

Skin 2 skin: B-Side

Words from the artist

I want to take a second here to tend to the lower frequencies. The underground, the underbelly, the B-side. To those whose skin are made of the earth. These spaces where time moves a little differently than it does up on street level. We tend to these frequencies through stories, retold over generations like transfers from one surface to another.¹ A process that builds an awareness of land and connection to home, but also one in which the details are subject to being lost, blurred, or maybe even deliberately withheld (for protection perhaps). These lower frequencies are tended to through attunement ~ *tabi tabi, po!* ~ Our upright bodies downfallen and connected to the ground², ears open to that which remains underneath.

Take the train 45 minutes north of here to the Guggenheim where the current exhibition, "Going Dark: The Contemporary Figure at the Edge of Visibility", asks the question: *What would the blackness of the painting mean if we considered not only its sociopolitical symbolism, but also its literal effects as a color whose qualities acutely influence sight and perception?*³ I couldn't help but relate it to brownness, asking myself and others, *how does the color brown confront us on a day to day?* I became intently focused on answering that question on a formal level and, for weeks, struggled with my thoughts around it. Finally, the words "but also" bulged out and revealed themselves from the text like a mound on a flat plane; "but also" as being with, "but also" as being alongside.⁴ For some, this way of troubling the distinction between form and content has been proposed as a radical formalism.⁵ For others, this radical change in form indexes the duende's arrival.⁶

According to Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, the duende is, in sum, the spirit of the earth.⁷ Growing up in a *househole* with Filipino lore, *duwende* (often conflated with *nuno sa punso*) was a mythological creature believed to live in dirt mounds that taught me to traverse the cemetery grounds with care, acknowledge the "unseen", and to never assume an empty plot of land as unoccupied ~ *tabi tabi, po!* ~ Through these multiple sensibilities to lower frequencies, I'm becoming aware of a quality of brown, both symbolically and materially, that asks us to slow down. A slowing down of vision, processes, development of knowledge, or how we navigate the world on a day to day. If we look beyond what we see, attune our senses to these other affective frequencies, and listen closely,⁸ our planet - humanity - is screaming for help.

The planetary crisis we face, fueled by industrialization and an imperial mode of living, has forced us to consider a reordering of labor. Less business to business and more skin to skin. More care work. But over the years, as my role as a working person in society has switched from fulfilling online orders to caring for our kids full time, I've learned how challenging that transition can be to one's identity. Am I contributing enough as "the man of the house"? Will I become another Filipino care worker rendered invisible? As a father of two and a recent bearer of familial loss,, I've become increasingly anxious about who we leave behind and what - particularly the messes. What outlives us and for how long? - a question of (un)archivability.

What image-object will continue to circulate? Is it a matter of material strength? Or care? I have tended to rigid structures for so long that I'm beginning to imagine outside the box. Disrupting the picture plane as I envision a landscape with some of the most fertile soils on earth.⁹ I want to create something new!! But in the distance, a hole.. and a mound. A reminder that there are people in this landscape. My tempo slows as I remember that this world is not becoming brown but rather, has been brown.¹⁰ So as I offer these works here in this space, underground, I start with a permission to pass. ~ *tabi tabi, po! tabi tabi, po!* ~

I start with a goodbye.¹¹

¹ Maximo D. Ramos, "Introduction," *The Creatures of Philippine Lower Mythology*. p. 5. Phoenix Publishing House. 1990

² T.J. Clark, "Bruegel in Paradise," *Heaven on Earth*. p. 75. Thames & Hudson. 2018

³ Ashley James, "Introduction" *Going Dark: The Contemporary Figure at the Edge of Visibility*. p. 17. Guggenheim Museum. 2023

⁴ Jose Esteban Muñoz, "The Brown Commons" *The Sense of Brown*, p. 2. Duke University Press. 2020.

⁵ Alan Ruiz, "Radical Formalism" *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*. Women & Performance Project Inc. 2016

⁶ Federico Garcia Lorca, "Play and Theory of the Duende," *In Search of Duende*. p. 62. New Directions Books. 2010.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 57-61

⁸ Tina Campt, "Listening to Images: An Exercise in Counterintuition," *Listening to Images*, p. 9. Duke University Press. 2017

⁹ Peter S. Goodman, "'There's No Other Job': The Colonial Roots of Philippine Poverty," *New York Times*. December 30, 2023

¹⁰ Jose Esteban Muñoz, *op. cit.*, p. 3

¹¹ Nathaniel Mackey, "Destination Out" *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes by Nathaniel Mackey*. 2005