# Anique Jordan

**Anique Jordan is an artist, award-winning writer, educator, curator and entrepreneur. Her recent work thinks about working class aesthetics, time travel, invisibility, Caribbean carnival, and Black Canadian futurities. She is part of the curatorial team at the Art Gallery of Ontario and is the Executive Director of Whippersnapper Gallery.**



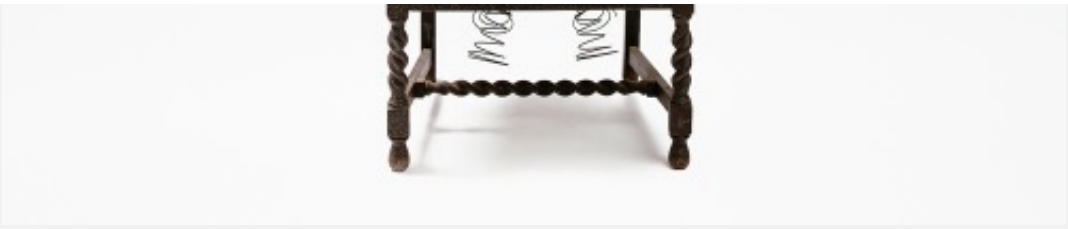


Photo of Anique Jordan by Sean Howard

***What inspires you to create?***

I started creating from a question: How do we survive? I was really perplexed by that question as a child. I didn't understand how Black people have been able to survive through transatlantic slavery, through racism. How are we here? I started asking that question to the older women in my family, and that led to my first photographic work. For me, part of the impetus behind creating is trying to find answers to something where language fails us. It's a way of thinking about how we can subvert colonial legacies by creating something that doesn't have to be used as language.

I'm also led to create because I want to be able to provide a different language, particularly in thinking of young Black girls. Can they understand, can they viscerally feel what I'm trying to say, and does it immediately speak to them? I think about the young people, and I think about elders too in creating. Does it say the stories that they would have wanted to say?

***On your website, a quote from you reads: "I recognize that my life represents the ability to continue in spite of all odds.***

***my life represents the ability to continue in spite of all odds, my body is marked as a site of resilience and I honor that by creating." Can you explain this?***

A lot of Black history in Canada is taught through really distorted routes. We learn very little, if anything, in school. Most of what I did learn about myself comes from really violent movies about slavery, like Roots. When I was younger, I was in the kitchen with my mom, and I asked her: "Mom, are you a slave?" I didn't understand how distant these events were. All I knew was that every time I saw myself on TV, it was in the form of a joke, or as being enslaved.

I spent a lot of time thinking about blood, and how blood is not something that is invented. Blood is in all of our bodies, and it's the same blood that has been passed on through generations. It really helped me to start thinking about the ways that I am living because somebody made choices that enabled me to survive, to be born; somebody made sacrifices, somebody resisted, somebody evaded something. I think about the responsibility I have by being alive; how can I do justice to this life that was not by happenstance, but was by deliberate choice making.

Part of it is also seeing art as a form of liberation, as a form of escape and a survival strategy. I see it as a way of imagining something that the world will tell you is impossible. I feel as though when I produce work, there's some sort of encoded language that only a Black person could read through, and there's something in there that's somewhat freeing. Part of it is sharing a type of freedom that I believe exists, even though the world tells

type of freedom that I believe exists, even though the world tells me it's impossible.

***The archive, history, family history, is a common aspect of your work. What is it about the past that you're drawn to?***

I don't think I'm drawn to the past at all. I'm drawn to the idea of disregarding all temporalities. I consider myself thinking about time in a sense that there is no time, there's a continuum. With dark matter, there's the idea that the world and the universe is being held in place by unknown matter, but it's so weighted that we know it exists whether or not we see it. I think of myself as existing within that sort of realm: invisible, unseen, but so weighted that you can't help but experience it.

Time has always blown my mind. I want to think about time in different ways; I want to think about how the future impacts the past, how the present impacts the future. I recently finished a residency with Wanda Nanibush at The Banff Centre called Future Narratives. It was led through an Anishinaabe perspective where we thought about the future of Canada, and the future in general. Something Wanda said really stuck with me. She said: "We can think of time as the present being impregnated with the future and the past." So even when I do work with things that have a historical feel to it, for me, it's not existing in the realm of history, it's existing in a realm of liminal space where anything can happen, where all things can be subverted. It's also a very political space because I'm thinking about the ways in which Black bodies are remembered in the Canadian dominant narrative. For me to decide what that memory looks like feels like

narrative. For me to decide what that memory looks like feels like a very political act.

***You're working on the manuscript for you first book, Possessed: Black Women, Hauntology and Art as Survival. What's the book about?***

The book is based off of my thesis at York. A lot of my work started off with the idea of survival. I had always thought of survival in a material sense; I did a lot of work in social entrepreneurship, in alternative economies, in the ways that we can use what we have to create what we need in a material sense.  In spending a lot of time thinking about that, I realized that I'm missing the things that we can't commodify: the things that we can't see, the survival strategies. For example, a Black mother might remove the hood from her son's head before he exits the door. That is a survival strategy that can't be commodified, but it must be relayed and taught in order for that boy to grow to an adult. That led to me understanding survival as an art form; it's a creation. I think about art as this thing that constantly reminds us to imagine what's impossible, because in exercising that imagination we create new tools that allow us to survive. It comes to life for me through the procession of carnival as the personification of the ghostly space where anything can happen along the parade route. I think about the energy that comes out of the space of pure imagination where everyone buys into this dream that we have. I think about what that can do for us, if we were to use that energy to create new ideas.

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***You describe yourself as a futurist artist. Describe what a futurist artist is?***

I'm trying to have a way of identifying myself as a way that speaks to a constant desire to subvert. I don't think I quite captured it. For me the futurists, and futurisms in general are carving out a space that is invisible, that does exist. When I think of that space of non-humaness, I always ask myself: what do the non-humans do? How do we hang? What do we think about? Futurist doesn't encapsulate it as best as I want it to, but the movement that's towards futurisms right now in the art world does. I just want to find something that speaks to both the material and conceptual ways that I'm thinking about survival.

***In 2016 you created work for a Lawren Harris show at the AGO. One of your pieces in the exhibition was a re-creation of the Black British Methodist Episcopal church that existed in Toronto in the early 1900s. Can you describe this work and why you were inspired to create it?***

The AGO relationship started when I applied to a call for ten Black artists to respond to the Basquiat show that was on at the time, and I was accepted. The work that I showed was of my mother and my elder aunts wearing uniforms from the war of 1812. Andrew Hunter who is the Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art, liked the work and started a relationship with me. He commissioned me to respond to the upcoming Lawren Harris show. At that time, I started learning about the Ward, which also coincided with an excavation that was happening right behind City Hall, in the epicenter of the Ward. They were making room for a

Hall, in the epicentre of the Ward. They were making room for a new provincial courthouse. What had been at the site before was a historical Black church, and two homes owned by one Black family. It would have been a place where a lot of people would have gathered not only for church, but also as a community centre. It was also a space of very intense social justice because the church at the time would have been called an African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was part of a sect in the United States. At the time, bounty hunters could enter the church and enslave people after the fugitive slave act was enacted. So the church and many other churches changed its name from the African Methodist Episcopal to the British Methodist Episcopal church so that there could be a sanctuary inside the church. There's a lot of history there.

I had asked Infrastructure Ontario to access the site to shoot a re-enactment of a congregation, and when I told them that it was going to be a site for thinking about Black memory and Black lives, they stopped communicating with me. A lot of my decision making went on around that. You're trying to talk about the history of a particular site, and you literally have to jump the fence as a Black woman to tell the story of Black people. I eventually made the decision not to jump the fence to show the inability to have access. In order for you to speak about history, you have to become an activist.

There's two different photo pieces that came out: one is a four part, and one is a single image. The four part is a woman who is standing in four different directions right in front of the lock of the

boarding that prevented people from entering, and she does a ritual where she turns to the four directions. She's standing on top of a Vèvè which is a Haitian voodoo symbol that represents the guardian of the crossroads. Behind her I drew a Congolese cosmogram which symbolizes life, death, after life and rebirth. There are crossroads all around her, and then she makes these crossroads with her body. She doesn't look back to the viewer until she's done – she came with a purpose, which is important for me in thinking about not responding to a white gaze.

There's another image that was shot inside the Church of Holy Trinity, which is the oldest and only standing structure from the war in this area. We re-enacted a congregation with people in different positions in the community. They are all wearing Victorian mourning clothing, so as to disregard the spaces that forget Black bodies, and to think about spaces that are purely about remembering them. They are all facing the audience in a dead pan expression. It's not an expression of sadness, it's not an expression of happiness either. It's an expression where you as an audience member have to implicate yourself because you have to decide how to feel in relation to them looking back to you.

Finally, the AGO asked me to do First Thursdays, and we re-enacted the re-enactment. We re-staged the Church of Holy Trinity image. I worked with 30 artists, community leaders, activists, my mother, my aunts, and we walked across the AGO atrium. From a DJ booth I called out the names of all of the Black residents who would have lived in the Ward at that time; the names were given to me by UofT researcher Daniel Panneton. It

names were given to me by OCAD researcher Daniel Fairbrother. It took 40 minutes for everyone to walk across the space, and at the center, they turned and remade the image that's in the picture. At that point I started to call out the names of mainly men who had been shot by the police or had died violently in Toronto. For a lot of performers, it was their first time in the AGO, and they told me that they never felt like they could take up space like this. It was such an emotional experience. For the audience members who were Black, or people of colour, I could feel a protection over them during the performance, and as soon as it ended, I felt the reclaiming of the space.

***Is there anything else that you'd like to add?***

I am increasingly moving back home as a caribbean woman artist and thinking about the ways the infrastructure, innovation, politics and festivals of the Caribbean influence my work. I have been experimenting more with sculpture and performance as integral parts of my work and want to see how these forms will continue impacting my photography.

Learn more: aniquejjordan.com; Instagram: @aniquejordan