

Deconsecration is a process that is conducted in religious spaces that will no longer be used for religious purposes. A priest may deconsecrate a church that is going to be abandoned or demolished. This is not a canonized (or popular) ritual—there is no creed saying what to do or a mandate for when it must be done—so let's take it outside of a religious context and not feel bad about it. What would deconsecration look like in our own lives?

There are values, experiences, beliefs, messages, behaviors, expectations and norms that were prescribed to you in life. Some influence you and are the proud pillars on which you rest your sense of self. However in moments of self-love, you recognize that some of what was given to you is damaging. When it is time to let go of a powerful influence, deconsecration may

best describe the process of acknowledgement and release.

The four artists featured in *Influence and Deconsecration*—Briyana D. Clarel, Naomieh Jovin, Candy Alexandra González and Chantal Vorobei Thieves—have crafted practices that are based in this type of confrontation. Ultimately the work is liberating. Some works however, first mangle the heart.

“The Corpse of Syed Atif Ali Hashmi, found at his home after an explosion while preparing a bomb intended to be used in a terrorist attack” is a figurative sculpture by Chantal Vorobei Thieves that employs false biography and hagiographical expression to tell the story of Syed Atif Ali Hashmi. “The Corpse” is a life-sized plaster cast, dressed in many layers of clothing. Three of the limbs are missing and only the right arm

remains, although it is detached from the rest of the torso. The arm hovers under the chest with a cupped hand, in which rests a childhood photo supplied by Thieves.

Using her birth name, Thieves is merging her experience of having been categorized as a terrorist (due to sharing the same name as another presumed terrorist) and the grief of having spent a substantial portion of her life hiding as a man. This disruption of gender euphoria and America's post 9/11 vengeful fanaticism are merged into a fabricated identity whose demise is externally guided and ultimately, self-inflicted.

Two of Thieves other works are video essays that focus on the triumphs that may be found in the future. The whirling "NOT ONE AND SIMPLE or What Would James Baldwin Do?" and the declarational "My

Controlling Intent,” give the viewer a lens into the mind of a creative athlete; Thieves’ racing narratives depict the hurdles and inspirations that bring her closer to the goal of joy.

In her longest video piece, “A Sensational Conversation (Sunflower Seeds and Raw Eggs)” Thieves focuses the camera outwards and interviews four individuals. She prompts introspective conversations on aesthetics, justice, learning how to touch, and learning how to listen. By splitting the screen into four close-ups of each individual, and allowing for the participants to consume sunflower seeds throughout, Thieves disrupts the typical structure of group conversation. The plasticity is shed and discomfort is revealed to be authenticity.

For playwright Briyana D. Clarel, the disturbance of social norms makes room for comedy and queer delight. Three of their sketches are featured: “complex,” the other I-word” and “Ruin the Reveal.” In each, Clarel picks apart common social interactions and reveals how white supremacy, politeness, and cisnormativity work together to suppress liberation for queer and trans Black people.

“Ruin the Reval” features a skittering Clarel in the role of Hades, who has decided to spend time sabotaging gender reveal parties. Hades foils reveals and cackles as couples weep at the prospect of now not knowing, “what color shoes to buy our baby” (“Babies don’t need shoes!” Hades remarks.)

Another play critiques the way non-profit organizations tokenize and humiliate Black

employees; a toxicity that can be particularly egregious when the organization is rooted in “feminist values”. In “complex,” two women sit down for a job interview. The interviewee is Black and the interviewer is white but Clarel stipulates in the script that both roles must be played by Black people. While the sketch makes clear mockery of how white women are usually blind to their own racism, the direction given by Clarel also takes down a common practice in performing arts in which racial power dynamics are replicated exactly, in the guise of critique.

Clarel’s work can also soothe wounds. “unboxed: a healing” is a solo performance piece in which Clarel traces and examines the experiences that have shaped their current position in life. Audience members are both witnesses and companions, as

they also reflect on the questions Clarel raises. This deep level of care is also evident in the work of The Starfruit Project, which is run by Clarel. The Starfruit Project supports the creativity and healing of Black queer and trans people by facilitating writing workshops and performance showcases. This work is not represented in *Influence and Deconsecration* outright but, the essence of the work is summarized with succinct sincerity in the featured poem by Clarel, “home.”

In certain circumstances, the words “home,” “body,” and “self” are interchangeable. Naomieh Jovin expertly overlays the three concepts in her surreal photography, which is shot in her abandoned, but never emptied, former family home. Jovin allows models to nakedly take up space and stand on

furniture; behavior that would have been decried had her Haitian family been privy to the ruckus.

Jovin's playfulness as a director, editor, and storyteller is highlighted in every image. "Red Carpet" features a model's bare feet and legs standing on a staircase that is enveloped in plush red carpeting. The toes crimping over the step's edge are edited to appear twice, with a second set added below the original. The interpretations of this simple decision are limitless.

"Reflection" is just as loaded with elusive meaning. A model positions herself on a dresser, hands placed awkwardly on the tall lamp that stands next to her. She looks over her shoulder in an intentionally awkward pose that only seems sensible when viewed through the mirror across the room. From this new angle, the pose is



poised, and the proportions of the model shift to those more closely associated with fashion models.

The visual of naked occupation of an unoccupied house is rebellious and could be jubilant, if it weren't for how Jovin complicates the feeling of freedom with expressions of loss. An image featuring two models ecstatically flailing in the living room is aptly titled, "Rejoice/Grief."

An untitled image features the heads of Jovin's family members, edited together as if squeezed impossibly onto a leather couch. They sit under a wall of photos and memorabilia, some of which celebrate Jovin's mother, who has now passed. An initially innocuous photo of a lighting fixture is titled "Mommy in the Corner" and in the unfocused background, there is a faded

framed image of a woman in all white, holding a diploma.

While Jovin uses the human form to accentuate the precarity of her former home, photographer Candy Alexandra González combines images of their nascent Miami with a previous series of self-portraits to further display the precarity of the human body. For *Influence and Deconsecration*, González presents a series of triptychs made up of self-portraits, nature shots, and poetry. These encapsulate a body of work titled, “Altar to self-reconciliation/ Altar a reconciliación propia.”

González spent time this summer back in Little Havana, recovering from COVID-19. Recovery came slowly (with no promise of completion) and González decided to heal by walking around their

neighborhood and capturing the leaves and buds growing all around.

Those photographs were matched with five images from “Mirror Talk,” a self-portrait series in which González fits into a corset like the one they dutifully wore during adolescence in order to conceal their body’s shape. These are warm and over-exposed; González is both an intimately present model and visually hidden under layers of themselves.

To complete the triptych, previously written poetry is shown together with the emotional imagery. In these short poems, González seems to write to themselves and asks how much longer will healing take.

In one set, there is text that reads, “I feel winded by the challenge/of looking at you/and learning to see you/for you and not the heaviness/that your uncensored gaze

holds.” Following it is an image of González, who is perpendicular to the camera but has turned their head and is staring directly into the lens. They appear to be in the act of either removing or putting on the corset. The last image is a close-up shot of a thin and fraying piece of brown fabric. Some edges start to droop down and look beautiful in their softness.