

# **Some Other Shore**

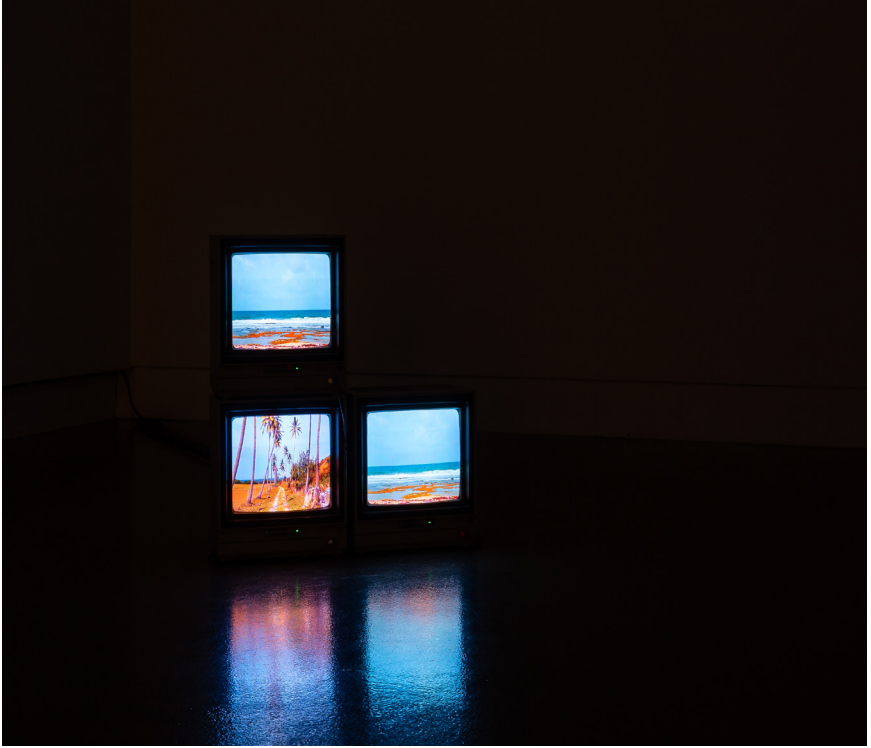
By Yaniya Lee

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The Centre of the World Was  
the Beach

Racquel Rowe

January 11 - March 8, 2025



Top: Racquel Rowe, *Untitled (Scenic I & II)*. Film installation. 2021.  
Bottom: Racquel Rowe, *Landscapes In Motion, The sea could swallow them* (2025), video 10 minutes 59 seconds.

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“The men had already folded the earth where there had been no fold and hollowed her where there had been no hollow, which explains what happened to the river. It crested, then lost its course, and finally its head. Evicted from the place where it had lived, and forced into unknown turf, it could not form its pools or waterfalls, and ran every which way.”<sup>1</sup>

Racquel Rowe’s solo exhibition at Forest City Gallery continues the artist’s exploration of family, diaspora, representation, rituals and cooking. The space is set up for visitors to sit and watch and listen. If they let themselves be completely absorbed, they’ll soon find they’ve become a part of Rowe’s conversations with her family, her cooking adventures, and her visits to the landscapes of home.

A monitor screen is set into a console; green palms overlook a sandy shore. Light breeze, full daylight, steady waves. The ocean fades into the long arc of a pale horizon.

On another screen, a slow-moving substance is blurry, indistinct, nearly abstract. But of such a *blue* blue that it can only be water. This body heaves and bumps against the containing walls as if the edges of the pool were the wailing limbs of a prizefighter. A body comes into view.

An image of a granny, born in 1939, cooking for the family as a child. Another image of her much later, in a kitchen, looking askance at the camera. She has soft, short-cropped hair and her face is

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glowing. Behind her a sink and faucet, two large pots on a stove top.

Rowe's work often takes the form of performance for the camera and installation. She will enact what seem like mundane rituals—cooking a meal, carrying out a ritual, getting one's hair done—as a way to recreate the traditions she grew up with.<sup>2</sup>

Part of her material is video footage she films on the island of Barbados, where she grew up, a former British colony in the Lesser Antilles floating on the far edge of the Atlantic. Her work has been described as “a kind of confrontation with history, the Black body, and the legacy of the sea for Black life.”<sup>3</sup>

Much has been made of the sea and its significance to the African diaspora. From the African continent as a point of origin, diasporas flourished across the oceans of the world. Glissant, Gilroy. Dash, Brand. “The sea is History,” Derek Walcott famously wrote. For Rowe, “the sea is the architect of relations, the mediator, the carrier of lost knowledge and history, the gateway of possibility, the tyrant and the womb of the Black Atlantic.”<sup>4</sup>

Water incarnates continuous transformation and movement. (Like diaspora.) The force of water can nurture you or crush you. As with all things powerful and ferociously alive, there is a violence, and danger there too. To be swept up in the tight funnel of an undertow can mean peril. To witness the flow of the ocean from a quiet shore is to be mesmerized by its rhythm.



Racquel Rowe. *Landscapes In Motion, The sea could swallow them* (2025), video 10 minutes 59 seconds.



Racquel Rowe. *Landscapes In Motion, Blackbelly* (2025), video 1 minute, 25 seconds.

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Wherever we end up, even in the most treacherous circumstances, Black people make home. This manner of shaping new surroundings is how we make space so that those closest to us can be at ease, no matter what is happening outside, beyond the threshold. This sense of familiarity has the texture of intimacy. It exists in tastes, smells, and sounds.

In the exhibition, you are invited to experience the comfort of Rowe's domestic interior. The line may blur between the recognizable and the unknown. Listen to the sounds of the waves in *Sea games* (2025). Watch the wind in the palms in *The sea could swallow them* (2025). Discern the bodies swimming in *A Frolicking* (2024).

Rowe's interest in reproducing familiar experiences is a driving force of her work. It is the artist's way of creating her own family history. Just as Rowe recreates domestic rituals, the diaspora is practiced at remaking ways of living. An indigenous food, custom, or language can end up with as many names as locations of arrival.

Take for instance the tropical African Roselle plant (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*). Since the flower's dispersal in the 16th century, its plump ruby red calyx has come to be commonly used across the diasporas to make drinks that have a similar taste but different names: Bissap, sobolo, zobo, sorrel, agua de Jamaica.<sup>5</sup>

Every story of dispersal in the African diaspora 7

is deeply personal, yet no matter where we end up, we inevitably encounter a shared sensibility. This is what it is, as Dionne Brand remarks, to be a part of the unnameable familiarity of Empire.<sup>6</sup> After eviction, like water, diaspora will run every which way. In “The Centre of the World Was the Beach,” Rowe records these movements to create a chronicle of what has come to pass.

## Endnotes

1 Morrison, Toni. *Tar Baby*. First Vintage International edition. New York: Vintage International, 2004.

2 Racquel Rowe, “The Chicken Is Just Dead First,” Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition, (University of Waterloo, 2021). <http://hdl.handle.net/10012/16930>

3 Rinaldo Walcott, curatorial statement displayed in *BLACK(Cite)* exhibition, Gallery TPW, Toronto, Ontario, 2023. <https://www.gallerytpw.ca/black-cite>

4 Olumoroti George and Demi London, curatorial statement displayed in *Saltwater Cures All* exhibition, Gallery Gachet, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2023. <https://gachet.org/past-events-and-exhibitions/saltwater-cures-all>

5 Martinez, Janel. “The History of Hibiscus Drinks in the African Diaspora.” *Serious Eats*, November 29, 2023. <https://www.serious eats.com/hibiscus-african-diaspora#:~:text=But%20while%20sorrel%20is%20commonly,Ghana%3B%20and%20zobo%20in%20Nigeria>

6 “One week ago I arrived at the airport and all my apprehension on the plane about a foreign country — suspicious customs officers who flag my skin for scrutiny and my anxiousness at the prospect of finding my way to this city — all my apprehension subsided as I joined an oddly familiar queue of South Asians, Africans, Spanish, French, Arab, and Middle Eastern people struggling with papers, forgotten



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bags, crying children, lost purses, well-filed papers, swollen feet, and red-eyed sleeplessness. All nervousness subsided when I saw the same apprehension loosen in their faces as they saw me, too, like them part of an unnameable familiarity among us. Empire.”

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return : Notes to Belonging*. 2001. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001.

## **Bios & Acknowledgements**

**Racquel Rowe** Racquel Rowe is an interdisciplinary artist from the island of Barbados currently residing in Canada. She's exhibited widely across Canada and holds an MFA from the University of Waterloo and a BA in History and Studio Art from the University of Guelph. Her practice is continuously influenced by many aspects of history, matrilineal family structures, diasporic communities, and her upbringing in Barbados. Her work includes performance, video, photo, painting, drawing and installation.

**Yaniya Lee** Yaniya Lee is the author of Selected Writing on Black Canadian Art (2024, figure ground/ Art Metropole) and Buseje Bailey: Reasons Why We Have to Disappear Every Once in a While, A Black Art History Project (2024, Artexte).

She has published in journals and magazines including Racar: Canadian Art Review, C Magazine, Flash Art, Montez Press, and Asia Art Archive. In 2020 she co-edited a special issue of Canadian Art magazine on Black artists and Black art histories.

Lee is a PhD candidate in the department of Gender Studies at Queen's University.





Forest City Gallery (FCG) is an artist-run centre founded on artistic autonomy with a commitment to excellence in programming exhibitions and events that reflect and address recent developments in cultural production. FCG serves to foster and support contemporary art, promoting dialogue among local, regional, and international arts communities. FCG represents artists of all disciplines and career levels with a focus on emerging artists and practices.

FCG's programs and exhibitions are free and accessible to all thanks to the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, London Arts Council, and the London Community Foundation.

We are grateful to our artists, members, volunteers, donors, and community partners. Our operations rely on your generous and dedicated support.

Please consider becoming a member of FCG.

For information on our programming, or for other general inquiries, please contact the gallery at [info@forestcitygallery.com](mailto:info@forestcitygallery.com)

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Forest City Gallery is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Huron-Wendat and Attawandaron peoples, which has been a site of human activity for over 10,000 years. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nations communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Forest City Gallery acknowledges the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers, and we acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples endure in Canada.

To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. We also acknowledge the colonial frameworks within which Forest City Gallery operates and the need to identify and remove barriers on an ongoing basis.

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