

Bold Tendencies 2022 Q&A with Dominique White

To start, could you give us a bit of background on yourself, such as where you studied, where you're currently based and some of your key interests as an artist?

I was born in Essex to a family of Caribbean Cockneys and quickly escaped to London as soon as I could to study at Central Saint Martins and Goldsmiths. I jumped ship to Marseille in 2020 after Brexit drove the final nail in trying to survive in London.

I'm really interested in aquatic afro-futurism with a taint of afro-pessimism. A lot of my research revolves around abolition, destruction and emancipation, whilst flitting between myths, dreams and the stark reality that we live in.

Starting in England and now living in France, you also work nomadically on various exhibitions, residencies and commissions around the world. How do you find this sense of nomadism impacts on your work - both conceptually and practically?

As a sculptor who works on a large scale (I would consider *may they never catch you* as small - haha!), it can pose challenges in a practical sense. A lot of the time, it becomes a test of stamina due to short production periods, limited access to materials and working with unknown factors. It's been a privilege to travel and work this much, but setting up a whole studio every two or three months is fiscally and physically exhausting! It became my normal working conditions throughout the pandemic to work like this, so that I could complete contracts and remain paid.

I've had many sleepless nights wrestling acrylic moulds in time for short deadlines, or worrying about whether a crucial material will arrive or sometimes worrying if certain fragments of works are able to cross the border! I think the most ambitious cross-border production was for *Blackness in Democracy's Graveyard* at UKS which ended up being the most fluid production yet due to border issues, visa concerns, expensive materials and fate being on my side.

At the same time, I enjoy travelling for residencies and installations as it grants me access to certain experiences, items or resources that I would usually only access through a screen. I enjoy collecting stories and myths associated with different bodies of water and relics, usually in the form of sails from every country I visit.

Your visual language is very distinctive, using symbols of nautical mythology in a dark, insurrectionary, and at times destructive tone. At what point did your work coalesce around this aesthetic and how has it developed in the past few years?

I'd say the current iteration started to emerge in 2018 with a work titled *Landlocked Prisoner*. It was the first work in which water solubility became crucial to the narrative of works and their lives, which then became cemented with the work *Fugitive of the State(less)* in 2019, shown as part of my first solo exhibition with VEDA in Florence. Despite making heavy and somewhat violent work, I'm a bit of a romantic and often daydream of submerging these bodies in the sea or bodies of water, as due to their soluble nature, the main forms which simply disintegrate, leaving their iron captors behind to slowly be consumed by the salt of the sea.

There's been a shift in the past year or so, from a limbo-like state to an active role. At the beginning of this body of research, forms would hang in an almost helpless state between capture and escape, and would often hang by single, delicate threads — as if they were waiting for liberation and were clinging onto this thread of hope, this thread of freedom under the current system.

This shred of hope was pretty much eradicated in 2020 and therefore the narrative depicted shifted. These forms are no longer looking or waiting for this escape, and are now actively destroying and consuming their captors as a means of liberation.

Central to your work are your terms of reference, which range from Afro-pessimism, Hydrarchy and what you define as “the Shipwreck(ed)”. Can you briefly describe what each of these terms mean to you and your work?

For me, each of these terms derive from a very specific definition of 'Ship' and its allusion to the container of

Blackness. Now this 'Ship' doesn't just denote solely to the slave ship or slavery, although it definitely is an example of this redefinition, it's a Ship or vessel that has re-emerged in mutated forms since the birth of capitalism through Hydrarchy.

I tend to refer to three ships to illustrate this continuous cycle of dehumanisation that we bear witness to each generation, and those are the case of the Zong (1781 - ongoing), the case of the MV Empire Windrush (1948 - ongoing) and the ongoing cases of migrants crossing the Mediterranean (ongoing). Simply put, each of these ships or vessels in question are automatically designated for the space of death. We were thrown overboard (literally or figuratively) and left to die.

This is where the pessimist jumps out as I see this as a continuous cycle that mutates with each generation and/or geographic location and the 'Shipwreck(ed)' is a movement to break that cycle. It is the wrecking of the vessel that attempted to contain Blackness, it is the complete disruption of power over land via the water (Hydrarchy from below), it is the telling of a intangible future that is deemed impossible. I guess it's what I imagine true liberation to look like, even though I can't even fathom what that world would even look like because this is all I know.

You recently completed a number of residencies, including at Sagrada Mercancía (CL), Triangle France – Astérides (FR) and La Becque (CH) in 2020 and 2021. Can you tell us a bit about what you got up to on these residencies, and the subsequent solo show you have recently opened at Triangle France?

I absolutely loved being with Sagrada Mercancía at the beginning of the pandemic. We spent a lot of time discussing abolition and the creation of almost intangible new worlds in Chile. They also inspired this new line of research that emerged in 2022 through the introduction of traditional whaling in other parts of Chile. I definitely have unfinished research (my residency was cut short by the pandemic!) that I would like to pick up again out there, and I hope in the future there will be a moment in which it's possible.

I spent a lot of time dwelling on this research again at La Becque, which is where the lines of research relating to whaling and the Hydra linked together. I was blessed to have shared my time there with such incredible artists such as MIGHTY and Iris

Touliatou. It was at La Becque where the shift in research emerged initially in a performance lecture that I delivered with Lecture Performa (founded by Rhea Dillon) whilst I was in confinement!

The rich research and incredible interactions that I was blessed to have experienced on these two residencies then made the fabrication or I guess manifestation of *Cinders of the Wreck* at Triangle - Astérides straightforward, as I then spent pretty much every day of the week in isolation in the studio working out how to bring these forms to life. Let's just say there was a lot of literal blood, sweat and tears (and nearly setting fire to my studio multiple times) that went into the manifestation of this show.

Your new commission for Bold Tendencies 2022 is called *may they never catch you*. Can you describe the physical piece and the process behind how it was made?

may they never catch you is a series of nine human sized, cast iron harpoons that are scattered towards a seemingly missed target. Each harpoon started as a hand moulded object in my studio which was then sent to a producer in Italy to be cast in iron. It's a tricky process full of potential unknowns, and this is the first time I have cast in iron at this scale which was a very challenging process.

They've been left in their raw, unfiltered state, which will slowly eat away at their forms until they collapse. It's a similar process to when you find iron chains or gates near the sea; elements eat through the protective layer until the metal itself succumbs to the sea. At the same time, it also gives this appearance that these harpoons have been salvaged after laying dormant on the sea bed... almost as whispers of a wrecked whaling ship again coming to life.

Where did the title for the work come from, and how do you think about your commission in relation to the programme theme of Love?

The title derives from the book 'Undrowned. Black feminist lessons from marine animals' (2020) by Alexis Pauline Gumbs:

All my love to the hunted, the traded, the betrayed. All my love to the haunting, the disciplined, the discrete. I know what it is to be somebody's nightmare all day. But when I

dream you, you are free. And your wings are unhidden and your sharp face relaxes and you breathe when you want to and loud. When you want to and how. And no one can catch you.

This is an ongoing love letter, first of all to the Windrush generation and their descendants, to Black folks trapped on land and to Black folks lost at sea. It's an ode to those whose humanity is constantly questioned or unmistakably eradicated and situates the place of solace beyond the margins or footnotes of this current narrative. It is situated *outside*, in an undetectable realm where they can evade capture for as long as they live.

I have no idea what the *outside* is after living so embedded in this time frame, in this mainstream telling of the future. Can you imagine what true freedom looks like? Without the police state? Without this late stage of capitalism? Without as Gumbs states:

a deadly system [that] doesn't have to seem like it's targeting you directly to kill you consistently... [a system that cuts off] parts of you daily, steal[s] parts of yourself that you need, just in its daily functioning in the legacy of its original purpose.

I do not dream of mutilating myself so that the generation who proceeds me may be offered a false taste of liberation. I dream of the collapse of the very system that was built through our purposeful dehumanisation. For now though, I hope you manage to escape their capture for as long as you can.

What have you got planned for the rest of the year — are there any special projects in the pipeline?

This summer I'll be participating in ArtBasel (CH) with a solo booth with VEDA Florence and will be presenting a new work at Maxxi in L'Aquila (IT) in the exhibition Afterimage.