“The truth is a two-edged sword, and if one is not willing to be pierced by that sword, even to the extreme of dying on it, then all of one’s intellectual activity is a masturbatory delusion and a wicked and dangerous fraud”

–James Baldwin
LEILANIE ARCE
Wilbur Cross High School

HAZEL MENCOS
Wilbur Cross High School

EVA-LARUE BARBER
Home Schooled

ALYSHA MOLINA
Wilbur Cross High School

MIA CAPPIELLO
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School

BENIE N’SUMBU
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School

AYAH SIMONE ELDRIDGE
Amistad High School

DANIEL RAMIREZ
New Haven Academy

MICHAEL JONATHAN JIMENEZ
Metropolitan Business Academy

ANTHONY IRIZARRY
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School

ANTON EDWARD KOT
Educational Center for the Arts

PHOENIX TAYLOR
Wilbur Cross High School

JENNIFER LOPEZ
Wilbur Cross High School

WINTER VON KOHLER
Metropolitan Business Academy
Q & A with SAP lead artist Nona Faustine
Interviewed by Me’Ilena Laudig, Yawkey Community Service Fellow
with Ayah Simone Eldridge

ML: What were your expectations coming into the Summer Apprenticeship Program? Did anything surprise you?
NF: I came in with an open mind because I had never done anything like this before. This was only my second time teaching, so it was all new for me. We thought it would be a great experiment, particularly because Artspace had never attempted a photography apprenticeship before.

“History is important because it shows both triumphs and mistakes made in the past so that we may know what works and what doesn’t.”
- 2017 Summer Apprentice
ML: How have themes such as race, gender, and sexuality informed the project?
NF: The students come from various racial, economic, and gender backgrounds that reflect the way they see the world and the various positions they have taken. Their identities are still forming...I’ve watched them find strength in asserting who they are in the short time we've worked together.

ML: One comment I remember you making last week was that this year’s students are extremely diverse in terms of race, sexuality, nationality, etc. What was it like to work with such a diverse group?
NF: I am a native New Yorker, so this sense of diversity is a part of my world, it was not unusual for me. The students reflect the people I grew up with. Each one of them could have easily been students at my high school.

“For me, photography is an outlet that can change the world with a click.”
- 2017 Summer Apprentice
“The best part of this program is how we are all able to feel like we fit in. We are all able to be relaxed here. All negativity is irrelevant here.”

- 2017 Summer Apprentice

ML: How has your experience of teaching and working with high school students been? Has their energy, work, and presence reawakened questions that perhaps you asked at their age?

NF: It’s been a beautiful, enlightening experience. It’s been a long time since I was a teenager, but it took me back to a place I instantly recognized and understood. Those years are some of the most important, impactful life-changing times. You really come into your own and become a fully formed human being.
ML: How have you seen the students develop?
NF: The students have absorbed the lessons and slide presentations I’ve prepared on pioneering black female photographers and early photographers who have influenced my practice-- almost like sponges. We looked at these artists so that they could develop a more informed view of how their practices might evolve in the years ahead, and reach its greatest potential within the short amount of time we had together. Each day they grew, trying out in their own pictures, versions of the technical and conceptual strategies of the photographers we looked at.

For example, Phoenix found a [piggy] bank that was a Black Mammy figure, a stereotypical racial caricature from the late 20th century and used it in her photos. She was inspired to do this after seeing work by Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Kara Walker. Phoenix’s mother had rescued this Mammy bank from a flea market and Phoenix took it to the steps of the courthouse on the Green. We had discussed the building on a walking tour with La Tanya Autry, who told us about the history of the 1970 Black Panthers trial in New Haven. Phoenix knocked it out of the ballpark by putting Mammy on the steps of the courthouse. Also, I have to mention Anthony’s self-portraiture because it gets to the heart of my work as well as the subjects of many of the other artists we’ve looked at. I loved seeing him integrate this style in his work, tackling his own emerging identity as a Queer gendered young person.

“I [now] understand how to make my photos mean something. I am able to convey messages through my art which I couldn’t do before.”
- 2017 Summer Apprentice
ML: Over the course of the last three weeks, we’ve visited several historical sites in the New Haven area. In the process, we have also revisited parts of our own personal histories. How has this historical lens shaped the vision of this year’s project?

NF: Students are searching for answers and some relevancy to how they feel, how they’re experiencing the world...and you can only attempt to answer these questions by doing a historical overview of how we got here. I think it’s important to give them historical context in order for them to understand the situation at hand and the different events that are occurring in our society and culture. As artists, they should be well-rounded, and a large part of that is knowing what has come before them.

ML: We have also spent a lot of time learning about artists and their practices. Why is it important to you for your students to have this background?

NF: This gives them an idea about the possibilities of art making and image making and what they can do. I think every well-rounded artist needs that. This background opens up the world of possibilities for an artist.
ML: What has your experience of New Haven been like? What has documenting the city meant to you?
NF: New Haven has really grown on me. I like the quiet sections, the suburban feel mixed with the city life. It’s more diverse than I thought it would be. The history of the city really interests me. I’ve noticed a lot of new buildings have been built, and I’ve wondered what was there before because you have a lot of the old and the new, like New York City. I’m always questioning that in my own city, so naturally I would bring this line of thinking here, to a city as old as New Haven.

ML: Has this experience influenced the trajectory of the work you’re creating?
NF: New York and New Haven are some of the oldest cities in the country. This experience has widened my historical view in the context of my own work.

ML: Prior to the Student Apprenticeship Program, the majority of your work has focused on sites in New York City. Do you envision your practice opening up in the future to include New England or New Haven in particular?
NF: I would like that if it were to happen. I have some ideas. I’m very inspired.
ML: Your work is on view at the Studio Museum of Harlem right now, and you just had an opening last week. What’s up next?

N.L. I will continue to exhibit my work. I’m actually going to be in four shows from the summer to the fall of 2017, and I have exhibitions in 2018 that I’m really excited about, especially one at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. Also, I’ll have my first gallery solo show in 2018 at Higher Pictures in Manhattan, and am making new work for the exhibition.

Will this new work continue to explore self-portraiture?

Absolutely, I’m not done yet. I’m just getting warmed up!

“I learned about our history in a bit more detail, and something about the assignments also helped me see my town in a different light.”

-2017 Summer Apprentice
"You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely
Unprotected by law or customs to have the laws reduce you to
the condition of chattel, entirely subject to the will of another.”
– Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,
Written by Herself* (1861)

Nona Faustine’s photography operates in a critical space of intervention
that both whispers and screams. Faustine, a Brooklyn native, disrupts
the complicated “visual archive of slavery [which] is vast but empty of
works by the enslaved.” Generally our gaze is limited to the demeaning
nineteenth-century slave daguerreotypes commissioned by scientist and
racial theorist Louis Agassiz, copious minstrelsy illustrations, and other
negative stereotypical imagery that constitute the visual record of
slavery. We do not, as Stephen Best has noted, have visual equivalents to
Harriet Jacobs’ account *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by
Herself*, or the countless other lives of enslaved people. Faustine’s work
engages this chasm. Through employing her body in public spaces in
New York City, the artist aligns herself with centuries of black woman-
hood. Her conceptual blend of self-portraiture confronts complex
discourses of history, memory, public space, race, and gender.

In her photographic series *White Shoes*, started in 2013, the artist
creates haunting visual narratives that redress history. Outfitted in
white pumps, occasionally with a long white skirt or nude, Faustine
becomes an embodiment of enslaved women of African descent. As in

2. Ibid.
her photograph *Arn’t I a Woman*, 2017, in which she stands near the former home of abolitionist Sojourner Truth, there is often both a banal and striking quality in her images. Standing partially or fully nude on contemporary streets with a neutral facial expression, the artist disrupts any quick looking. We are forced to pay heed. The artist provides clues. In *Arn’t I a Woman*, the sign evokes Truth’s impassioned 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman,” Faustine’s long skirt suggests that earlier era and her descriptive title explains the setting.

At other times, Faustine opts for a more poetic mode as in *Lobbying the Gods for a Miracle*, 2016. Her practice regularly entails the politics of looking. But here, the artist negotiates the gaze in a different manner. The subject stands in the center of the frame in a frontal position with her head turned to the side. The belt composed of sets of baby shoes and the smoking pistol are focal points. Faustine does not give us a clear explanation such as a text-based sign. We are left to wonder if the woman has just done battle perhaps for her children. Unlike the photographs that entail a documentary component, this work is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s concept of “rememory” introduced in the novel *Beloved*. Faustine seems to recall a repressed memory in the

slavery archive as she engages both the psychological and historical dimensions of the subjects she embodies. The resulting uncanny images propose that engaging with repressed memories could be a path for coming to terms with the violence of slavery.

The artist also delves into this psychological realm in work *From Her Body I Will Make Monuments in Her Honor*. In refusing the viewer the ability to scrutinize the subject’s face, the artist may be suggesting the anonymity of enslaved women entombed in the past. The image may also compel us to critique ourselves as we take on the role of appraising black bodies. Our act of looking may remind us that visual inspection was one of the tools of power performed over enslaved people. Faustine’s removal of the face seems to align with Saidiya Hartman’s reflections on scenes of racial subjugation: “Redressing the pained body encompasses operating in and against the demands of the system, negotiating the disciplinary harnessing of the body, and counterinvesting in the body as a site of possibility.”

Faustine presents her body from three sides for inspection. Yet she sets the parameters for that looking. She makes her body a tool for compelling us to critique our complicity in the legacy of slavery.

![Image](image.png)

Nona Faustine, *From Her Body I Will Make Monuments in Her Honor*, 2014

While Faustine’s photographs connote a strong sense of vulnerability, they also connote power. Her nudity in public space, akin to the forced disrobing of people being sold on auction blocks, indicates her commitment. She takes on this exposed condition similar to the experiences of the millions of enslaved people who built this nation. However, Faustine’s work avoids the voyeuristic problems associated with many depictions of scenes of physical suffering. Instead, she directs our attention to the humanity of the people erased from history and the institutions that profited from their labor. Her photograph They Tagged The Land With Trophies From Their Conquests & Rapes, 2013 expertly highlights this dual nature. Here Faustine, nude except for her white heels, uses her physicality to defy the structures of New York. Through pushing against the columns of City Hall, she creates an indelible image of black resistance that both augments the visual archive of slavery and demonstrates that resistance thrives in the descendants of the enslaved. She makes us consider our idea of humanity and our individual roles in the narrative of our nation’s past and present struggles. Nona Faustine makes us understand ourselves.

Nona Faustine, They Tagged The Land With Trophies From Their Conquests & Rapes, 2013

Historian La Tanya Autry is Curator of Art and Civil Rights at Tougaloo College & the Mississippi Museum of Art, and was most recently the Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow, Photography Division, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, Yale University Art Gallery.
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- Helen Kauder, Executive Director, Artspace

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15