

R.I.P. Germain



mew

ICA Theatre, Saturday 30 April, 7pm

R.I.P. Germain's new moving image work *mew* (2022) documents an asemic exploration into rituals of burning that involve transmuting in order to call in the futures we long for. In holding a space to process the trauma, displacement and collective uncertainty of this time, *mew* continues a trajectory of creating different types of spaces to witness, muse and move towards change collectively.

Q&A

Where did the ideas for your new work come from?

The idea to make *mew* came from conversations I had with Amal Khalaf, Cubitt Artists Director of Programmes, and Serpentine Galleries Civic Curator. She's a good friend of mine, and during the time my solo show *Dead Yard* was on at Cubitt she began to tell me about rituals you can do to process trauma and use as modes of self-healing. The rituals she taught me mainly centered around doing moon-cycle-based burnings in order to call for things or to get rid of negative energy, so from those conversations that I had with her, I then started to splice these burning rituals into works in various ways. One of those works was *J.D.D...S.Y.M (Farin)* (2021), which was shown in a group show at NICO in Bari, Italy that Arcadia Missa hosted, where I did a burning ritual through an installation so I could put a traumatic experience to bed. So once I'd done that burning, I felt that after getting rid of that energy, and thinking in the register of me being a vessel, I'd be empty, right? So naturally the next move would be to call in some positive energy. This is when the wheels started turning in my head and I began to develop the ideas that would become *mew*.

Can you talk a little bit about your practice and how moving image fits in?

So my practice, as it stands, traffics in double meanings, deep resonances and a tension between accessibility and occlusion. I try to play both trickster and guide (laughs). I'm also really interested in system making at the moment and how it can affect a person or community, whether it's subtly or forcibly enacted onto them or self-generated or self-policed. My work draws from multiple genres of Black experience, history and culture – personal and collective,

with the intention to make art that is rigorous about my commitments and possibilities as a Black artist. Moving image though, hasn't really figured into my practice until now, at least in a traditional sense. This is all uncharted territory for me, and that was the most exciting thing about the prospect of making *mew* when I submitted my proposal!

And does the new piece link specifically with any of your previous works, and do you see it as forming a larger focus for ongoing work?

Yes and no. Yes in the sense that it's a continuation of my exploration into rituals and ritual making. Whether that's from taking direct influence from specific religious practices or remixing and figuring out ways to create my own rituals with various goals in mind. Making *mew* also saw me take my practice of hosting open calls in order to seek a degree of audience participation that could shape the outcome of a work one step further, with the open call being much bigger than I'd ever attempted before with regards to things like social media coverage, visibility and response. However, where *mew* takes its own course is the meta topics I'm investigating within it, both personally and culturally. There's a lot of 'messy' feelings and thoughts that are raised and exposed like raw wounds for the audience to see, so it was a new thing for me to document that type of thing in a non-static way.

With the rituals and the idea of ritual and religion, I suppose, comes an idea or a conversation around performativity in action. Do you see moving image as a way of negotiating that terrain?

That's a good question. Moving image for me is a tool to capture, document and archive in a very specific way, and it becomes a part of the performance of the ritual as well when the end goal is to show it to an audience. You choose what to show, and you choose how to show it, so that then becomes the way the audience receives the ritual, and how they can understand it. I don't really have an interest in things like exaggerating the flamboyance or falsifying the nature of the rituals I do for the camera's sake, as I feel like the reality of them is intellectually and aesthetically rich enough. They don't need Insta filters (laughs).

This leads into the next question, which is, do you have a process that you tend to go through in order to make your work? Is that a typical process, or do you want to talk about the process you went through to make this work?

So you want to know the method to the madness? (laughs)

Well, I do a lot of research, a *lot* of research, and there's no hierarchical system that I use or any kind of intellectual elitism that I apply to determine what I consider to be a good reference or useful piece of information. High or low brow, it doesn't matter to me as long as it helps to get my point across to the audience effectively.

The research acts as the foundation. Actually, tell a lie, it's the second stage, because I will have already come up with the idea by the time I decide to do some research. I look into my research bank as a way to check against and figure out how a work could reach its best possible outcome. And from there I take into consideration the time and monetary limitations I have and then use that as the playground to go and explore conceptually what's possible. I'm really open to the work manifesting in whatever way it needs to. I'm very much an artist who isn't tied to a medium. Anything other than being elastic just feels claustrophobic to me at the moment.

Last question, which is a mini question. Is the aspect of travel and place in this new work something that's important for the audience to understand through the specific location?

Yes. Location is an extremely important aspect of this film. A large part of it is about me trying to re-root to my cultural heritage, so it was vital I went all out in this department! And to be honest, I couldn't have made this film anywhere else. Truly. *mew*'s essence was shaped by where we were and the specific time we were there, and the people who we came into contact with. So many 'crazy' things happened and so many 'odd' coincidences occurred during the time of filming that by the end of it my crew and I all felt like 'something' was guiding us. We got 'lucky' too many times for us to put it down to us being, you know, lucky (laughs). It was just a special place where 'special' things can happen with special people.

R.I.P. Germain's practice traffics in double meanings, deep resonances and a tension between accessibility and occlusion. Trickster and guide, he tries to dance a fine line: making work that speaks to deep truths without cheapening them with explanations or flattening them out for easy consumption. Sedimented with layers dense with cultural meaning and reference, the extensive research undergirding R.I.P. Germain's work draws from multiple genres of Black experience, history and culture - personal and collective, seeking to make art that is rigorous about his commitments and possibilities as a Black artist.