

# Shedding Heaviness

Julianna A.S.

Delali Cofie

Kourtney Jackson



**G44** Centre for  
Contemporary  
Photography

MARCH 28 - JUNE 1, 2024

## Cover image

Julianna A.S., *untitled (RAMS)* and *Can you feel what I hear?*, 2024

## Poster image

Delali Cofie, *In The Garden II*, 2023

**Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography** is an artist-run centre committed to supporting diverse approaches to photographic and image-based practices through exhibitions, education programs and facilitating artistic production.

Gallery 44 provides space and context for meaningful dialogue between artists and publics. Together, we offer an entry point to explore the artistic, cultural, historic, social and political implications of the image in our ever-expanding visual world.

**1616G44** is a platform sharing initiative occurring in two spaces over three seasons, onsite at Gallery 44 and offsite at Studio1616, an emergent Black-owned studio and exhibition space and collaborative endeavour Aaron Jones and Timothy Yanick Hunter. Over the summer/fall of 2024, Gallery 44 will support post-exhibition residencies and window projects at Studio1616 for each of the three artists, Julianna A.S., Delali Cofie and Courtney Jackson, unfolding from their work in *Shedding Heaviness*.

In their collaborative project, **Studio1616**, Aaron Jones and Timothy Yanick Hunter merge their distinct artistic voices, creating a platform that explores the multifaceted aspects of their identities, cultures and experiences. This fusion embodies the essence of their artistic ethos, where they seek to foster meaningful dialogues about identity, culture and societal narratives.

**1616G44** is supported by Threading Frequencies, a partnership project with OCAD University supported by SSHRC, led by Immony Mèn and Suzanne Morrisette.

THREADING  
FREQUENCIES

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# carry as you rise

## Lillian O'Brien Davis

On a blustery day in early January I make my way to 1616 Dupont, the studio of Timothy Yanick Hunter and Aaron Jones, for my appointment with both artists. The bus is late and I walk from the station arriving flustered and breathless. Tim, Aaron and I spend some time catching up—upcoming shows, travel plans, upcoming nuptials—just chatting. As we move on to discuss the exhibition at Gallery 44, *Shedding Heaviness*, it's with the understanding that both artists have a lot on their plates.

Hunter and Jones set the terms for this collaboration, terms that were then outlined in a contract. I've learned the value of articulated boundaries to establish positive and sustainable working conditions—even amongst friends. In 2022, when we first invited Hunter and Jones to consider what we vaguely called a "programming takeover" of Gallery 44's spring exhibitions slots, in conversation with myself, Alana Traficante, Hunter and Jones, we discussed how we might more efficiently share resources that a legacy artist-run centre, like Gallery 44, has access to. As members of Black Artists Union (BAU),<sup>1</sup> Hunter and Jones have a preexisting relationship to collaborative work without the formalized structure and funding framework of an artist-run centre. During an initial meeting, Hunter and Jones proposed a plan that would involve three artists in their immediate community as well as support their own artistic development through a publication mentorship. The process felt like a natural progression of their own practices, meaningful arrangements of inspiration and creative reference always building towards something bigger.

Hunter and Jones have specifically articulated their relationship to this project as not within a curatorial framework instead seeing the project as a many tiered collaboration, leveling power dynamics between themselves and Gallery 44, as well as between Hunter, Jones and the exhibiting artists. Similar collaborative frameworks have been undertaken between arts organizations and artist collectives in the past, such as SBC Gallery and the Wood Land School in 2017<sup>2</sup> and BAU and Whippersnapper in 2018,<sup>3</sup> among others. Opportunities for slow working, relationship building among artist peers as well as small-scale institutions and resource sharing link these collaborative experiments. This project, which consists of an exhibition at

Gallery 44, an off-site residency for each artist at Studio1616 and a forthcoming publication, considers collaboration from the perspective of sustainability. Thinking about how racialized artists might simultaneously have more space to access resources, lead conversations and develop their practices while at the same time not feeling pressured to always be making something new—something symptomatic of the experience of being an emerging artist—to consistently be in a production mode in order to keep themselves afloat financially and professionally.

*Shedding Heaviness* features the work of Kourtney Jackson, Delali Cofie and Julianna A.S. The artists' works are conceptually linked, seeking to articulate ephemeral experiences such as non-linear time and sound through familial memories, contemplation of the body and the Self. The exhibition is grounding; inviting reflection through spiritual and intangible encounters, as in Julianna A.S.'s project *Can you feel what I hear?* which explores what the artist describes as "Intuit-familiarity", a deep, boundless connection and something immediately understood rather than needing an explanation. The sculptural sound system plays an audio track created by the artist, entwining recollections of her grandmother's sound system in Kingston, Jamaica, with audio memories referencing the artist and her mother. Julianna remixes familial memories in order to explore the power of sound in relation to how memory is contained in the body as it echoes throughout the Afro-caribbean diaspora. This work includes an accompaniment of photographs of the artist and her mother, exploring concepts of spacetime through distorted images that convey a sense of travelling, transferring information and the interconnectedness of past, present and future.

Kourtney Jackson's series of photographs reinterpret the lesser known biblical fable of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar who was banished by God from his throne and spent seven years in the wild slowly becoming more animal than human. Only after Nebuchadnezzar is truly humbled does God return him to his human form. For Jackson the story offers an interpretation for a pathway to a return to the Self through the disintegration of the (western) icon of The Human/ King one might become more present and embodied.

1 BAU is an artist collective supporting and facilitating the movement of Black artists and creatives established in 2016.

2 John Hampton, "Inside a Year-Long Experiment in Indigenous Institutional Critique", *Canadian Art*, May 2, 2017, <https://canadianart.ca/features/indigenous-institutional-critique-case-study-wood-land-school/>.

3 BAU took over programming at Whippersnapper Gallery in 2018.

Delali Cofie's photographic series also explores the self through the body, visualizing the shifting perspective of self either in community or in solitude. Rich textures and luxurious handmade garments of organic materials in domestic and garden settings suggest a liminal space between the private and the public. The doubled subject, the appearance of family and self, reflect Cofie's visualization of the multitudes contained within a body.

The artist selection process for Hunter and Jones was intuitive, out of a desire to give a platform to peers and colleagues in the Toronto community who they have connected with naturally through spaces like Nia Centre for the Arts, BAU and even G44's BIPOC mentorship network. Hunter and Jones have allotted space for each artist to conduct consecutive research residencies at Studio1616 following the close of the exhibition at Gallery 44. This post-exhibition residency intends to give each artist time to rest and contemplate rather than feeling pressure to produce work for the purpose of exhibition. The studio is framed as a library, a space for gathering and eventually sharing each artist's research material which will be made available to the public during select open hours.

A forthcoming publication, supported by Gallery 44, will also provide a platform for Hunter and Jones to invite a wider array of artist colleagues to share their writing and images, further unpacking the concepts of the exhibition after a period of contemplation. Like the exhibition and residency, the publication will prioritize sustainable working models, inviting community members to share what they are thinking about and working on and seeking what connections arise out of generative proximity.

An overall vision for this project is an interest in research and process, investigating how sustainable relationships might be built amongst colleagues and peers. Hunter and Jones propose a model based on slow research and reflection. The artists in *Shedding Heaviness* expand on this proposal through their respective artistic practices by posing open questions through their artwork that invite reflection and maintain space for infinite possibility without infinite endowment of the self.



Kourtney Jackson, *heaven's dew (KING)*, inkjet print, 2024

