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Arriving at Now

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Arriving at Now

by Marnie Temple



About the Artist

Marnie Temple is an interdisciplinary artist based on the traditional and unceded territory of the Ktunaxa Nation, a.k.a. Creston, BC. Temple is a biracial woman with European and African ancestry, adopted and raised in a white family. It is vital to explain her genealogy because it is an ongoing process of discovery that profoundly influences her work and continues to unfold. Her practice draws from lived experiences and a research practice that investigates the aftermath of The Transatlantic Slave Trade. Temple received a BFA from the University of Calgary and an MFA graduate of Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Her artistic practice includes her work at Empire of Dirt Residency.

Arriving at Now

Marnie Temple

The loophole of retreat . . .
 a dark hole
 an attic space
 she plots, she plans
she dreams of possibility from within impossible strictures
 of enclosure and confinement
 her escape is immanent, as her imagination is boundless
her enclosure is an incubator for a practice of refusal and
 a roadmap to freedom.
 —Tina M. Campt

The arrival of my DNA test results in 2024 permanently ended the speculative phase of my research. The burden of proof was lifted. Soon after, I met one of my sisters, and another realm of speculation opened. What was lost between us due to decades of separation? I began to connect my loss with that of enslaved people separated from their families—whether through abduction, at the auction block, on the ships, on the plantation, or through untimely death. Two sisters.

Both fiction and non-fiction accounts of the aftermath of the Transatlantic Slave Trade have influenced my art practice. It moves from a personal archive of my life, a collection of quilt patches, to installations that respond to my exploration of historical facts. My work serves as a methodology for viewing overlooked and unarchived histories that are rooted in the past. It is important to remember this part of our collective history so that our understandings of ourselves can shift. As Katherine McKittrick reminds me, methods and methodologies can be “act[s] of rebellion and [focus] on how Black studies scholars have used and can use method to engender radical scholarly praxis” (2021, 35). My methods of making are rooted in my truths and the collective experiences of Black people on Turtle Island. Although I do not speak for Black folks, I have come to recognize that I share lived experiences with them.



Figures 1–2. Temple, Marnie. *two sisters*, 2026. The Langham Gallery, Langham, BC.

Photos by Kenton Doupe.

My interdisciplinary installation, *two sisters* (2026), depicts how one sister survives the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, while the other does not (see Fig. 1–2). The collection of stones placed in the centre of the room weighs the same as the two sisters who were separated on a slave ship. One sister was cast overboard, while the other sister made the journey to the Americas. When ships left the eastern shores, stones were placed as ballast in the hull of the ship to mimic the weight of the human cargo that would return from Africa. The stones were cast overboard along the African coast before the ship's holds were refilled with equal mass in human cargo.

My work comes from autobiographical examples made in the spirit of what Saidiya Hartman asserts as “not about navel gazing [but] trying to look at historical and social process and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them” (Saunders 2008, 5). One might consider them visual citations.

Children’s rhymes, originally from the colonial empire, are also a recurring theme in my work. I did not fully connect with decolonized rhymes until I became a parent. I am very interested in their histories and what they were meant to teach children during their formative years. *eeny meeny miny moe* 1975 is a second iteration reflecting a childhood memory from when I was ten (see Fig. 3). It was a hot, dry day in my village, and I was riding my bike on the newly built concrete sidewalk in my neighbourhood. I was a happy child, with colored straws on the spokes and tassels hanging from the

handlebars. My bike ride suddenly ended when a car of teenage boys drove by, threw eggs at me, and shouted “N*****.” This work references childhood and the experiences associated with it. A common way to choose a sports partner in the 70s was to use the “Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe” rhyme.

In *Ordinary Notes* (2023), Sharpe shares anecdotes on her own experiences of anti-Black racism and white supremacy. This work caused a visceral reaction for me—a pang in my stomach reflected a sense of sadness, which dissolved and produced anger, and later, kinship. Sharpe’s recollection of being called “N*****” as a child and spat on after getting off the school bus is familiar. She watched her father get into their car to pursue the bus. She writes:

In my memory: my father saw, but he and I never spoke of it . . . We were mutually shamed by it and, somehow, also mutually sympathetic to each other’s untenable position. Mine, for it having been done to me; my father’s, for having been witness to it. (12, 2023)



Figure 3. Temple, Marnie. *eeny meeny miny moe* 1975, 2026. Nelson Museum Archives & Gallery, Nelson, BC.

My interest in exploring the lives of Black children continues with a response to the novel, *The Invention of Wings* (2014) by Sue Monk Kidd. The story begins in Charleston in

1803 on the day 11-year-old Sarah Grimké is given Hetty, a 10-year-old enslaved girl, as a birthday gift. Hetty was expected to always remain with Sarah, except at night, when she slept outside Sarah's bedroom door on the floor, with nothing. In my installation, *both sides of the door* (2025), I respond to this novel (see Fig. 4). For example, the recurring lines in my work are a form of asemic writing. The lines meander freely with curves and soft edges like uncensored words. Like the nuances of a conversation, there are spaces of chaos, controlled emotions and thoughts, collections of words that make sense and don't, times of frustration, moments of not being heard, and so on. The abstract mark-making allows for individual interpretation by the viewer, while I commit to a meditative place. My first large-scale work, *traces* (2025), experiments with asemic writing using soft materials that might transcend language barriers (see Fig. 5). Specifically, the white wool lines on the dome serve as a metaphor for survival—mirroring words exchanged in the hold. The black line that leaves the dome makes its way along the floor and up onto the wall to begin another existence. This solitary line reaches another imaginary place of comfort—connecting with others. And so, a collection of lines begins on the wall, recreating itself in relation to others. The lines begin to create a deeper, more meaningful experience—one that explores a place that I was becoming more familiar with. I was investigating a language and redefining a mode of communication.



Figure 4. Temple, Marnie. *both sides of the door*, 2025. Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver. Photo by Julya Hajnoczky.

The artwork also draws on the experience of Harriet Ann Jacobs, an enslaved girl in the mid-1800s, as she describes her life in a confined attic space (1861). Tina M. Campt similarly describes the attic space as “an enclosure and a space for enacting practices of freedom—practices of thinking, plotting, envisioning, and realizing alternative forms of possibility” (146, 2021). In the early stages of developing my line drawings, I imagined an existence from centuries ago, trapped in a reality I did not ask for—like being held in the hold of a slave ship or hiding in an attic. It dominated my thinking.

As Campt’s opening quote describes, loopholes of retreat are like traces, supporting my experience of being in another place. Jacobs’ writing, for Simone Leigh and me, explores freedom, alternative possibilities, and envisioning that underpin a place of power and resilience.



Figure 5. Temple, Marnie. *traces*, 2025. Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver. 2025. Photo by Julya Hajnoczky.

Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) situates us all in the afterlife of slavery. No matter our skin color, we are all having to live with this history as it lives on and reduces some of us through feelings of shame, guilt, ignorance, and avoidance—all ways of being that present no possibility. It is at the core of erasure. But there must be something else that we can create—something hopeful. In an interview, McKittrick says:

Thinking beyond identity-self moves us toward other, more interesting questions, which attend to how freedom is imagined and enacted through our extra-human worlds. For me, this is also about what songs, environment, ecology, water, poems, and theoretical leaps tell us about exploding coloniality and “race” thinking. (Prescod-Weinstein 2021)

I have made many meanings from my memories that are unfree from racist interactions. My imagination still exists in the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation.

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