

On-n-On:

On-n-On is to Archive. To continue. To print.
To assemble. To cipher. A zero. An infinite.
Over time we change and evolve over and over,
On-n-On.

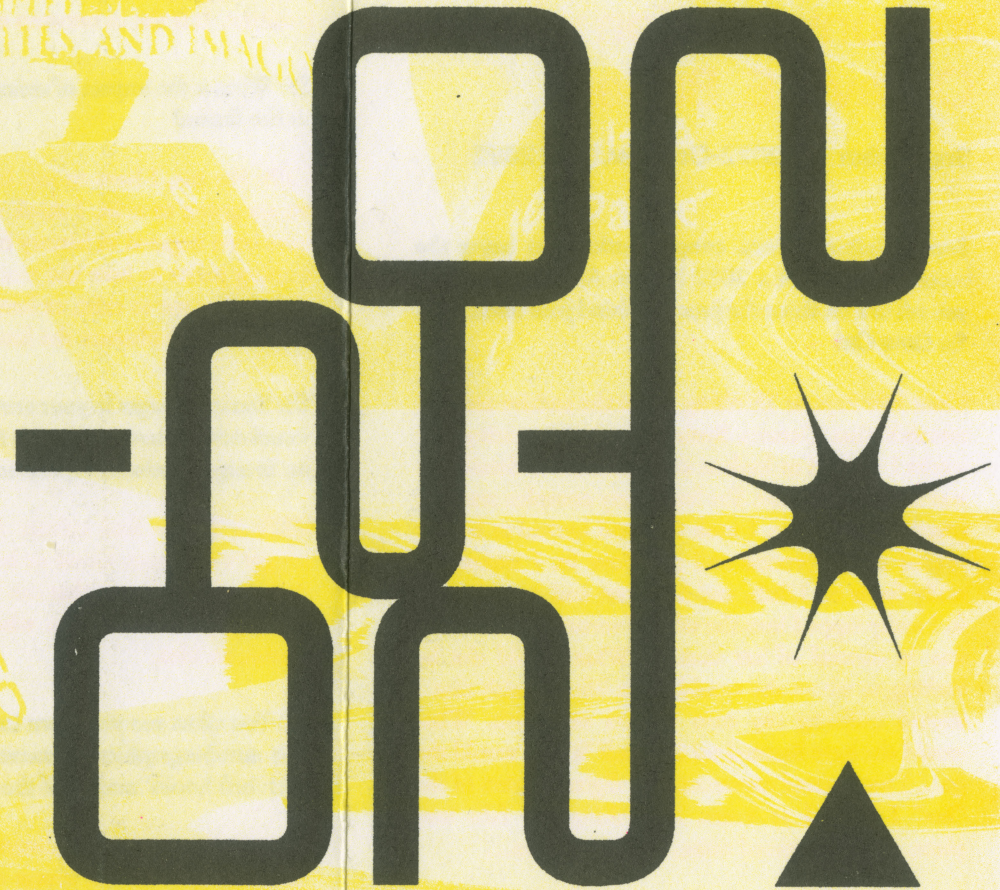
On-n-On is an installation of works that looks at the agency of Black existence in the future. Specifically looking at Octavia Butler and Butler's main character Lilith from the Lilith's Brood series, the installation constructs and interrupts the evolution of Afrofuturism in the context of contemporary new media processes.

Legacy and Identity continue to embed and burrow in the lineage of future generations. One can only predict what the future will hold or how it will look, or even how it will smell. *On-n-On* is an ode to the unknown and the unseen. 'My cypher keeps moving like a rolling stone'. Octavia Butler lays out how a Black future could look, based on knowledge, predictions, and the archive of history. I take what she provides and imagine it for myself. Agency in the form of resilience, is the need to keep going. It is where the future lies.

The method and thoughts of the archive have been present in my work for years. Butler, an archivist herself, provides countless records of information that she has used in preparation for her literary works. *On-n-On: Ciara Elle Bryant in conversation with Octavia E. Butler*, dives into the archives to construct a view of Butler's process of creating her works.

'My cypher keeps moving like a rolling stone'
- Erykah Badu, 1997, On&On

September 1st - October 16th, 2022



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On-n-On: Ciara Elle Bryant
in conversation with
Octavia E. Butler

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September 1st 2022-October, 16th 2022

Sophia Salinas: Ciara, congratulations on being the recent recipient of a 2022 Nasher Artist Grant. Can you tell us a bit about the process behind your installation for *On-n-On*?

Ciara Elle Bryant: Thinking about the archive and the research that Octavia Butler puts into creating her works I wanted to look at the attention to detail that was happening there. She had a very complex research practice that I love. I took that and looked at how it related to my process and just dove in. I wanted to really focus on Lilith, and how vast and complex she is. I really tapped into the what if version of her. If she was in control of her destiny. What would she be looking at where she would be in life. So with that I started building my own version on Lilith. What would she have listened to? Studied? Where would she go... I just started constructing a digital version of the "her" I wanted to know. Everything else falls into place, the background noise, the foundation...

SS: Historically, science fiction has often been associated with magazines, mass market paperbacks, and low-budget films. How do you see Afrofuturism interacting with notions of high and low art?

CEB: When we see the terms low and high art we subconsciously tap into a system of power and class, right. Afrofuturism is definitely something that shows up and challenges this. Black, African - Americans, are inherently tapped into mass publications and mass media because that's accessibility, that is what we have

direct access to. However, the idea of taste or cultivated taste or curated taste definitely is something that the (Black) culture has started to control. When we look at Afrofuturism we are tapping into the what's next, what could be for us as a culture. It is the in between of it all...

SS: What is the impact of seeing Black characters represented in the future?

CEB: For me, I have to say, it's just the pure thought that we are going to exist. I think about how we, Black people, have been negated in history for so long that this is a major turning point in how the world can evolve and change. It also pushes me to exist, or keep existing as long as I can, so I can alter or influence the future.

SS: You use images in your artwork that reference decades of visual culture, how might this fit into your work's perspective on intergenerational experiences?

CEB: I like to find culture markers that instantaneously trigger a response. Good or bad it's something. It creates a thread of experiences that can be talked about and shared... the engagement changes when multiple generations can discuss an idea.

SS: You often use your own image in your work, do you see this autobiographical element of your practice interacting with bell hooks' notion of the "oppositional gaze"?

CEB: Self portraiture is always present in some kind of way. Whether I am in the image or remnants of me are in the images or videos, I am there. I definitely think I am playing with the oppositional gaze, to push engagement or disrupt, make uncomfortable. I rely on this more than I should, but it is a coded way to acknowledge my power in my installations.

SS: Butler consistently explores queerness within her futures. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, the aliens—the Oankali—are represented by three sexes: male, female, and Ooloi. Do you see speculative aesthetics as a means of exploring Black queer identities?

CEB: I feel like I read a lot of queer moments in the books that made me feel personified. Maybe I was looking for them, but having a representation of a future alien third sex makes the spectrum of queerness feel way more relevant. These moments are definitely giving a pathway for Black queerness to be accepted and acknowledge its place in history. This also brings me to thoughts of pleasure that can essentially transcend what the human experience actually is, do we need a defined sex to explore the realms of pleasure?

SS: In the 2000 essay "Brave New Worlds", Butler refers to the act of contemplating the future and its consequences as "an act of hope", how would you respond to that?

CEB: I agree. It's hard for a lot of us to imagine what is next... we have been told for so long that it wasn't worth it for us to exist or we had little control of our existence for so long that it is definitely "an act of hope."

There is a lot of anticipation and optimism that contemplating the future can bring. I hope it's also healing to evolve into what's next...

Ciara Elle Bryant is a multidisciplinary creative working and residing in Dallas, TX. Bryant is a Southern Methodist University graduate with a Masters of Fine Art. Bryant uses photography, video and mixed media installations to discuss Black identity and Black culture and how it exists in the new millennium

Sophia Salinas is the curator of *On-n-On* and a second-year PhD student in the RASC/a art history program. Her research interests include modern and contemporary art with attention to themes of gender, race, and embodiment, as well as new media art.

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