Founded in 1976, *Indiana Review* is a non-profit literary magazine dedicated to showcasing the talents of emerging and established writers. We publish fiction, poetry, and nonfiction from all over the world, twice each year, and solicit visual artists for cover art that fits our “carefully strange” aesthetic. In Bloomington, the place we call home, we regularly organize readings to celebrate both our contributors and local writers. On September 6, 2018, we partnered with Grunwald Gallery of Arts, the Indiana University Arts and Humanities Council, and the IU Creative Writing department to host an ekphrastic reading in conversation with the *Out of Easy Reach* exhibit.

**OUT OF EASY REACH EXPLORES HOW AMERICAN ARTISTS FROM THE BLACK AND LATINX DIASPORAS WHO IDENTIFY AS WOMEN ARE USING VARIOUS FORMS OF ABSTRACTION TO NAVIGATE, RESPOND TO, AND EMBRACE THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD.**

—outofeasyreach.com

Four writers, Maria E. Hamilton Abegunde, A Bowden, L. Renée, and Joann Quiñones, viewed the work together and then, after only a couple of weeks, responded with poems. The book you’re holding is a record of the event, a record of creators connecting across genres to comment on our times. We truly hope you enjoy.

—Essence London

*Editor-in-Chief*
MARIA E.
HAMILTON
ABEGUNDE

in conversation with

Xaviera Simmons, On Sculpture #2, 2011, Color Photograph. Collection of the Engel/Feldman Family.

“Untitled” also references other works featured the Out of Easy Reach exhibit: Little Gold Flag by Barbara Chase-Riboud and The Origin of the Blues by Ariel Jackson.
My journey to the water started at Little Gold Flag,¹
the “imaginary reincarnation of histories”²
that don’t know they are connected
egun ggun separated and crowned with bronze
gold silk-spun fluid to resemble hair or nooses
Ashanti and Amazons
Emmett Till and Laura Nelson
rope twisted around our necks
that still make other people rich.

I walked next to *The Origin of the Blues*³
though I would have missed it save
that little voice saying he wanted freedom now
and no(!), he wasn’t willing to wait for it.
I followed that voice around the corner to find Confuserella
traveling through space in a blue pyramid
like she was one of Sun Ra’s thoughts.
She wanted to resolve the impossible:
“the desire yet inability to ‘speak with her whole body,’”
as if doing so would explain Katrina, Cosby, and why
some people want everything Black but the skin.

I proceeded to the center of the room, but I felt trapped
in that spinning blue pyramid thinking: how easy it is to get lost in
“…in-between spaces, with nonlinear narratives that drop off and then continue,
with shifting narratives, shifting characters and shifting histories.”⁴

How easy it is to be pulled back into memory year 1980.

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1. Barbara Chase-Riboud
2. *Out of Easy Reach* Catalog, Indiana University, p18
3. Ariel Jackson, 2015
4. *Out of Easy Reach* Catalog, IUB, p50
My last summer in Grenada, the one after my mother died. The one where the CIA plays pre-war invasion games with the New Jewel.

This is the summer a little Black girl sits on a bomb made for Maurice Bishop. In that moment, she and the island’s chance for reconciliation are blown apart. It is the first (but not last) time I see an AK-47 up close. A boy as young as I, and perhaps more frightened, pushes it into my face when soldiers search my uncle’s car.

This is the summer I mourn my abortion and contemplate the connection(s) between my mother’s death and my death as a mother. At age 15, I know then what I know now: my whole body is the point of and origin for memory and I can use it—bodymemory—to piece together Black girls who were/are/are being/will be sacrificed for revolutions.

I then turned around and saw the people jumping off the boat and I remembered Salvador de Bahia, how between the island and the mainland young men climbed the launcha’s rails, dived into the water, belying their Olympic skills. And, I wanted to be home. I wanted to be at the horizon where the sky meets the sea. In the century before I was sold to slavers. In the century when I met my beloved. In the moment where I am in a backward bend so deep my heart cracks open and all I have ever felt flows into the ocean. She laps up my terror and grief as if it is an ebo long overdue.

II

The picture is a sculpture. You think you are looking at a photograph of someone holding a photograph.

Right now, you are wondering why they are jumping. You will make up your own reasons. Me, I want them to be those boys diving recklessly to make tourists gasp at their bravery. But for all I know they could be “refugees” jumping because although one boat can carry dozens once aboard, it cannot catch them once they swim away. Or, it could just be some friends hanging together to stay cool off the coast of somewhere.
What does it matter? They are jumping all the same. From the edge of a boat to the edge of a page and into the lens of a Black woman stepping out of the sea standing in the sun, and holding the whole world in her hand.

III

Xaviera Simmons once retraced the transatlantic slave trade by walking for a year and a half, 8 hours a day, all around America, with Buddhist monks. During that same time, I was sailing the slave routes of the Atlantic between Puerto Rico and Brazil for two months with the first Black man to ever circumnavigate the world solo.

One morning her traveling companions boarded my ship because they had heard about us. As team leader, I greeted them, asked if there was an Orisa elder to salute. There was not. I sat down next to a young woman with beautiful dreadlocks and we began talking.

Have I told you this before?

Two black women meet on a ship sailing slave routes of the Atlantic. We are free. We are aware of the irony. One of them is walking the roads enslaved Africans took in a new world. The other is sailing the waters that carried free Africans away from the worlds they knew. We know how lucky we are. We know how everyone watches us. The camera has not stopped filming. The cameraman wants to know how we feel. Wants us to replay the first time we saw each other—10 minutes ago—because he missed the encounter.

Two Black women meet on a ship sailing slave routes of the Atlantic.

My sister is walking the roads from North to South. I am sailing the water routes backwards from the Puerto Rico to Brazil. Our return passages have been paid for already in salt and blood and the histories you will never read.

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5 The Middle Passage Voyage had several legs. I was lead team for leg 1, Puerto Rico to Brazil. Other leads sailed from Brazil to Ghana, Ghana to Senegal, and Senegal back to the US. It took our leg two months to complete the journey.
Two black women meet on a ship sailing slave routes of the Atlantic. We lean into each other’s arms without warning. And, then, even the cameraman stops and turns away. This memory is our memory. Only we can remember and make meaning of what happens when two Black women understand that the weight of the journey we are making has increased by the weight of the water times ten and that it pushes us forward, outside of time, away from any present we may know, and denies us any future that does not include the recollection of each other.

Our bodies refuse the ancestors, their never-must-be-forgotten stories that want to pull us to the bottom. We are the ones who jumped and did not get eaten. We have no idea how we got here, on a ship called The Sortilege, French for spell, as in magic or sorcery, walking cobblestoned streets with monks sitting on a ship bound to retrace slave routes. For what seems like forever: We cannot stop crying. We cannot stop shaking. We cannot stop clinging to each other. We do not explain our silence, or why we turn toward the water, when we do.
A BOWDEN

in conversation with

No good is just going to walk through that door. Craft your own arena. The ever-blessing of seeing my reflection in a poured milk. *You are back for a drop in the cup of the middle of ocean.*

Jar off the threaded twist. To repeat each and every stone “the work is benevolent.” Am I transcendent because I have studied this movement for so long? Well that’s like saying, *a spirit’s uncontrollability reveals itself in the fact it must be exorcised once conjured.*

Two starlings trapped flightless entangled by one foot each.

The world too has decided to be transcendent of itself and it’s personifying meanings. Bad feeling in my throat. Reminds me of a story I heard. How they felt grace the moment they began to hemorrhage. Sowing before the 7th oil tide. White colt waiting for it’s sight. What were the signs supposed to be again? *Dried fruit and the thrown performance.* Lines on your face from a respirator. Standing in the mold breeze facing

Two whole possessions at each other’s arms. Heavy bodied four legged birthed low to the floor.

See. All that is needed is a matter that submits to a thing for cleaning.

Because I have seen?

Just almost. Yes.
When a spider falls out of your mouth it has already toiled to repeat its likeness. I try to smell beyond the blackness but only smell almond oil, butter, hot combs humming their tones against lines of scalp almost as beige as the stain. Raw lambswool opening up just to contain. Tuning to split a scalp open again. You are replacing not throwing though the energy is the same as a body in webbing/that keeps the spirit free. That was-is dependent on its legs. oxen free for barrels batwing with a gurgle. See the chest sticking out its throat. What becomes of the black brown sage? The same thing that happens to the sage. Of the trees that trick sticky maple likenesses. Did you lay and think about this too? And did the ink I bet come laughing at first before you got the kicking out enough without it preserving your footstep. Down to its numerical or its double-dutch slackness. application of ancestry. general dissent. meant to mask physical germination and psychic mutilation. Ha. What story is that? To be excluded and then added back? Some dampened wild strawberry with its ware. Bend with all your eight arms newly freed from glass. Here is a guide to a newly realized anthropocentric phrasing of your name remembered for its richness and its 95 syllables.
L.
RENÉE

*in conversation with*

UNTITLED

I should be glad to be here
I should be glad to be here
It ain’t that bad, cuz I’m here
Don’t look too mad to be here

Ain’t nothin’ worse than a Black woman
who believes she deserves anything
has earned everything
despite in spite of spikes the world spits up
slice this brown skin to bits delights
this world strips from
hands her clan the klan stripped
bare she grins and bares it unseen heap
hailed and hoisted across centuries this
tick-tack-toe back slash spectacle
sanguine mass
this blood inheritance
this brace-for-it jolt
this shuck this jive this
performance of equal
this blue packet disguising
salt this bitter pulp
she force feeds it
down down down down
swallows singed cup of ashes
like liquid lightening like
spoonful of madness
like fly-bespotted shit
like roped-off entanglement
down down down down
let green funk plume
in the belly of her mind let
the putrid be purified let stomach acid remake
this acid churn rage into something
she can use race into something
not abused let her pierce this minstrel
smile sewed taut cheek to cheek
speak more than meek
speak past the white mask speak
bandages speak raw no chaser speak havoc
speak savage speak crooked balance speak
round back porch slammed doors speak
whispered hisses speak  charred missives speak
girl,  speak

I should be glad to be here
I should be glad to be here
It ain't that bad, cuz I'm here
Don't look too mad  to be here
JOANN QUIÑONES

in conversation with

Kellie Romany, In an effort to be held, 2016, Oil paint and clay. 
Courtesy of the artist.
In an effort to be heard,
I cut my tongue
tied it in the porcelain cup
of strangers’ hands
leaving rings of blood and sweat.
(Blackness is an out-of-body experience.)

In an effort to be seen,
I flayed my flesh,
(mea culpa, mea culpa)
gave birth to you on all fours,
my lovely brown fawn,
carried you like scars on my back.

In an effort to be held,
I tied my hands behind my back
and waited
  waited
  waited
for you to free me
or bring me back home.
Martine Syms, More than Some Less Than Others XII, 2016, Archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC.

“Haiku—More or Less” also references Syms’ Subtle Maneuver
In a bright, white light, 
no one can see a gentle, 
black hand clearly.

Harvest gold curtains hid 
the yam-selling man’s daughter. 
Daddy, forgive me.

I want to stay in 
the cut. Open wound. Fingers 
are not done searching.

Bigger. Black children 
searching in the sand can’t see 
airplanes anymore.

Detroit, when the mule 
had its funeral, printed 
buzzards claimed no one spoke.

Life goals: Young and Rich. 
What happened to Young, Gifted, 
and Black, my people?

Who knows what you’ll do 
(fine, as you are told, for now) 
when cut text runs off?

In a sharecropper 
first world, off-white vans sell socks 
to that side of town.
1992 taught me I am a ghost in the film. Play. Repeat.

How far can I see through Black fences casting long shadows on White walls?