

We Belong Here



Marie Smith

Designed by Maciej Rackiewicz

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Belong
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INTRODUCTION

"Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."

We belong here is about opening a dialogue. During my residency at spudWORKS in May 2022 I worked with seven people of colour based in *New Forest and Hampshire* to create a portrait of them. Speaking to the participants before I met them was a methodology that I had used in previous projects and it helped with any anxiety that we might have with each other. I could also learn more about the participants and why they wanted to be part of the project. Each person relayed their perspective and this provides the project with a lot of context and nuance.

This quote by *Stuart Hall* encapsulates the essence of what I am trying to explore with this series, to document and translate the continued evolution of these participants and their identities, despite the objections and the othering that some of the participants face in the landscape of *New Forest*.

The portraits that I made during the session were a reflection of how I saw them. I always try to find ways for the participants to have agency in the project. Each participant has created *cyanotype* that has been exhibited with their portrait. They maintain copyright over the image, so this project is more of a collaboration. The participants were asked to bring objects to make their *cyanotypes* or we foraged for objects during our walk.

I enjoyed walking and making *cyanotypes* with the participants and had many intense and deep conversations with them. I found these conversations reassuring and illuminating. Some of the participants have chosen to contribute writing to the publication, to further elaborate on their thoughts and feelings about being a person of colour in *New Forest*.

The publication also features more photos of the participants as well as some landscapes captured by me during my walks after I had met the participants. However, my aim for this project was to find community and to provide a space for people of colour to advocate for themselves. As someone who is not familiar with the area, I felt it was critical to centre the voices of people who live here and to find way to rethink about power dynamics in the project. I believe that the participants and, their thoughts and feelings are at the centre of this exhibition and publication.

Marie Smith

⁴Hall, Stuart, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, 1996

PARTICIPANTS



Adeola

I was born mixed race, but I became black seven years ago, on the day I left London. Transplanted from city bustle to a small town buffered between sea and forest, I quickly felt the sameness that spread out before me. The same voices with the same tones, the same clothes, the unified culture. I had left behind the beautiful jumble of languages that my ears had relished, the never-ending array of styles that my eyes drank in, the feast of competing smells.

There was an instant connection to each person of colour I met, a need to connect, to not feel quite so alone and exposed. I began to understand that the 'one drop' rule applied here. No longer mixed race, my skin that fit anywhere, allowed me to blend-in anywhere and feel at home everywhere, had been taken and replaced by the skin of an interloper.

I learnt to desensitise myself to the micro-aggressions, accepting the beauty of the place came at the cost of the attitudes of its residents. I became an ambassador quietly fighting to change opinions with a permanent smile and perfectly polite and respectful behaviour. Exhausting myself to be the counter-balance to media fuelled stereotypes.

This soul-deep fatigue created by rural racism is a wall of noise that assaults every sense. The only balm the silence of the wild spaces, those without the heavy feet and loud chatter of humans. There, surrounded by the peace and acceptance of nature. I am reminded that there are places I do not need to fight to exist. Places of beauty, where my shields can be lowered and I can breathe.







Emmanuel

Running from space, negotiating identity practising weakness in the form of place non-place entities of space, bodies of space disrupting the force the norms of power. Destabilising the precariousness of the gaze to which we must endure and encounter. Time and time again, subjective positions of otherness' are conferred to our image, face, body, mind, soul and ego. As I encounter these spaces, my only thought is that the act and burden we carry from commodifying our bodies must be fought.







Issa

"God made the country, and man made the town"

—WILLIAM COWPER

Walking in nature is respite for this city born incarnation, the tension of city psychology dissipates throughout silver birches, ferns and grass. Strangers more easily become friends in the psychic space of nature.

The lake was calm, and the creation of cyanotypes reinforced nature's artistry in this mind with a concrete backdrop.

Walking in nature immerses me in a temporal forgetfulness of the strains of being the enemy.

When walking in nature, away from gazes of paranoia, this Black man relaxes. '







Kristian

Enjoy the earthly treasures







Liza









Wenjun

STONE

*“Find a stone that is your size or weight.
Crack it until it becomes fine powder.
Dispose of it in the river. (a)
Send small amounts to your friends. (b)
Do not tell anybody what you did.
Do not explain about the powder to the
Friends to whom you send.” (Ono, 1995)*

Maybe I am already a stone,
an immutable stone,
a light grey, rough, angular stone.

Stream flows through me;
Wind blows through me;
Sun glows through me.

I am eroded by the stream and meet other stones;
I am whirled by the wind and fall heavily off the cliff;
I am burned by the light and deformed the air.

Rain drops, thunder roars, torrential rains continue.
Water hits violently,
Take me away until the rain stops suddenly.

Water and I,
Hit everything hard together.
Wind rages, flecks shine, forest fires burn.
Fire attacks maniacally,
Heat me until I explode.
Fire and I,
Burn everything together.

I can be everything,
But I can't do anything.

Just be a stone,
Be omnipotent,
Be everywhere.

Ono, Y., 1995. *Grapefruit*. New York: St. Martin's Press, p.52.







Yoko

Be free. Like the birds, bees, and fairies





