

Curatorial Essay for *BodyWarp* by Kemi Adeyemi

If there are many ways that racial blackness has been marked by burden, then there are an equal number of ways that body positions inhabited by people marked “black” mark this weight. They are seen, heard, and felt in the everyday mechanisms of survival that require you to hold your head a certain way, cock your elbow just so, mete out your pace carefully, drop both shoulders ever so slightly. These methods of movements allow you to leave your house, step off the curb, walk across the street, buy something at the store, and so on. These quotidian choreographies are always a gamble, of course, when any kind of movement attached to a black body is suspect: when one half-step off, or one glance too long, or one step too wide trigger the calculus of fear in others.

In this environment—which is to say: every day—black people are always marked by tension. Tension as described as frozen or immobile, or the anticipation that something (because there is always something) is about to go down. But tension also signals that which is pent up and ready to burst forth. This very dual nature of tension is central to Indira Allegra’s working with the object-concept of the weaving loom. In BODYWARP, the mathematics of the loom—an object which stabilizes the imbrication of the weft and the warp, which in and of themselves possess a theory of stasis and movement—become the coordinates through which a complex conversation about blackness and/as movement is staged. The mathematics of blackness in turn make possible a complex conversation about the theoretical weight of loom itself as an engaged site through which meanings of racialized gender have historically been crafted.

In BODYWARP, Allegra has partially dismantled the floor loom. Its core structure sits in the middle of the gallery space whereas the smaller-scale components that are integral to the larger loom’s functioning, such as the treadles, are positioned elsewhere in the space. In its fracturing, the physical and metaphysical weight of the craft object is somewhat dissipated in ways that allow for (if not demand) new methods of approach. One cannot technically produce an object, a weaving, from the loom as it stands. Allegra thinks through alternate engagements, then, in video and live performative engagements with the loom’s diverse elements. In these embodied installations, Allegra importantly brings all parts of her body in direct contact with loom pieces that are historically only touched by one’s hands, such as the shuttle or the heddles, or one’s feet, such as the treadles. By expanding the points of contact between the loom and the body, Allegra generates a series of queries about both: how are categories of “black” and “weaver” co-constructed through the traditional mechanics of weaving, yet reconfigured when those traditions are made physically impossible because of the dismantled loom? If tension is key to the meaning-making processes surrounding blackness and weaving alike, can we understand either through or as slack? As ease? Looseness?

If blackness has historically been scripted by and as tense movement, the disassembled loom allows Allegra to pursue more kinetically complex gestures that expand our expectations of how racialized gender is expressed—be it on a body or in a loom. More specifically, in forcing different interactions with the loom, BODYWARP stages a quieter conversation about gesture itself as holding potential for a more complex Politics that can certainly be attentive to but can never be contained by the tensions inhering in identitarian categories of race and gender. The Politics that Allegra gives us the tools to think with are not so object/outcome oriented. (This is immediately evident as she presses against our expectations that any embodied entanglement with a loom is always invested in production of an object.)

Allegra's modes of lying atop, standing alongside, and fitting under the looms reconfigure expectations for how and where black women's bodies move—engaging process itself rather than conforming to expectations of querying the object (racialized queer gender) as *the* site around which Politics must be organized in order to gain certain kinds of institutional recognition, be it from galleries, museums, collectors, or the government. Through the quiet intimacy of her movements with the loom, we are continually refused, in turn, our expectations (or hopes?) that Allegra's body will conform in some way to a traditional image of blackness as always already, or at least anticipating, suffering. Instead, Allegra engages the production and experience of tension, where resistance isn't a response but an active, productive site that allows one to move their body in unexpected ways.