

Ayanna
Dozier
Touch Me
on the
Inside
and Call Me
By My
Name

30 AUG–
11 OCT, 2023

Melancholic Pleasure

— Mahlet Cuff

The semi-dark mood lighting and the light echoing off my feet against the hardwood floors haunt the gallery space of Ayanna Dozier's first Canadian solo show, *Touch Me On the Inside and Call Me By My Name*. I can hear my footsteps through my airpods as I listen to the playlist that Dozier has curated to accompany the exhibition. Including melodies from Lana Del Rey, Shy Girl, and Sade, all of which come together to transport you into Dozier's universe. Hers is a universe that grapples with questions of pleasure in the construction of desire, refusal of the gaze, and self-determination. The universe that she is building is one that transports the viewer into a place of questioning their relationships to these ideas. Dozier is able to display a level of control where she is in charge of what is hidden and available to the public.

In a series of images that function as a recollection of memories of Dozier's experience with having cancerous cells in her cervix, she asks the viewer to also feel and sit with the discomfort of her illness. Here, the artist is not only in front of the camera, but also behind it. Dozier is intentionally playing with the viewers expectations and in turn refusing to amuse those presumptions. A four-part series of digital chromogenic prints sees her in communication with her past partners, including photographs wherein she still lifes incorporating used condoms from her sexual partners with their consent.

One of these images, titled *I Took Your Fuck Personally*, portrays red meat stuffed into a condom wrapper and held firmly in the grip of Dozier's black latex gloved hand. The grip that Dozier has on the condom wrapper was one that I was drawn to as it made me think about the anger and dominance present when making this image. Dozier is able to remove the awkwardness that can be present when interacting with artwork that not only involves herself and her partners but now inviting the viewer to be a witness to their relationship. The print titled *Self Portrait* shows Dozier in front of the camera with a comparable amount of authority over her own body as well as the gaze of what the viewer is observing.



ABOVE ↑
I TOOK YOUR FUCK PERSONALLY
CHROMOGENIC PRINT, 2022



02 The Super 8mm film *Forever Your Girl* shows Dozier dressed up in an elaborate outfit, transformed into a hyperfemme embodiment that, from the flickering of her light up, colourful stripper heels, long blonde wig, and gold acrylic fingernails, is doused in elegance. The character that Dozier has become here is trying to connect to her sense of girlhood, grazing the carousel horse as the camera moves alongside her. With its rupturing soundtrack, it creates an eerie feeling that feels like a balance between grief and shame. An attempt at returning to her girlhood, there is a sense of dissatisfaction as Dozier sits uncomfortably on the carousel, legs hanging off the ride as she spins in search of joy that the novelty amusement is not able to provide. With the repetition of the carousel's continuous route, Dozier places herself within a continuous loop while the viewer is brought along to try to make sense of Dozier trying to amuse oneself while navigating a possibility of retiring to pleasure as a gesture.

Lovertits, from the 16mm film trilogy *Close, but no Cigar*, places Dozier in a red heart shaped bathtub, surrounded by images of love and intimacy. This woman, is surrounded by her own grief, not only in her own loneliness, but by the way the mirrors around her reflect back her own image. There is the overwhelming feeling of loneliness that washes over one when watching Dozier's character navigate the uncomfortable feelings of being alone, especially in scenes where Dozier is moving around the tub in stiffness. A love motel— traditionally a space for sex, love, and pleasure—is, in this moment, transformed into a cold space. There is a loss that is present where two bodies should be present, the absence is very much felt.

Although alone in the film, as a viewer I felt as if I was there with Dozier as the gallery viewing space is painted in this deep red that is similar to the colour of the motel room that she is in. Rather feeling as though I should not be watching Dozier, as I am witnessing a fly on the wall but at the same time being the missing body within that love motel. The mask that Dozier wears throughout the film resembles smiling teeth which she later takes off, confronting the superficial facade of happiness as well as binding the viewer into the tensions that Dozier brings forth. Being a Black femme the performance of happiness transcends to many spaces and to the overall survival of oneself. The tension that Dozier is playing with goes beyond the love motel but to the ways that femmes are interacting with themselves and people within the world.

With *Touch Me On the Inside* and *Call Me By My Name* Dozier brings us into her imagination, one that is laborious and makes us question: “What does it mean to deconstruct intimacy?”



QR LINK↑

A PLAYLIST OF SONGS CURATED TO ACCOMPANY
*TOUCH ME ON THE INSIDE AND CALL ME BY MY
NAME* CREATED BY AYANNA DOZIER

Biographies

Ayanna Dozier



Ayanna Dozier is a Brooklyn-based filmmaker-artist and writer working with performance, experimental film, installation, printmaking, and analog photography. Select exhibitions include; BRIC (Brooklyn, NY), Microscope Gallery (New York, NY), Block Museum (Chicago, IL), MoCA, Arlington (Arlington, VA), and The Shed (New York, NY). She was a 2022 Wave Hill Winter Workspace Resident (Bronx, NY), a 2018-2019 Helena Rubinstein Fellow in Critical Studies at the Whitney Independent Studies Program, and a Joan Tisch Teaching Fellow from 2017-2022 at Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY). Her film work is in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. She received her PhD in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University (Montréal, QC) and is an assistant professor of communication, with an emphasis in film, at University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Sarah-Tai Black



Sarah-Tai Black (they/them) is an arts curator and critic born and (mostly) raised in Treaty 13 Territory/Toronto whose work aims to center Black, queer, trans, and crip futurities and freedom work. Their curatorial projects have been staged at Cambridge Art Galleries (Cambridge, ON), Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina, SK), MOCA (Toronto ON), PAVED Arts (Saskatoon, SK), and A Space Gallery (Toronto, ON). They have previously worked as the Interim Artistic Director of PAVED Arts (Saskatoon, SK) and in public arts spaces such as Art Museum at the University of Toronto and McMaster Museum of Art.

Biographies

Mahlet Cuff



Mahlet Cuff is an emerging interdisciplinary artist, curator, writer, film programmer and arts cultural worker based in Winnipeg Manitoba (Treaty 1). She is a part of the curatorial team Patterns Collective. In Cuff's work they question conventional narratives about relationship-building both within themselves and with their kin in the world. They draw inspiration from the idea of creating their own worlds, building and rebuilding what it means to generate bonds with one another. Cuff has been able to curate and program with various arts organizations such as the Winnipeg Film Group, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Synonym Art Consultation, Vtape, Vancouver Queer Film Festival, TakeHome BIPOC Arts House and Window Winnipeg. They have written for BlackFlash, Manitoba Music, Peripheral Review, Akimbo and Public Parking.

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