

Jan Wade et al., *Jan Wade: Soul Power*, exh. cat., Vancouver: Information Office and the Vancouver Art Gallery, 2022, 176 pp. 150+ colour illus., \$35.00 (paper) ISBN 9781988860138

Yaniya Lee

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archipelagos, we are all connected back to the Caribbean as a cultural and artistic centre.

Fragments of Epic Memory frames the Montgomery collection as a speculative site of emancipation, using its collection of photographs to reframe dominant historical narratives about the Caribbean. Walcott's strenuous looking cues the reader to see these photographs with new eyes, asking: what is it that cannot be consumed? The catalogue contributes to the growing crescendo of voices that affirm that the colonial photographer has not and will never capture these subjects in their entirety. Through the collection of essays, texts and images documenting the Montgomery Collection and other artworks, the catalogue is distinguished beyond its association with the exhibition as a record of Caribbean artists, thinkers and writers reflecting on the impact of the Caribbean on the western artistic canon. One of the final texts in the catalogue, O'Neill Lawrence's interview with exhibition artist Leasho Johnson captures the essence of the catalogue's collected writings, successfully proposing an interrogation of a particularly rigid way of thinking by re-interpreting, re-looking, cutting up, collaging, to ask the question: "is this who we were—who we really were?"

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1. Walcott's text was originally delivered as the 1992 Nobel lecture. See Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory — The Nobel Lecture* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1993).

Jan Wade et al.

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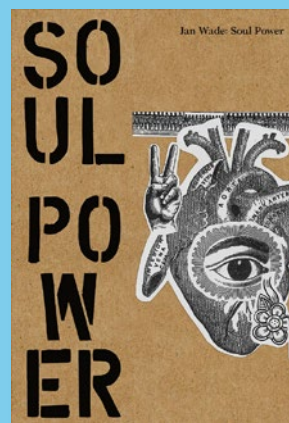
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Much was made in the press about the fact that Jan Wade's recent solo exhibition, *Soul Power*, presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery from July 2021 to March 2022, was the first major show for a Black Canadian woman artist in the gallery's ninety-year history. As a student of Black Canadian art, I know that these practices existed here for a long time, even if, until very recently, they were overlooked by major Canadian art institutions. More than the VAG's ability to fulfil current socially responsible representation targets under pressure, I was excited for the publication of a new monograph on an important Black Canadian woman artist, of which there are too few—monographs, not artists, I mean.

Jan Wade: Soul Power, a 176-page tome with over 150 full-colour images, was co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Information Office to accompany the most comprehensive survey of Wade's artwork to date. The catalogue lays the groundwork for a fuller understanding of her practice through the introduction of discourses around the work, and in this way achieves its purpose of presenting Wade's career as an artist. In what follows I will give an overview of the contents of



the book and some of the main ideas it therein.

Three major texts are included in the catalogue: "Breathe: A Conversation," an interview with Wade by the artist Deanna Bowen; "Life Lessons," a biographical essay by curator Daina Augaitis; and "Signifying, Text and Movement in the Art of Jan Wade," an analytical essay by writer Wayne Compton, all preceded by a brief foreword by VAG director Anthony Kiendl and followed by a list of Works, a Curriculum Vitae, and Acknowledgements. Interspersed between the texts and images are two-page spreads of testimonials by the artist, in which she describes her upbringing, her work, and her values.

Wade was born to an interracial couple in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1952, and raised in the local Black community. After art school in Toronto, she moved to Vancouver in the early 1980s, and there she found a local scene that nurtured a practice that soon had her showing her work in solo and group shows across the country and abroad. Wade's many mediums include painting, collage,

sculpture, and textiles. Her altars, crosses, praise houses, memory jugs and embroidery are often connected to the politics of Black life, a reflection of her spiritual upbringing in the local African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The photographs reproduced in the book are a combination of close-ups and installation shots, which together provide the viewer with a strong impression of Wade's distinct visual forms. Her sculptures, paintings and illustrations often incorporate found objects and, at times, resemble meticulously crafted 3-D collages. In the catalogue's richly coloured reproductions, Wade's beautiful, intricate works could transfix with their aesthetics alone, but instead gain another level of depth through the discussions of cultural and political contexts included in the accompanying texts.

Augaitis's essay compiles a sequence of biographical information from personal interviews with the artist. The author awkwardly broaches race in relation to Wade's life and career, uncomfortably imparting race and racial characteristics. She refers to Wade as "a person with a dark skin tone," for instance, and seems to describe Wade's relationship to Black culture as something discovered through research. Luckily, the two other texts by artists Bowen and Compton, who have both invested a significant amount of time in Black life and Black Canadian history, do not have these same issues.

Bowen introduces her interview by describing Wade's significance to her when she began her own career as an artist in Vancouver. (Part of

Bowen's artistic research traces her own family lineage from Vancouver to the Prairies and down to Nicodemus, a historical Black community in the Midwest of the United States.) Black Canada is often defined in relation to the monolith of Black American culture, but in the discussions included in this monograph there is no antagonism between the two—instead, there is an appreciation of complex, diasporic histories and identities. Bowen connects to Wade because they have a shared heritage and the shape and tone of the back-and-forth between the two artists in conversation is animated and lively. Bowen notices the labour-intensive work in the series of embroidered textile paintings *Breathe* (2004–2020) and then raises questions of labour, citation, and representation. Wade explains the rhythm and pace of the work, and how time is as important to the work's completion as any other material. Wade says: "I wanted it to flow, to move, but to convey a sense of time at first glance, and then when you realize it is a textile piece—each stitch made by hand—you realize that time is a definite element: sitting in time, moving in time" (28).

In his essay, Compton applies theory to Wade's work, referencing Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s essay on signifying in Black culture. He is attentive to Wade's careful and plentiful use of words and language, as well as her patterns, rhythm, and repetition. He notes: "Another way Wade's work ingeniously doubles and doubles again, from the point of view of her inclusion of text, is the way the positive and negative—the ecstatic and the painful parts of history—are

interlaced, creating a jarring simultaneity" (35). Compton attributes Wade's use of readymades and found objects in her sculptures and installations to a class commentary, by way of which "Wade's art is rooted unequivocally in Black Proletarian life" (36).

At one point, Wade declares that she's not interested in putting an interpretation on her work, that she prefers to leave it up to the audience. This generous sentiment gives a lot of room for the people seeing her work to generate their own opinions and also sets up the various texts in this catalogue. Together, the essays and testimonials situate Wade's work and visual forms within an artistic legacy. As an artist making work since the 90s, Wade is a part of a generation of Black Canadian women artists, including Buseje Bailey, Grace Channer, June Clark, Lucy Chan, and Charmaine Lurch, who for decades have steadily made work both inside and outside mainstream Canadian art institutions. As a practising artist, Wade often sold her work herself, which is evidence of her ingenuity in earning a living outside a traditional Canadian art system that relied heavily on municipal, federal and provincial grants to support emerging artists' careers. Funding that, as curator Andrea Fatona writes about in her 2011 dissertation "Where Outreach Meets Outrage: Racial Equity at The Canada Council for the Arts (1989–1999)," was largely only opened up to marginalized artists in the delayed aftermath of the 1988 multiculturalism act.

From activist work to traditional domestic crafts, Black cultural practices have been developing in

Black communities for hundreds of years. These art works and cultural practices did not always fit into mainstream platforms. Black artists in Canada, including Wade and her contemporaries, have found varieties of ways to make and share work outside of, or parallel to, those spaces. Later generations of artists, like Bowen's, were influenced by their work, but unfortunately still not enough of the history of this Black Canadian art is known. Students in art school, or without access to the actual communities in which these artists work, do not learn the stories of these Black Canadian artist foremothers. The history is missing, and this has caused breaks in the legacy of Black Canadian art's visual language.

The texts in this catalogue are attentive to formal and material aspects of Wade's work in a way that is gratifying and, sadly, often unattended-to in studies of racialized artists, when shallow representation talk takes precedence over analytical discussion of forms and contexts. The awkwardness of the first essay is only a reminder of the difficulty some white art workers have engaging Black Canadian culture, as they tend to see race as something that has nothing to do with them, but is instead a trait or series of accidents that belongs solely with the subject.

Catalogues like this are important to the burgeoning Black Canadian art history. As a part of the historical record, they become primary source material for how we see and think about Black art in Canada. As Black

curator Andrea Fatona explained in a recent interview, "If there's no writing as there would be for other kinds of exhibitions, and if there's no conversation from folks in the field who come from these communities, I think we're always going to end up with a void in the historical record of what happened, and the impact of what happened then gets lost." As of yet, there is no official history of Black Canadian contemporary art. This catalogue will be an important addition to that nascent field, which right now exists mostly in archives as critical reviews, academic studies, exhibition texts, and sometimes, on rare and lucky occasions, as exhibition monographs. I look forward to more such catalogues for other Black Canadian women artists with prolific exhibition track records, such as Deanna Bowen, Tau Lewis, Sandra Brewster, Erika DeFreitas or Michele Pearson Clarke.

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Tina M. Campt
A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021

232 pp. 78 colour & 33 b/w illus.
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(February 2023)

Leticia Cosbert Miller

A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See is the much anticipated follow up to Tina M. Campt's groundbreaking book *Listening to Images* (2017),

which introduced and explored the concept of photographic frequencies, that is, the haptic quality of images—"how they move, touch, and connect us to the event of the photo"¹—while championing a practice of listening to and looking beyond what we see in a photograph.¹ Campt, a Black feminist theorist of visual culture and Professor of Humanities and Modern Culture and Media at Brown University, amplifies many of the discourses presented in her 2017 monograph in this latest offering on making and viewing Black art.

In *A Black Gaze*, Campt trains her senses (sight, touch, hearing) on nine prominent contemporary artists whose practices straddle multiple media, including performance, video, film, photography, sculpture, and music: Deana Lawson, Khalil Joseph, Arthur Jafa, Dawoud Bey, Okwui Okpokwasili, Simone Leigh, Madeleine Hunt Ehrlich, Luke Willis Thompson, and Jenn Nkiru. As we encounter each artist in the book's



seven chapters, which are titled as "verses," we get a sense of Campt's continual "commitment to understanding visual culture through its entanglement with sound" (19). The