

Malachi Parsons - Artist Statement

The Gospel music and performance at the Caribbean black church I grew up in taught me the powerful intersection of gesture and testimony. I spent years observing how at church funeral services, grief and loss were transformed into worship by liturgical performances. These services were a precious paradox; in moments of tragedy when tears were in their eyes, they responded with joy and praise. As a member of the church's media team, I gained an intimate perspective on how each person would move differently to the music. These bodily reactions occurred as they recounted memories of how faith had shaped their lives. When our stories are shared verbally and enacted through the body, they create opportunities for revelation in both the individual and the spectator. I am committed to utilizing film and performance art as a means of ancestral veneration, creating a space for celebration through themes of impermanence, lamentation, and expressive gestures.

I've had to investigate myself carefully to invite the voices of others' testimonies into my body; to allow my body to be a conduit for these stories. While the oral history and archives of my Gullah Geechee heritage are weakened from displacement, I learned I can define my own identity and create new imagined understandings of my blackness. I've come to appreciate the interrelatedness of cultural performances, folklore, and rituals from various traditions as well as my own journey. Celebrating our untold stories isn't just an act of protest; it's a resurgence, a way for us all to reclaim space. My goal is to understand how these narratives empower marginalized communities and reshape our approach to their autonomy and rights. Through my body as a proxy, a living gift for the dead, I create re-imagined manifestations of entities we encounter daily in order to understand and revive shared social narratives.