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Creative Thresholds living borders

Postcolonial thoughts: Michi Meko's *The Job of the Resurrectors is to Wake up the Dead*

by Christopher Hutchinson

Michi Meko's *The job of resurrectors is to wake up the dead* is the artist's most recent triumph. As a participant in Flux 2013, Meko used the opportunity to declare his position atop the list of contemporary American/African American artists in Atlanta. Meko's deliberate performance will easily be remembered as the best of 2013 with a couple months to spare.



"A sound theater of Negro prison work songs will be played to wake up the souls of Negro men that were forced to lay the tracks in and around Atlanta as the re-enslavement of Black Americans increased during the Civil War up to World War II. Most of these free men were imprisoned on bogus charges enforced by Penal Labor/Servitude laws allowing the cycle of supremacy to continue. The inspiration for this sound work came from the pages of *Slavery by Another Name* written by Atlanta author and Pulitzer Prize-winner Douglas A. Blackmon."

Performance

Early performance feminist artists like Carolee Schneeman and Yoko Ono employed performance to break from the European institution of the voiceless nude. With similar stagnation, the Black body has been stuck, unable to speak beyond the object/spectacle. Schneeman merely reacted against the Tradition; she remained tied to that narrative. Meko goes beyond just speaking to create a sound performance that does not allow the Western custom to penetrate. Meko has complete ownership of his narrative; it is not interested in protesting the West, rather revealing another tradition altogether. Meko has revealed something that has always been present and regularly dismissed, disqualified as art-ritual.



Meko's family. His mother is the youngest child in front on the right.

This narrative in sound and action demands an investigation into a rich lineage of rites of passage which Meko receives directly from his bloodline. It is a direct source, as well as a shared means of access.

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Meko includes us in his lineage that allows the viewer to participate in a tangible way, not as romantic spectators.

Meko's wailing sounds envisage a time that is past and present as a continuum. It was a confrontation with the dead, not just the physicality of death, but also the innate that died to become more academic. What awakened was the "Id."

Romanticism

It would be easy to lump these chants into a familiar generalized "tribal." Native American chants, African drums, and the familiar "Bass," that heavy "Bass" which divides the guitar lovers. When Meko uses these sounds they are not bound by the already generalized "Blackness" that exists. Viewers had to come to terms with visceral response. The mind tried to figure out where it was. What was happening? Why this felt so good? The body didn't care to reason anymore, it just gave in to Meko's provocation. It was transcendence.



Participation

After moving through the crowd and happening on the piece, I saw a little boy doing some contemporary Hip-Hop dance. There was a circle of at least 100 people around him. This youth captivated the viewers, and then about ten minutes later large Black Male fell on the asphalt motionless. After a while of lying there, "Bass" brought him back to life. He was re-animated with the prison chants. He was intense and somber corresponding with the introspective tone of the audio. The performance had a crescendo into a celebration, where everyone participated. It could no longer be contained in one cipher, the performance overflowed to another circle completely on its own, organically. This ceremony went on for hours.