

## Miatta Kawinzi: *Soft is Strong*

Curator-Mentor: Ronny Quevedo

April 8 - May 12, 2021

### Opening Reception with Miatta Kawinzi and Ronny Quevedo

Saturday, April 10, 2-5pm

### Artist Talk with Miatta Kawinzi and Ronny Quevedo

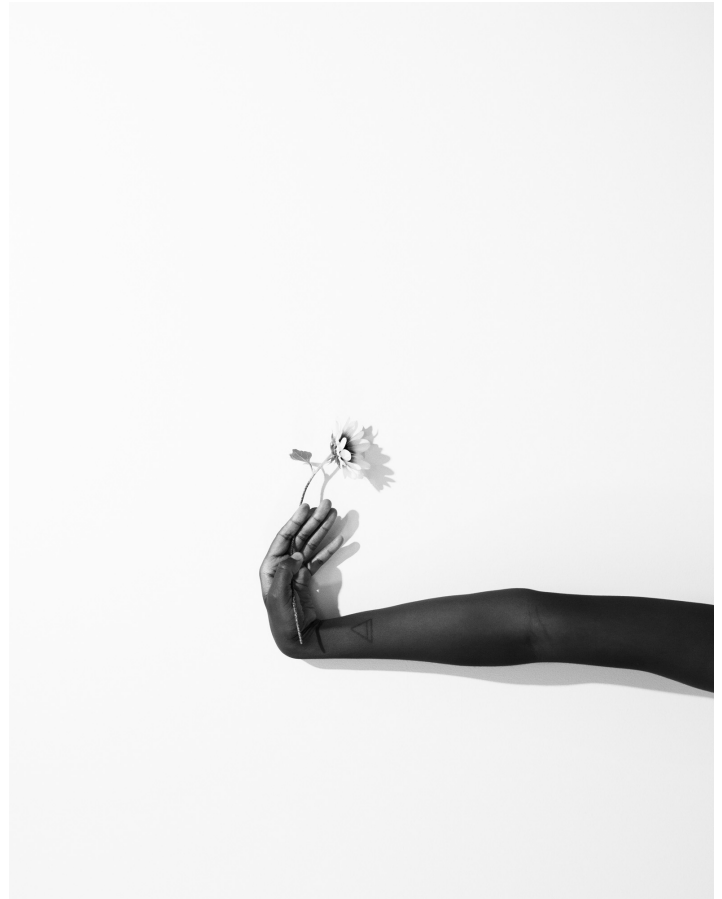
Thursday, April 29, 6-7pm

CUE Art Foundation is pleased to present *Soft is Strong*, a solo exhibition by Miatta Kawinzi, curated and mentored by Ronny Quevedo. Kawinzi employs multimedia installation, video, and prints to consider conditions of fragmentation, multiplicity, and softness within the African diaspora as sites for belonging, possibility, and regeneration. Born in the Southern United States to a Liberian mother and Kenyan father, the New York-based artist's work explores cultural hybridity, motifs of doubling, and linguistic experimentation in conversation with Black feminist literary traditions, uplifting a poetics of liberation that simultaneously holds space for loss while imagining paths towards reparation and renewal. This is the artist's first institutional solo show in New York.

In the main gallery is a large-scale installation of Kawinzi's experimental film, *SHE GATHER ME*, titled after a line from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The film uses analog and digital footage recorded in Detroit, Johannesburg, New York City, Santo Domingo, and Tulsa combined with concrete poetry and an original electronic score

to meditate on both existing and imagined internal and external landscapes of the African diaspora. The immersive environment includes a silver mylar-covered floor, blue lights, and wooden rocking chairs. A series of sculptural works hung across the gallery walls weave together dark blue cotton threads with cowrie shells, historical signifiers of value in both East and West Africa. Elsewhere, Kawinzi's two-channel video installation, *A(f)mrka*, situates an experimental dialogue across two CRT television monitors in which fragments of text on a blue background draw attention to the intersections between imaginings of "Afrka" and "Amrka." For the soundtrack, the artist riffs off of the Liberian and Black American national anthems, alluding to their entanglement. Across the front wall and hallway, Kawinzi has installed colorful Kente cloth-inspired original wallpaper on which a photographic print, *The fragrance of our blooming*, is installed. This image is part of a series of black and white photographs displayed throughout the gallery that depict the artist's unanchored arms holding sunflowers against white backgrounds, gestures that reference the poet Nikki Giovanni's musings on the ways in which flowers speak to the dualities of "mourning and rejoicing."

The color blue echoes throughout the exhibition, evoking the West African Mami Wata, the Black American blues tradition, and waterways, as well as serving to reclaim the color from its contemporary connotations of policing by inserting it into a context of softness and possibility. In the exhibition catalogue, Adeola Olakiitan writes: "At a time of ongoing brutality against Black lives worldwide, staying soft is bound to the necessity of continued demands for the liberation of the oppressed. Through the exhibition's spatial poetics, the viewer is reminded that staying soft is an oppositional force to the negative constructions of vulnerability as a sign of weakness. To be soft, to deliberately instill softness, offers a spot of respite and alternative ways of survival, reckoning, and healing."



Miatta Kawinzi, *River City* (detail), 2021. Photographic diptych, cotton thread, cowrie shell, dimensions variable. For Breonna Taylor.



Miatta Kawinzi, Video still from *SHE GATHER ME*, 2021. HD color video, 16mm color film transferred to video, two-channel audio: vocalization, cassette tape recordings, synthesizer, original electronic score, 10 minutes 50 seconds.

**Miatta Kawinzi** (she/her/they/them) is a Kenyan-Liberian-American multidisciplinary artist, writer, and educator raised in Nashville, TN, and Louisville, KY, and based in NYC. She received an MFA in Studio Art from Hunter College and a BA in Interdisciplinary Art & Cultural Theory from Hampshire College. Her work has been presented at the Studio Museum in Harlem, MoMA PopRally, Red Bull Arts Detroit, BRIC, Maysles Cinema, and the Museum of the Moving Image, among other spaces. She has been awarded artist residencies in spaces including the Tulsa Artist Fellowship (Tulsa, OK), POV Spark in partnership with the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture (NYC, DC, and Venice, Italy), Red Bull Arts Detroit (Detroit, MI), the Cité internationale des arts (Paris, France, with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council), Beta-Local (San Juan, Puerto Rico), the Bemis Center (Omaha, NE), and the Bag Factory (Johannesburg, South Africa). Kawinzi has been awarded a 2021-

22 Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, the 2019 Bemis Center Alumni Award, and the 2018 Barbara Hammer Lesbian Experimental Filmmaking Grant administered by Queer|Art. She has taught art at Hampshire College and the University of Richmond and worked as a museum, youth, and community arts educator throughout NYC.

**Ronny Quevedo** (b. 1981, Guayaquil, Ecuador) works in a variety of mediums including sculpture and drawing. He received his MFA from Yale University (2011) and BFA from Cooper Union (2003). Quevedo's work has been exhibited at the Denver Art Museum (2021), the Albright Knox Gallery (2021), Foxy Productions (2021), Upfor Gallery (2019), James Fuentes Gallery (2019), the Whitney Museum of American Art (2018), Socrates Sculpture Park (2017), and the Queens Museum (2017). Solo presentations include *Silueta*, Rubber Factory (2019); *Field of Play*, Open Source Gallery (2019); and *no hay medio tiempo / there is no halftime*, Queens Museum (2017). Group exhibitions include *ACE: Art on Sports, Promise, and Selfhood*, University Art Museum at Albany (2019); *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art* at the Whitney Museum (2018); and the traveling exhibition *Monarchs: Brown and Native Contemporary Artists in the Path of the Butterfly* (2017-19). His work has been reviewed in *Artforum* and *Hyperallergic*, and is highlighted in *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, Politics* by Arlene Davila (2020). His work is held in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Denver Art Museum, and other world-renowned cultural institutions. Quevedo is a recipient of a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, Queens Museum/Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Emerging Artists, and A Blade of Grass Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a 32-page color catalogue, with texts by Miatta Kawinzi, Ronny Quevedo, and Adeola Olakiitan. The catalogue will be available online and free of charge to gallery visitors. For more information please contact Programs Director Lilly Hern-Fondation at [lilly@cueartfoundation.org](mailto:lilly@cueartfoundation.org).

This exhibition is a winning selection from the 2020-21 Open Call for Solo Exhibitions. The proposal was unanimously selected by a panel comprised of artist Guadalupe Maravilla, curator Sohrab Mohebbi, artist Ronny Quevedo, and curator Legacy Russell. In line with CUE's commitment to providing substantive professional development opportunities, panelists also serve as mentors to the exhibiting artists, providing support throughout the process of developing the exhibition. We are honored to work with **Ronny Quevedo** as the curator-mentor to Miatta Kawinzi.

**CUE Art Foundation** is a visual arts center dedicated to creating essential career and educational opportunities for artists of all ages. Through exhibitions, arts education, and public programs, CUE provides artists, writers, and audiences with sustaining, meaningful experiences and resources.

**Major programmatic support for CUE Art Foundation is provided by** The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Anholt Services (USA) Inc.; Aon PLC; Chubb; Compass Group Management LLC; The Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc.; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP; The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation; Vedder Price P.C.; and New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council, and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

