



FAUNA: THE SPECTACLE LURE

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VILLA-LEGODI
Centre for Sculpture

“FAUNA: THE SPECTACLE LURE”

Dee Marco, Shoshani Netshia, and Farieda Nazier

Dee Marco [DM]: Hi everybody. My name’s Dee Marco. I don’t like introducing myself much, so perhaps I’ll say something about why, I think, Farieda invited me to have this conversation with her and Shoni. I’m very interested in women’s work: in care work and affective labour. I work in media and cultural studies. I read the write up which she posted to social media, in which she references reality TV. I thought this was interesting to think about as we watched her this afternoon, and I think that’s why she invited me — for us to bring some of those things together. I hope that I can do justice to a beautiful performance, which was quite hard to watch in many ways, but beautiful.

Shonishani Netshia [SN]: My name is Shoni. I’m a friend of Farieda’s and like Dee I’m also interested in the labour that a lot of women invest in their daily activities. In my work I focus a lot on what my mom used to do when I was a child, and I investigate some of the ritualistic aspects, which is interesting because that came across in Farieda’s performance. I also think she invited me because we’ve had conversations about things that make us uncomfortable. Without getting ahead of myself, thanks for inviting me. It was a beautiful and moving performance so I’m looking forward to this discussion.

Farieda Nazier [FN]: Thanks everyone for coming. I appreciate the long trek out here, and thank you for your participation. I know it’s not an easy thing to do — coming to stare at my bottom — but it seems to be very normalised in our society, which is what I’m trying to highlight, and make into something that shouldn’t be. Beyond that, there are other aspects that I would like to address through the work. But first I’d like to thank people: Jade Bowers for her excellent ushering, ring-mastering, and the other support that she’s offered. My family, part of whom is here, and Gordon [Froud], who assisted me with putting together the sculptural moulds. Of course, thanks to NIROX Sculpture Park, Sven [Christian], LeRoy [Croft], Benji [Liebmann], Manthe [Ribane] and everyone here. Thank you very much for your support. Last but not least, to UJ, who provided the funding for us to be able to explore these matters, in quite deep ways.



I think the way we do this is if you've got questions or comments, please ask. If there's anybody on the floor that would like to know or say something about the work, that would be fantastic if you could share that with us.

DM: I have a question. It's been a long time since I was at a performance where I could fully immerse myself in the experience. I found it interesting that despite being so distracted, I was always drawn back. I couldn't see your face, but there was so much that was being told to us — a kind of sadness; a tone to your body language. Like I say, I was watching in quite a distracted way, but I was really fascinated, knowing how voyeuristic we all were, watching your body. I was intrigued, and I kept looking to see if I could see your face. I wanted to know what your face was doing, and I couldn't gauge that. Why did you choose to perform in this way? Why a performance? Why not a different modality?

FN: I think that we're always performing. It's almost the most obvious thing to do next to language. It's one of the first things you do, actually — to express through your body. If you're in pain, you perform in a particular way. We're always performing, and that performance is either being read by people around us or it is just there, as something that your body is expressing, because your body speaks all the time. The way that you sit, the way that you walk... You're not always thinking about the other, or the gaze, and how people are looking at you, but you're constantly performing. Even if you're standing still, there's always the potential for you to be read.



I'm not a performance artist — I'm more of a sculptor and body artist. I've done jewellery design for a long time, and body sculpture. We are familiar with our bodies, so I find it an easy way to express things. The body can be easier to read than an image or a sculpture, because we often feel like we need to read more into it, whereas the body is very familiar. It's a language that is accessible. For example, you said that my body looked sad. There was some discomfort, some tension. There were a whole bunch of things that you could see, but you also immediately went to the face, to find meaning. And then also the distance between that, that helps us to resonate and access in ourselves those types of experiences. And what I would like is for you to resonate with what I'm doing, because even if you miss a couple of things, you can't miss that sense of emotion that it invokes. You can't forget that.

SN: I just wanted to find out where you went in the performance: when holding the small maquette, the small figure, where did "Fauna" go?

FN: So essentially, I create these installations, and this is why I say I am not a performance artist, because the elements in installation are cues that I'm responding to. Of course, we rehearsed the performance (because Jade wanted us to). However, I am always responding and very much in the moment when the costume is on and I have assumed the particular character I am playing. The props and installations in which I perform evoke something in me. So, I'm also channeling the person in the freak show, asking myself questions like: 'How do you feel in response to someone tugging you in a chain or on a rope? What is your body's response and how do you move in accordance with that?'



In the beginning I put thought into it, but eventually it just happens. There is a sort of muscle memory of being tugged. We have a long history of colonialism, and then apartheid. Something is also currently happening... However, we always feel like we are being tugged and are in that state of tension and danger. There are safe spaces which we have created for ourselves. For example, this here — NIROX — is a safe space. We are all relaxed. When we leave here, we are no longer in a safe space. We feel tense. That is cultivated by the country / world we live in. It provokes certain bodily postures and ideas: 'we need to keep safe, close and lock our doors...' All those actions come

naturally for me when the object is there. If someone handed me a sword, for example, I would start swinging it, because something in my bodily and emotive memory is telling me to. So, the installations are there to respond to, and to be honest, I don't rehearse very much. Some of it is improvised, for example, picking up the object was never in the script. During the performance I said, 'Jade, I think I need to run away,' and eventually I did run away, but it feels like the thing I need to do — being in the moment and trying to channel a human or a memory. Yes, it could be a fantasy I have put together through research, but alas, it was/is a reality for someone at some point.

DM: For many of us watching, we may have thought of images or drawings of Sarah Baartman — her body and bottom — and the history of being put on display in that way also may have come up for many of us, as it did for me. Listening to you now and thinking about you being tugged by this string, there is something around obedience that comes up; something about being a good performer but rather a good woman performer ... an emphasis on the idea of watching / the gaze that we impose on you as we watch.

You also spoke about safe spaces, and I am not sure what the beginning bit is meant to do. I know Jade said, 'Ok now we're shut' and we will come back tomorrow and all perform tomorrow, and there's this weird way in which the audience also has to perform and be part of the tomorrow, the future, this performance... We will all come back, right? Essentially, you make us all performers. We are not just here watching you today. We are all a part of this and there is a *thing* happening there. However, I am curious about that beginning moment, because even the next day it starts that way. We are watching you in a private space, I assume, and that space is populated with these sculptural body parts, limbs, seeds, and objects that you have obviously given a lot of thought to. Except, the limbs/parts are all broken. I wonder if you want to speak a little to that: the brokenness of those limbs and you having to gather yourself up, put on your sandals, and off you go?

FN: With the sculptural installation: I have been trying to grow avos for a while. Avo seeds, when they bud, look like a bottom with a tree coming out of it, and my reaction to that was 'this thing is incredible' but it also made me think about how we, as woman especially, birth things and how broken we are for a very long time after. But there's also this expectance — societal expectations



about women as vessels or pods, who bring life... It seems like a very poetic and beautiful story, but is it?

With the installation there is an armless figure giving rise to and being broken by this tree. The parts are there as part of the composition. They add to that sense of brokenness. But also, there are these pods, that again come from the tree. So there is a cyclical aspect to the work; something that feels very natural: you give birth to something, it grows, then it gives birth to more things, the pods fall, and the cycle goes on. It is natural to assume that the body needs to go through these steps. Also, the blossom, the flowering of women — there are all these associations that link woman's bodies to flora.

The other part of the installation, Fauna, means 'animal' (the animal kingdom). There is flora, the plant kingdom, and then there are other organisms. Fauna is me, the performer, and I pay homage to flora, which is considered the beginning of everything (so before there was anything, there was flora). Also, how that cycle gives rise to patriarchy and patriarchal ideas of how the body should be set in particular ways, breast feeding etc. So, the tree has these pods and they fall and feed the ground, or they grow into another tree, and they break the body again. There is a little bit of a massacre going on there, but it is a poetic massacre.

What I am doing is activating the space by sitting in it and saying I am accessing this ancestral 'something' — I am given a moment to access the ancestral and the intergenerational.

DM: I also thought about Sila, from Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* (2007), and about how the protagonist, who's on Robben Island, is considered 'mad' because she speaks to herself, but she is also speaking to her children, who have died (I can't remember the exact details but I think one was killed by her). One gets sucked into something otherworldly — her interiority — in such a visceral way, and you respond to that. I also realise that I am pissed off at the gods and I ask myself why they are speaking to her in that way because she is going through a rough patch; she has lost her kids and needs to be left alone. Watching you and hearing you speak now is reminiscent of Sila dealing with the cyclical nature of life and death, beginnings and endings.

SN: Similar to that is Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). And just thinking how Fauna almost wants to acknowledge her ancestors. I think of Fauna as Sarah Baartman, thinking back to her homeland with 'why have you forsaken me' in mind. So, just evoking their spirits to say 'be with me in this very difficult journey that I now find myself in / having to perform, having to experience violence.' And you speak of violence in your abstract. There is a certain violence that takes place, but it is so subtle within the performance. Perhaps you can speak to us about the violence that the body, and perhaps the black body, experiences?

FN: I am very interested in the idea of violence. Many things in our daily life can be considered violent, but it is stuff that we have become numb towards. It is that heteronormative, daily stuff that we go through. We have been programmed to be able to endure and normalise it. So, if it is just normal violence, is it better than the 'not-so-normal-violence'?

With the performance, I didn't want to *start* with this historical reference. I never mentioned Sarah Baartman, but she was one of the main inspirations for the work, because it so relevant to what we are experiencing now. It is coming to a head on social media, and especially Reality TV, which perpetuate the Sarah Baartmans, the "freak shows," the human zoos. The "freak show" in-and-of itself is such a violent and invasive... Matter of fact, I don't have the words for it, and because I don't have the words, I made the work. It is something I can only feel.

There are all sorts of related words that come to mind though: dehumanisation: 'You're a performing monkey.' So the song from the *Jungle Book*,¹ the one that I keep singing, is really asking to be recognised as human. That — begging to be human — is linked to the biggest type of violence. As people of colour, we often experience dehumanisation in subtle ways. It's still there. I feel it everyday: being lesser, lesser than someone else or another race. It's very much set into the mindset and stereotypes we have here in South Africa. Our aspiration — and this is 'Fanonian' stuff — is to be human, where Fanon says that the aspiration is to be white, because white is the 'ultimate symbol of humanity' — and I use the words 'white' and 'black' in political terms, I don't believe that they are conducive to us shifting.

1. "I Wan'na Be Like You (The Monkey Song)" by Bruce Reitherman, Louis Prima, and Phil Harris.

SN: I was thinking about how I felt, in a post-apartheid/ post-colonial era, and almost imagining that I was one of Queen Victoria's subjects, because

here I am; complicit, taking part, doing exactly what we then turn around and say, 'but this shouldn't be happening in this day and age!' So I think you are right. Within this context, have we come to a point where we don't want to spell things out as they are? Going back to Dee's point, why a live performance? You could have done this with just Jade and the team, so I'm curious about this project's longevity and where you take it from here?

FN: I would like to continue performing it live because I think it works best when people interact. The relationality that a live performance sets up and the discomfort that we feel for each other is important. I am also uncomfortable with people starring. At some points I close my eyes because I don't want to be starred at. However, I put myself there to feel that discomfort, to feel the eyes looking and kind of taking (which is what it feels like). My sense is that, yes we are going to make the video work and have it up in the space, making it more accessible (perhaps on social media etc.), but the idea is to continue with the interactions. If it isn't felt *between people* then for me the whole artwork is not complete. It relies very much on personal interaction; being in one's personal space, and within particular contexts... How we feel out here in nature with this organism / person...

We often view the birds and monkeys around — I am always laughing at the monkeys, as they unpack the haybales, pick out the seeds. I pulled out my camera and acknowledged the monkeys. It is important for us to keep identifying when we have the urge to look at different bodies, etc., and when that look is the opposite of a gaze of humanity. Another aspect of how close the freak show is to social media and reality shows is that I identified what the tropes were; research on what the 'usual' tropes of 'freaks' from the 1800s were. There was the 'fat body' — definitely one of the favourites — and there was a short body, the disfigured body, the black body.

I have been watching *TLC* for two years, researching. The shows portray the same tropes: the fat body, the short body; there is the mentally unwell body — people who have various mental conditions: and we look and consume because it is either funny, spectacular, interesting... If one of these is a trait of yours, you are deemed 'not-properly-human,' right? You are told that there is something wrong with you, that you are less than human. These things still very much exist...



Dee, I wanted you to hear your thoughts of the installation that was on my bottom?

DM: The other thing that came up so strongly for me was that; initially as Jade invited us to come and we can all pay your R5... my first thought was 'I don't have R5.' I actually said that. Again, I felt part of it — in order to see the show I had to hustle R5.

What I found incredibly interesting was how the installation was perched on your bottom, as well as the objects in it. I need more time to really think about it, but I will share some of my immediate thoughts. Firstly, I wondered how you got the objects: were they made? Did you make them? Did you find some of them? One object has 'I love ANC' written on it, and I thought: 'Wow!' There was so much one could read into this one little object, based on what a spectacular experience it is to watch our news (whether you are South African or not).

I also thought about the black woman subject who is pulled, through time, in a domestic space. Even if she is not as obviously on show, I thought about women who cooked in kitchens, and those who choose not to. I thought about how women relate to a domestic space, and the choices they are able to make about domesticity in general, and how we read women's bodies. According to them, in these domesticised ways, how legible are you as a woman? How neat, well-behaved, and obedient are you in your performative role (you are domesticated)? I did not initially think so much about this historical

figure that you were portraying, but of the performances of women at pick-up and drop-off every day. I thought about the performance of being a freak show, when people interact with me in relation to these three children that I have, and how there is an element of shock — that you have ‘past the barrier of what is ok / permissible...’; that ‘you have gone into the other realm of lack of productivity’ (because there are a lot of children to look after). All those things came up for me. It felt like ‘looking through a looking glass.’ I could have, but I didn’t choose to pick one up. However, the way in which we observe and police women’s bodies and police their abilities to show up in society in neat ways. Also, we ask women to be vulnerable — that’s one of the social media performances that we are able to do right? We invite women to perform themselves on social media and it is pretty outrageous when you start watching that stuff. Not only on social media but also on reality TV. I put on *Netflix* last night and stumbled upon a trailer of a show called *The Mommy Club* and thought, ‘this is insane.’ It is a grotesque performance of wealth and a very specific version of ‘mommy-ing’ that you watch — that version of domesticity. So, when I looked at the objects, the glasses and cups, all of that comes up. It was powerful. And for it to be resting / perched on your bottom in this way... And then one of your acts is that you can twerk for us... I thought, ‘What happens if you twerk all the objects off?’

SN: It is very powerful! You had a choice to take that off when you were twerking, but there’s this expectation that women can do it all. And when you are expected to do it all — be it the role of an academic, professional, mom, daughter, sister, friend — you are all of these things, and yet you are still ‘othered.’ That for me comes across in what you said Dee. There was also that little installation with the animals on the apartheid flag — very specific things that you have added to that tray. Perhaps you can speak more about the subtleties there?

FN: As cheesy as it may sound, I called it the ‘Bumstallation’ because that is where it went. Regarding the mini-installation, I started collecting things for it a long time ago. Some of it is made — i.e. the bead work (I sat and beaded) — some of it is found, some are natural objects, and a lot of it is from thrift shops. That little placemat of the South African flag I obscured by putting a plant on it.

2. (South Africa, crude, slang) to have sexual intercourse.



Each element is like a little story on its own. All of these things happen in tandem, playing off in the kitchen or behind the scenes. There are agricultural things, little shelves and drawers... A lot of detail that's there refers to the nature of things. Also, how resources are pooled politically and economically. There is also this continuity. So there are two temporal indicators: The one is the ANC thimble (I won't say what stitching is in Afrikaans... In fact, it's 'naai')². The act of stitching is going in and out of fabric. It's sexual in some way. I just thought it was ironic. I didn't make it, I found it. Secondly, there is this correlation between the ANC and the old national flag, and the continuities from one to the other.

I think the most significant thing for me on the tray are the pigs. There are a lot of pigs, and they are all slightly different in colour. Adi, my son, helped paint them and choose the colour pallet for the pigs. It was a lot of work to make them look like they do. What I have realised is that there is this thing called 'whiteness', and here again, I am referring to Fanon's theory on neuroses. Whiteness for me isn't necessarily about colour, it's a condition. There are certain acts, certain traits, that play out when 'whiteness' unfolds. The little piggies are symbolic of that (and I am not talking down on piggies, they have good traits too). For me, the little piggy is a symbol of greed, entitlement, superiority ... It is linked to Fanon's notion of 'black aspiration to whiteness or humanity'. So it doesn't matter what skin colour you are, anyone can suffer from 'whiteness, and to varying degrees. So, it's a narcissistic

type of neuroses, and it plays out as something that Fauna carries or suffers from.

DM: Are there any questions or comments from the audience?

Audience: I would like to ask the artist if she experiences or processes the traumatising and what is her aftercare?

FN: It's a hard one. I write a lot; I am currently writing my PhD. I write a lot for that and I also journal and document my experience. This becomes a space of reflection. I am able to see and manifest what I feel, and to read it back to myself and think deeply about why certain things are happening. For me, it's therapeutic to find some causality, i.e. really looking into why things are the way they are. That allows me to feel like I have the agency to change things. By understanding where it comes from, I can almost forgive in some ways, but in other ways, I try and address the issue by highlighting it, like I am here. Talking about it now is part of that aftercare. The ongoing process is the ability to express and talk about the work. It is a therapeutic process for me, to be able to put it out there and then talk, write, and gain understanding. It feels like a release. It's not a matter of 'I made it, it's over.' It is really an ongoing process, diving deeper into myself, and our shared experiences. However, the struggle continues. It is not like I have arrived or am healed.

Audience: I have to say that I felt very complicit, coming up with the magnifying glass. I think the idea of being complicit in something that is traumatising, objectifying, was quite a difficult space for me, the viewer. Also, having us share that space with you made me wonder what are you doing with the trauma of that experience because it is buried in your body and holding that space was really hard to watch. Thank you for this. I think it took a lot of courage and I think it's important that you reflecting that dialogue back to all of us.

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