzoeff's counter-visuality, as

a reading practice that responds to TransAtlantic slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, I understand deception as strategic, useful, productive, and at times a discombobulating mode of aesthetic practice. Because systems of oppression mark racialized, gendered, and classed bodies continually as illicit, criminal, and in excess of a universal subject; aesthetic deception re-writes these experiences against the normative subject. While aesthetic deception draws on the black fantastic and

fugitive flights to conjure black life as possibility, I particularly pay attention to the racialized gender dimensions of Jillian Hernandez's uses of the politics of fakery and excess in contemporary Black and Latina women's sexual aesthetics and find it informative for my use of aesthetic deception in this article.⁷ I take seriously fakery and strategic manipulation as the battleground in which blackness makes room for pause and undermines its pathology. I begin by utilizing the

messy figuration of Truth to tease out two modalities of deception: archetypical embodiments and timespace. The latter half of this article turns to specific examples that perform aesthetic deception: the work of South African artist Mary Sibande's *Sophie* series and African American artist Torkwase Dyson's *The Fugitive Project*.

Shadow Seller

It is to the cultural symbol of Sojourner Truth's oratory and visual practices that I turn to think through deception. The 1851 Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio and the lack of corroboration on *how* Sojourner Truth performed this speech make legible the complication of historical interpretation and its contemporary neoliberal convention.⁸ It is through differing depictions of her speech—recorded by Frances Dana Gage and Marcus Robinson as well as what Nell Painter calls the

“historical impossibility” of Truth's Southern dialect—that bring us to two instances of aesthetic deception: embodiment and timespace.⁹ Firstly, the use of the body through gestures, adornment, and speech are evoked to project the knowable subject onto the body. Because subject formation is a precarious site for black bodies, deception repurposes the constraints of blackness and utilizes subterfuge to mark a different truth. Secondly, I use the concept of timespace to engage with geography (space) and futurity in the here and now (time) as a corollary process that marks black life despite the logics of black death. The mode of deception at play here exposes ways blackness is both precarious and exceeds an always looming death.

Gage renders Truth's speech as a grand performance of Southern dialect, brands the speech, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, and utilizes rhetorical

strategies and thick description to describe Truth's likeness and speaking voice as a force to reckon with the problem of race.¹⁰ However, Gage's account—written in 1863, several years after the convention—starkly contrasts with journalist Marcus Robinson's measured account of the convention. Robinson depicts Truth's words through standard English with little reference to her bodily gesture.¹¹ Both accounts render Truth as the strategic embodiment of slavery's problem and present her as a symbolic figure with which to rally support for the abolitionist/feminist cause. However, as Painter notes, this Southern dialect starkly contrasts with a historical record of slaves in rural New York, where Truth was born. Slaves from this region commonly lived on farms with Dutch families and likely spoke Dutch as their first language.¹² These accounts remind us that what is known of Truth is filtered through secondary sources

that are fraught. Ultimately Truth's true and "multiple meanings cannot be reconciled."¹³ Both accounts reflect an entrenched white racism that relied on particular stereotypical modes of illiteracy and regional symbols of slavery to be legible to such an audience at the convention.¹⁴ Like the slave narrative, speech-making, as a reputable form, required "the former slave-cum-writer to properly execute generic conventions and utilize a form already familiar to readers" and *simultaneously* navigate the conventions of white racism, even within the context of abolitionist practices.¹⁵

The rhetoric of the visual does not escape such deception. As I previously suggested, the carte-de-visite might be the only *real* document of Truth bearing an explicit mark of her self-crafting. Of this representation, Painter notes Truth's very clear and strategic placement of

objects, down to the lace and book in her hands evoking a respectable and literate subject (despite her inability to read) that would strike a chord in those that encountered her. Truth understood the symbolism of the carte-de-visite as a new technology that represented a sign of mobility and what Grigsby notes as "the fragile phantom substitute for the presence of persons exercising their freedom of movement."¹⁶

The juxtaposition of how Truth's Akron speech is conjured and the strategic craft of her carte-de-visite disturbs notions of racial authenticity and simultaneously adheres to conventions of racial and sexual respectability. Deception whereby the symbolic imagination of Truth as an embodied subject and one located in timespace rather than the historical provability of her figuration make this disruption possible. This vacillation between the provable and

the imaginative, the conventional and the non-conventional of Truth's figuration compels the following questions: what can we bear to acknowledge about blackness? What cannot be tolerated in imagining blackness, black gender, and the *will* of deception? How can deception veer and travel into unpredicted directions? Truth's embodiment and its disorientation to a real, true, and authentic subjectivity reveal other orientations to blackness that are here rather than in the background waiting to emerge. Truth's aesthetic deception through embodiment disturbs notions of racial authenticity (particularly prevalent in the hero narrative) and simultaneously adheres to iterations of sexual respectability (e.g. grandmother figure in the carte-de-visite) that continue to reinforce hierarchies of race and gender. These embodiments are undergirded by racialized and sexualized concepts of personhood laid bare in the

Antebellum United States. Drawing on McMillan, I understand Truth's embodiment to be "an elastic means to create new racial and gendered epistemologies" that interfere with the very anti-blackness that creates the contours of her existence.¹⁷

My recounting of the above historical traces of Sojourner Truth are not to generate a provable record nor to ignore the climate in which Truth lived as a factor in managing her presence, but to arrive at two important points. Firstly, Truth's performative and visual depictions (imagined and otherwise) contribute to her legibility as an abolitionist and activist. Secondly, this legibility relies on aspects of imagination and contradiction within the biographical details that we know of Truth. To take seriously these juxtapositions (e.g. Truth's Northern upbringing against a Southern dialect) is to firmly grapple with deception as

both embodied and located in time and space as well as how deception is wielded as both a means of survival and subject formation. I now turn to two examples within the exhibition *Selling the Shadow* where the historical traces of Truth and strategies of deception makes space for blackness's multiple subject formations.

**Aesthetic Deception:
Archetypal Embodiment
and in Plain/Plane Sight**

Embodiment as aesthetic deception is exemplified in the work of South African artist Mary Sibande. Sibande uses sculpture and photography to comment on the intersections of race, gender, class, and nation. Drawing on an alter-ego figure named Sophie, Sibande develops the character of a domestic worker that draws on the historicity of four generations of women in the artist's family.¹⁸ As the figure of Sophie

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grows larger over time, the work blurs the boundaries of domestic laborer and madam, fusing and disrupting a binary formation of these embodiments while acknowledging their violent relation. Sibande's potential to agitate visual codes of race, gender, class, and nation is not a result of unmediated agency, but rather presents an attentiveness to the aesthetic and political work that is performed through the complex signification of her sculptures.

Linking Sojourner Truth's iconicity to Sibande and the productive uses of deception might be better made through the regional specificity of the Khoisan woman, Krotoa/Eva—an indigenous woman who moved from Khoisan society into the Dutch colony of the Cape after its founding in 1652. Although Krotoa's primary position was as a domestic worker, she later became a translator between the Khoisan and European settlers.¹⁹ Distiller and Samuelson note that Krotoa was “the first female cultural

broker in the colonial contact zone and...one of the most significant go-betweens of the period.”²⁰ Further, Baderoon identifies Krotoa as a significant symbol of the ambiguity of domestic service by black women in white households, whereby “ideas about domesticity were frequently used as a weapon in the colonial power struggles between and among Europeans and Africans.”²¹ Domestic labor in present day South Africa continues to be a major source of work done by black women. Given

this context, Krotoa's ability to function as a go-between among settler and indigenous populations represents the fraught and intimate terrain of domesticity, power, and racial and sexual aesthetics that Truth embodied. Furthermore, this ability to code-switch as an interlocutor between different populations disfigures normative values of sexual and aesthetic truth while maintaining an attentiveness to colonial conquest as an intimate and disciplinary site of culture comingling.

Mary Sibande's sculpture uses the human form and ephemeral embodiments to explore the construction of identity in a postcolonial South African context, while critiquing stereotypical depictions of women, particularly black women.²² Crafted from fiberglass and silicone casts of her own body, Sibande uses the body as the site of vision and transformation.

Sibande first introduces *Sophie* (2008) through a life-size cast of her body wearing a domestic's uniform with a collar and apron rimmed in Brodeirie Anglaise, which originated in 16th century Europe and is widely used in the apron and collar details of contemporary South African domestic workers.²³ The nod to the Victorian era is present in much of her work through stylization and it historicizes South Africa's colonial past/present, where Britain has not only consolidated its empire but also expanded its colonial reach.²⁴ This approach presents a similar thread as the Nigerian-British artist, Yinka Shonibare, who takes up the colonial and post-colonial era as filtered through globalization while utilizing Victorian costuming to visualize such encounters.

In *I'm a Lady* (2009), deception is visible through the physical and epistemological intimacy of violence

of the domestic-madam relation, which is literally stitched into the overlapping forms of blue maid uniform and blue gown (Figure 1). The billowing tulle skirt and cuff, parasol, scarf and apron visualize the entanglements of entitlement and service, opulence and labor that figure into the domestic-madam relation, while the facial gestures present an opaque comportment. This installation is deceptive. Sophie intertwines stereotypical symbols; the uniform of a working-class maid and the attire of a bourgeois madam "...are fantastically stitched together around the idea of a single persona, disrupting the entrenched and highly politicized dichotomy that has tended to govern popular depictions of the maid and madam."²⁵ Within one figural embodiment, Sibande ruptures the dichotomy of maid-madam, constructing a subtle, albeit pernicious subterfuge of the tropes of domesticity. These embodiments

evade dichotomies of domesticity while visualizing its violent intimacy.

Mary Corrigan (2015) understands the juxtaposition of attire as satirical excess, in which Sibande uses exaggerated style codes to liberate the domestic worker.²⁶ Yet these modes of self-fashioning are deployed within the terms of sexual politics that negotiate a fraught relationship between domestic (blackness) and madam (whiteness). This connection is perhaps more explicitly made through the work of a contemporary of Sibande, Zanele Muholi, particularly her piece *Massa and Mina(h) II* (2009). The photograph depicts Muholi as a domestic worker scrubbing the floor of the living room. The viewer can see the domestic from the perspective of the fashionable legs of the madam. The madam is disembodied as her upper body is not visible. This gives way to an

affect of absolute dominion over the domestic space. Here, the sphere of domestic labor is juxtaposed within a nuanced gendered and sexual matrix of domestic labor, and it depicts the libidinal twist of labor and dominance that lurks under the fray. Jillian Hernandez uses sexual-aesthetic excess to mark the way modes of dress and comportment are framed as *too much*, and consolidates sexual deviancy with sexual impropriety.²⁷ These modes of sexual impropriety often articulate themselves through fakery in which questions of authenticity and proper performance are couched in hierarchies of racial, gendered, and sexual codes of conduct. While *I'm a Lady* mobilizes both satirical excess and sexual-aesthetic excess, I also believe deception is mapped onto the Sophie figure through the signification of femininity and ladylike-ness, the criminalization of blackness, and the purity of

whiteness. Aesthetic deception is undeniably linked to the libidinal and structural implications of managing blackness in spaces of colonial and racial dominance. Subsequently, it is this relational play of power and domination, and despite deception and its illicit burden, that deception *also* serves blackness by befuddling its very systems of subjugation.

Aesthetic deception is further made visible in how Sophie, over time, grows in scale—signaling an aesthetics of excess that consumes its site of domination. *The Admiration of the Purple Figure* (2013), which appears in *Selling the Shadow*, depicts a figure in the center of the photograph (Figure on page 117). Sophie is wearing Victorian regalia where an opening can be seen at the bases of the gown. The deep purple against the smoky black background engenders an apocalyptic sentiment whereby the cylindrical figures

emerge from the ground to envelop, shroud, and surround Sophie. On closer investigation, Sophie appears to clasp the harness that puts these creatures at bay. The dark background mimics a turbulence, perhaps foreshadowing something brewing in the distance; yet the bright radiation of light gestures to a growing dominance of the purple figure. Under the left-most arm, the bright part of the image vibrates. Above the figure in purple, another set of cylindrical beings circle at the head with a crown. Through both the juxtaposition and blur of domestic labor and Victorian opulence and a gradient radiance between light and dark, *Admiration* holds these contradictions, these dialectics as a collective persona whereby the very line of demarcation between domestication and control are obscured and blurred. The viewer, in this instance, might be left with the question: Do these creatures



FIGURE 1. MARY SIBANDE, *I'M A LADY*, 2009, DIGITAL ARCHIVAL PRINT, ON COTTON RAG MATTE PAPER, 90x60 CM/ 35.43x23.62 IN. GALLERY MOMO/ LICENSED BY GALLERY MOMO, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.

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grow from within the purple figure or are they parasitic, representing the underbelly of relation? If Sojourner Truth's oratory practice and photographic likeness disrupt a catharsis of capital and pathological blackness through the performative of a figuration, Sibande's use of the domestic-madam relation mobilizes the deception of the madam-domestic troupe to call into question subjectivity reflected in Krotoa the interlocutor.

The spatial dynamics of aesthetic deception are apparent in the work of others presented in *Selling the Shadow*. Drawing on the relationship between spatial and geographical technologies of management (space) and the overlaying of the geometry of the future (time), Torkwase Dyson's contribution to *Selling the Shadow* depicts black survival as aesthetic excess. Dyson is most known for paintings, drawings, and sculptures

that utilize the built and architectural environment, to comment on the ways place and space circulate discourses of inclusion and negation. Using the geometrical form as a site of abstraction, Dyson "uses the language of architecture to produce a visual grammar that rescales and renders legible dominant systems of population control and social engineering."²⁸ It is these geometrical abstractions and the stories they tell that lead to a productive contribution to a theory of aesthetic deception.

Anthony Burns (In Plane Site: Fugitive) visualizes the story of the slave who was known to have hid in the hull of a ship to escape to freedom (Figure 2). Anthony Burns was captured a year later under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Using acrylic, wire, graphite, and plexi-glass, Dyson notes, "This work asks viewers to experience geometric forms—lines, grids, curves, optical

illusions—and light as a way of seeing hidden histories in architectural space.”²⁹ The flat black materials that Dyson uses create a stark contrast against the architectural white of the gallery, forming a visible juxtaposition between the uses of negative and positive space. Returning to Truth’s management of her photographic likeness, we are reminded that the *carte-de-visite* as a technology required the management of exposure on light (highlights) and dark (shadow) to render a representation legible. It is here that Truth, through selling the shadow, utilized “the fragile phantom substitute for the presence of persons exercising their freedom of movement” in the photographic plane.³⁰ Truth utilizes the mechanics of the *carte-de-visite* to undermine the very logics of photographic form, which, in the parlance of Darcy, further mobilized race by making the chemical process of exposing



FIGURE 2. TORKWASE DYSON, *ANTHONY BURNS (IN PLANE SITE: FUGITIVE)*, 2016, ACRYLIC, WIRE, PLEXI, GRAPHITE ON GALLERY WALL, 360 x114 INCHES. GALLERY MOMO, CAPE TOWN/ LICENSED BY GALLERY MOMO, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.



FIGURE 3. TORKWASE DYSON, (DETAIL VIEW) *ANTHONY BURNS (IN PLANE SITE: FUGITIVE)*, 2016. ACRYLIC, WIRE, PLEXI, GRAPHITE ON GALLERY WALL, 360 X114 INCHES. GALLERY MOMO CAPE TOWN/ LICENSED BY GALLERY MOMO, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA.

the negative for darker skin tones a challenge.³¹ Through a practice of aesthetic deception through timespace, we might read Dyson's installation as a mobilization of the tenants of design through light and dark, negative and positive space, and shape and form to render the illicit and criminal impossibility of an escaped fugitive, Anthony Burns, a tangible possibility. Put differently, the success of Burns's escape requires the mobilization of the geographical landscape of the Antebellum South (space) and the measure of time, illegible and thus legible, for such an escape to be made possible.³²

The installation mimics the folded contours of a shipping crate, a slaver hull, a garret that is flattened into its two-dimensional plane. If assembled at the conjoining joints and flaps, the viewer can manage an imagined three-dimensional form (e.g. hull,

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garret, crate). It is no surprise that Dyson utilizes the historical figures of Harriet Jacobs and Henry "Box" Brown, two other slaves that escaped from captivity by hiding in plain sight. Upon closer interrogation of *Anthony Burns* one might notice that the flat black spatiality of the installation is a combination of tonal blacks and openings that conjoin around a line drawing (Figure 3). Is this set of lines the figuration of Burns in the hull? Do the reflective surfaces of the plexi-glass that pick up components

of the surrounding landscape suggest the haunting of Burns? Unlike Glenn Ligon's *To Disembark* (1993) series of crate sculptures, to express Henry Brown's experience of shipping himself from the captivity of Richmond to Philadelphia, Dyson's rendition of the hull is a figure on the two-dimensional plane. Suspending normative strategies of sight, Brown crafts a worm-hole into the scaffolding of economic production, where the object literally steals the self.³³ Dyson's work tells these stories

of fugitive movements through the geographical scaffolding of the box, crate, garret and its negotiation with the built environment. The use of architectural techniques renders these objects into abstraction, whereby the viewer literally encounters the holding space, as a flat plane in time. No longer able to hold the object that hides within its confines, these installations use slight of the eye, illusion, the not-quite-true, to formulate a mode of survival and liberation. Holding in suspension

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even in the absolute dominion of American slavery, this relationship between captivity and enslavement, Dyson uses strategies of architectural drawing, floor and building plans, to render captivity and freedom as contradiction, negation, and deception. These liminal spaces between freedom and captivity that are located on top of one another hold in suspension and defy the temporal and spatial landscapes of captivity. To defy the temporal-spatial landscapes of captivity is to

participate in deception, whereby the figure of the slave illicitly steals the body, takes the body, unmoors the body, on the way to freedom.

This fusion of libidinal and hyper-visible timespace outlines not only a transitional and illusive state, but also mediates between the terms of what is a reliable and unreliable trace, with which strictures of racial management and violence function. Aesthetic deception suspends normative logics of sight and visualizes the sites with which

black subjects—particularly women—construct alternative futures (or futures that are always already here, rather than on the verge of occurring) within current timespace. Mary Sibande's *Sophie* studies present us with archetypes of domesticity, purities of whiteness, and the management of black woman's labor alongside the emancipatory politics of the imagination, while Dyson's work turns to aesthetic deception through abstraction and how the built environment

manages black death and how black lives exceed its management.

Conclusion: Befuddlements

Selling the Shadow utilizes the likes of a range of artists in the African and Black diasporas to arrive at some of the fundamental questions implied in Sojourner Truth's strategic development of her persona and visual likeness. While I have only touched upon two of the works in the show, I would like to suggest we might think of Truth as a diaspora figure and symbol that puts to use aesthetic deception in formulating a persona-figure through her speech and visual orientation. Much like the contexts and enmeshments where Sojourner Truth sells her likeness, Krotoa similarly helps visualize the tenuousness of historical embodiment and its relationship to criminality that simultaneously rewrites the logics of subject formation through that which is delayed, strategically

manipulated, and revealed. Aesthetic deception presents a modality that might hold in suspension the space of pause with which to apprehend the management of the visual and its aesthetic counteraction. I argue, much like the context in which Truth sells her likeness and precisely where black embodiment struggles through illicit criminality (e.g. stealing the body, selling the body), that we might envision liminal spaces where blackness re-writes subject-hood and the figure of the human. Such a liminal space might better be understood as the suspended alterity where blackness baffles and throws into disarray an understanding of aesthetics. I am less concerned with creating a grand narrative of the way in which Truth's legacy might be applied to places outside of the Americas than with thinking about some of the questions her very figure brings forth and what those questions might suggest for other locations. ■

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Endnotes

1. The carte-de-visite, a form of portraiture developed by French inventor André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri in the mid-1850s, utilized a camera with multiple lenses that exposed different portions of a large glass plate.
2. Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 199.
3. Painter reminds us there is no clear idea of what Truth said in Akron, particularly because every record and document of the speech comes through a secondary source with a relationship to Truth. Marius Robinson (1851) provided a straightforward report, however Frances Dana Marker Gage in 1863 published a different version of Truth's speech. The latter has become more widely available while Robinson's account might be more reliable to historians. For more information, see Painter (1996) 174-175. Additionally, my use of deception is specific and intentional. While I later draw on its ramifications for a gendered body through Jillian Hernandez, these insights are informed by genealogies of Black Study (Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten and Sylvia Wynter) that have previously argued blackness must rewrite the terms of criminality in its varying formations at the very moment of the act of maneuvering the body into a self. The very act of self-curation or self-fashioning, in the logics of white supremacy, requires that the black object/subject participate in acts that are criminal to the absolute dominion of racial slavery to curate and fashion a self, even a mere idea of the self. Deception as it pertains to visual and performative likeness takes stock of this lineage and conjures the implied criminal and illicit modes of "stealing the body" and "fugitive flights" as a significant site of subject formation to the ontology of blackness. For more see: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation — An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (March 4, 2003): 257-337.
4. I would like to thank Anya Michelle Wallace for her insightful thoughts that have helped me tease out the uses of Truth's photographic image and the inability of black women to utilize fakery or aesthetic deception in strategic ways and to their own means.

5. The artists included in *Selling the Shadow* are Coby Kennedy, Cosmo Whyte, Dread Scott, Elizabeth Colomba, Torkwase Dyson, Maurice Mbikayi, Joël Mpah Dooh, and Mary Sibande.
6. I am drawing on Kara Keeling's use of "common sense" in the context in which black femininities in the cinematic landscape disrupt normative modes of knowing. See *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
7. Richard Iton's use of the fantastic draws on the subversive elements of blackness in modernity and provides the juxtaposition of the underground in which the Other engages the dominant order. Fugitive movement (e.g. stealing away and unconscious resistance) is where Fred Moten makes a case for blackness as conjuring moments in and out of the frame of external "imposed social logic—a moment of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure". Iton and Moten present the necessary paradoxes of blackness and subjugation that make clear deception. Hernandez's contemporary formulations fold into discourses of the fantastic and the illicit fugitive, strategic and unconscious modes of resistance and curation by navigating claims to the rational and respectable *gendered* subject. See Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 50, no. 2 (2008): 179; Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3; Jillian Hernandez, "Carnal Teachings: Raunch Aesthetics as Queer Feminist Pedagogies in Yo! Majesty's Hip Hop Practice," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24, no. 1 (2014): 88-106; *Ibid.*
8. I am thinking about the ways Sojourner Truth is made legible as a formative figure in Black and feminist study. I am particularly interested in how contemporary investments in certain depiction of Truth often rely on an overdetermined set of characteristics. This is visible in the contradiction of *Ar'n't I a Woman*. Frances Dana Gage's interpretation of Truth's speech marks this juxtaposition between the performative conventions of abolitionist rhetoric and entrenched white racism that illuminates how a historical record is documented and remembered.
9. Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol*, 164.

10. Nell Painter, "Sojourner Truth in Life and Memory: Writing the Biography of an American Exotic" in *Gender & History* 2, no. 1 (1990). Painter notes how Southern speech pattern was used to symbolically align with the stronghold of American slavery in the Southern states and with the prerogatives of white abolitionists.
11. Ibid., 128.
12. Gage's rendition of Truth's speech is consistently taken up and reproduced in Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies classrooms and texts as a formative example of the intersectional approaches of feminist praxis. I take issue with Gage's rendition, which is held as true, often without distinguishing the nuances of Truth as symbol.
13. Ibid., 129.
14. Nell Irvin Painter notes Gage's interest in presenting a more *true* and riveting version of Sojourner Truth after reading "The Libyan Sibyl" by Harriet Beecher Stowe. See Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*, 164.
15. Uri McMillan, "Mammy-Memory: Staging Joice Heth, or the Curious Phenomenon of the 'Ancient Negress,'" *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 22 (2012): 32; Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities*, Cultural Studies of the United States (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 20-21.
16. Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Negative Positive Truths," *Representations* 113 (2011): 16-38, 20.
17. Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 6.
18. The Sophie series was first developed for a solo exhibition in 2009 titled "Long Live the Dead Queen" (2009) about her grandmother, but the character quickly evolved, appearing in different outfits and poses for installations and photographs at exhibitions and art fairs. In 2013, some of the works were displayed on billboards in Johannesburg.

19. Gabeba Baderoon, "The Ghost in the House: Women, Race, and Domesticity in South Africa," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1, no. 2 (2014): 175-76.
20. Natasha Distiller and Meg Samuelson, "Denying the Coloured Mother': Race and Gender in South Africa," *L'Homme: European Review of Feminist History* 16, no. 2 (2005): 31.
21. *Ibid.*, 177-178. These methods found their way in apartheid regimes that sought to divide black households by creating systems of migrant labor, creating single sex townships through dormitory enclaves, and destroying rural economies. See also Elizabeth Elbourne, "Domesticity and Dispossession: British Ideologies of 'Home' and the Primitive at Work in the Early Nineteenth-Century Cape," *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, eds. Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 27-54, 27-28.
22. See "Mary Sibande South African Born 1982," www.gallerymomo.com.
23. Dodd, Alexandra, "Dressed to Thrill: the Victorian Postmodern and Counter-Archival Imaginings in the Work of Mary Sibande," *Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 467-474, 468.
24. *Ibid.*, 467-474, 471.
25. *Ibid.*, 470.
26. Mary Corrigall, "Sartorial Excess in Mary Sibande's 'Sophie,'" *Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015): 146.
27. Jillian Hernandez, "The Power of Sexual Aesthetics: Women and Girls Crafting Bodies" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2013), 1-340, 5.
28. See, Torkwase Dyson. "About." <https://www.torkwasedyson.com/about1>.
29. See, Torkwase Dyson. "Installation." <https://www.torkwasedyson.com/installation>.

- ³⁰. Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Negative Positive Truths," *Representations* 113 (2011): 20.
- ³¹. *Ibid.*, 22–23. Grigsby offers a substantial argument on the way photography, as a rather rudimentary set of chemical reactions, sacrifices background detail when creating the shadows that are required to make darker skin legible. This points to considerable labor on the part of photographers when producing cartes-de-visite that could even render the skin tone of an African American woman.
- ³². Dyson also draws on the fugitive movements of Harriet Jacobs and Henry Brown to craft her *Fugitive* series. Each story further iterates the subterfuge of time and space, whereby Jacob "hides in plain sight" in the garret of her grandmother's slave quarters for seven years and Brown ships himself to freedom in a packing crate.
- ³³. This line of thinking is indebted to Fred Moten's concept of stealing the self, through the notion of fugitive movements. See Fred Moten, "Black Op," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 123, no. 5 (2008); Moten, *In the Break*.

